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Colorado Producers during COVID-19: A Closer Look at the Potato Supply Chain¹

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Abstract

Media headlines during the COVID-19 pandemic have told two different stories about sales of agricultural products. On the one hand, many large establishments whose customer base consists of restaurants and food service lost sales (Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery, 2020). On the other hand, establishments whose primary customers are in retail or direct-to-consumer markets (e.g., farmers markets, roadside stands) have seen increased demand for their products (Robey, 2020). In short, the reality of COVID-19 is affecting farm establishments differently, depending on many factors including their market channel. In turn, farmers are responding to the pandemic with a variety of strategies, which affect actors farther down the supply chain (Blevins, 2020; Ehrlich, Sullins, and Jablonski 2020; Love, Thilmany, and Jablonski 2020).

We interviewed potato farmers from the San Luis Valley, Colorado, and compiled their strategies for adjusting farm operations and product marketing during the pandemic. Their strategies range from short-term solutions, such as repackaging their products, to longer-term solutions, such as building new customer relationships or diversifying their crop rotations. For farmers, hearing how others are creatively handling an unusual situation may spark innovation, and, for policy makers,

¹The original writing was published on the Colorado State University Food Systems website for reference by agricultural producers, businesses, extension staff, and researchers.

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it may provide clarity on how they can best support agriculture with effective policy. For food processors, distributors, and retailers, knowledge of on-farm strategies can help them prepare to increase the versatility of their operations to keep pace with swift changes in market dynamics in the future. During this time of transition, it is important to reflect on priorities, management practices, and the industry's involvement to be better positioned for the future.

Keywords: Colorado, potatoes, COVID-19, adaptation strategy, farm diversification, supply chain

Original Publications

Ehrlich, S., M. Sullins, and B. Jablonski. 2020. *Colorado Producers during COVID-19: A Closer Look at the Potato Supply Chain*. Available online: https://foodsystems.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID19-Potato-overview_final2-2.pdf.

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Abstract References

Blevins, J. 2020. "Coronavirus collapsed America's food system, but created a 'pivotal and magical moment' for locavores." *Colorado Sun*. Available online: <https://coloradosun.com/2020/06/09/coronavirus-food-system-farm-to-table-potatoes/>.

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