

# SWEET POTATOES

BY ANDY NELSON

**THANKS TO THEIR “SUPERFOOD” STATUS**, sweet potatoes aren't just for Thanksgiving and Christmas anymore. Retailers who tap into this surging category's year-round possibilities will reap rich rewards.

Bakersfield, Calif.-based Country Sweet Produce Inc., which ships sweet potatoes under the Bako Sweet label, reported strong demand heading into the peak fall/winter season, said Prescott Leyba, the company's sales director.

“Thanksgiving is just around the corner and sweet potato demand is high,” he said. “Shoppers are looking for something convenient to pick up for those casserole dishes.”

Bako Sweet keeps momentum going with comprehensive marketing efforts promoting sweet potato consumption across the board, said Alexandra Rae Molumby, the company's marketing director.

Those efforts start long before the Thanksgiving and Christmas push.

This summer, for instance, Bako Sweet partnered with a local retailer in southern California, with 99 stores promoting sweet potatoes as a BBQ item in Traeger grill-designed bins.

“It was a huge success,” Molumby said. “We saw an average 35% case per store per week lift.”

Targeted advertisements to drive foot traffic and original recipe creation are among the Bako Sweet brand's other initiatives to keep demand strong year-round. In addition, the company's website has cooking information, storage tips, social media giveaways promoting its retail partners and media placements.

Key to those efforts, Leyba said, are strong relationships with the shipper's retailer partners.

“Retailers are always looking for trust, experience, and reliable partners,” he said. “They want companies to create new categories in fresh produce to drive the market to have a go-to fresh produce brand. We focus on value-added products to benefit both the retailers and the shoppers they serve.”

It all comes down to having a high-quality product that's displayed well with consistently sized sweet potatoes, added Molumby. No longer will inconsistent, bulk sweet potatoes do for today's shoppers.

“Be the shopping destination that's known for triple-washed, consistently-sized, high quality sweet potatoes that you can only get from Bako Sweet,” she said.

Fortunately, Bako Sweet and other shippers have been getting a fair amount of help in their marketing efforts from soaring consumer demand for sweet potatoes.

Thirty-four percent of shoppers bought sweet potatoes in 2020, up from 8% in 2019, and sweet potato consumption per capita increased from 4 pounds a year in 2000 to 6 pounds a year in 2022.



## Supercharge your sales by playing up big health benefits

- Over four times the recommended daily amount of Vitamin A, which comes from the beta-carotene in the sweet potato and plays a vital role in vision, bone development and immune function.
- Provides 37% of your daily value of Vitamin C, (good source) which helps fight infections, heal wounds and absorb iron.
- Contains 15 IU of Vitamin E, which is the daily recommended dietary allowance.
- Contains 4 grams of fiber, often more than a packet of oatmeal.
- Good source of manganese, which helps maintain normal blood sugar levels and optimal thyroid function.
- Low in sodium, containing only 40 mg.
- Low in calories: a medium sweet potato contains approximately 100 calories.
- Ideal for diabetics: even though they are called “sweet” potatoes, diabetics can enjoy them too. One medium cooked sweet potato, without skin, has a GI ranging from 63 to 66 and is considered a medium glycemic food.

(Source: American Sweet Potato Marketing Institute)