

YOUR POTATO ADVERTISING AND MARKETING PROGRAM

by
Emerson Matson
Evans/Kraft Advertising
Seattle, Washington

Since passage of the assessment increase referendum back in 1980, the Washington State Potato Commission has made surprising progress in increasing share of the U.S. market for Washington grown potatoes. This was accomplished despite the fact that total U.S. potato consumption has remained fairly constant and fresh potato consumption has declined.

In 1980, Washington's share of the market was 14.5% compared to 26.3% for Idaho and 7.9% for Maine. Each year, marketing of Washington grown potatoes gnawed away at Idaho's lead and by 1985 there was only 1.5% difference between the two states. During the same period, Washington increased its lead over all the other major potato producing states.

Major market segments for Washington potatoes are foodservice, schools and institutions, consumer and export. Nearly 85% of the total Washington crop goes into processed potatoes, consumed primarily by the foodservice industry. The Commission has focused on foodservice operators, promoting the high solids Washington potatoes throughout the foodservice trade. The Washington Potato Commission introduced French fries into the school lunch program and consistent promotion and advertising over the years has made fries processed in Washington State a preference among the nation's school foodservice directors.

Washington is the commodity leader in foodservice potato promotion and in foodservice magazine potato advertising. Washington State Potato Commission foodservice advertising copy is consistently listed among the top ten advertisers when it comes to readership and recall of content studies conducted by the nation's best research organizations. Competition for reader attention includes branded food products, foodservice equipment manufacturers, and other commodity groups, most of whom are numbered among the largest budget advertisers.

Washington frozen French fries are sampled at all major restaurant shows, School Foodservice shows and thousands of prospective customers are given Washington processor and shipper address lists.

However, the Commission has not ignored fresh promotion. Each year, the Commission conducts a national fresh potato retailer display contest for retailers. Winners receive a round-trip three day visit to Washington State where they get a close-up look at potato harvesting, fresh packing and processing.

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Also, they see some breathtaking scenery along the way. Entries are judged on creativity and how well they depict the grown in Washington theme. Displays have been entered with as many as 4 tons of potatoes piled to resemble Mt. St. Helens, maps, or other things that indicate Washington State.

The Washington Potato Commission was instrumental in introducing potato bars into the Far East. As a result of promoting in Singapore and Hong Kong, and working closely with potato exporters, Washington shippers are now exporting fresh potatoes to these markets.

National network television is used to inform consumers about Washington potato quality. In 1986, television advertising ran from September 15 until October 31 on ABC, CBS, NBC and cable network stations.

The Commission maintains a field staff of 18 market representatives who cover every major market in the United States. They work during the Norgold Russet harvest and into the beginning of the Russet Burbank crop, calling on potato buyers, urging the trade to buy Washington potatoes. They outline Commission promotional support programs, distribute point-of-purchase materials, relay information on special shipping rates, secure information on competitive potato activities and report on market conditions.

These gains enjoyed by the Washington potato industry are being threatened. It is difficult to maintain a competitive program in 1987 with financing based on conditions of the late 1970's and early 1980's. By 1989, it will take \$2.53 to buy the same amount of advertising a dollar would buy back in 1980. Due to annual increases in advertising rates, the Commission is able to buy fewer pages of advertising than they could 10 years ago.

All major Washington State agricultural commodities have recognized this and have increased their rate of assessment at least once since 1980. Our competitors have become more competitive. Since 1980 all of our major competitors have increased their assessment rate . . . Maine, Idaho, Wisconsin, Colorado and Oregon.

Marketing strength is easier lost than gained and is expensive to regain. With other state potato organizations getting heavily involved in potato promotion, marketing will require more attention, not less.

Washington State produces the world's finest potatoes. Unless we promote, people will think all potatoes are equal and we will lose this terrific marketing advantage.