

Klamath Basin growers add organic Purple Fiesta variety to mix

By LORA ABCARIAN

Klamath Basin Fresh Direct, comprised of 17 shareholders from south-central Oregon and Northern California, has added the organic Purple Fiesta potato to its manifest this season. The potato was developed by the Tri-State Breeding Program, a cooperative research effort of officials in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"This is the first year we will be marketing the organic Purple Fiesta," said Director of Marketing Hollis Baley. "It is a fantastic fingerling. It is uniform in color and makes beau-



Klamath Basin Fresh Direct has added the organic Purple Fiesta to its manifest. (Photo courtesy of Klamath Basin Fresh Direct)

tiful purple, not brown, potato mashed potato dish and is chips. It is an amazing purple earthy and rich in flavor. Over-

all, it's the best purple we have seen in terms of color retention, size, shape and flavor."

As for retail reaction, Ms. Baley said, "Local markets have definitely taken interest, and those retailers — special and high-end, high-quality markets — that carry purples have certainly taken an interest in giving it a try."

The Purple Fiesta builds upon company buzz which occurred after the organic Klamath Pearl potato was introduced. "We chose these varieties with our consumers in mind," Ms. Baley stated. "The Klamath Pearl is an incredible potato. We chose it for its size, short growing season, its ability to retain its firmness when cooked and its light buttery flavor. The Pearl retains its integrity when cooked. The skin does not break, and they are so easy to prepare because of their small size." The variety requires no preparation, and cooking time is short.

"People love fingerlings," Ms. Baley commented. "To me, it looks like they are becoming more and more popular."

The Purple Fiesta and Klamath Pearl complement the cooperative's product line. "This year, we feature seven organic products, all available in bulk or 1.5-pound packages," Ms. Baley went on to say. Other varieties marketed are Russian Banana, Ruby Crescent and French fingerlings. Klamath Basin offers two medley packs: the Multicolor Round Medley and Fingerling Medley.

"Next year we will be adding organic russets, organic round reds, organic Yukon Golds, and maybe organic Norkotahs under the 'KBFD' label," she added.

The company is one of the first to pack its potatoes using Ultra-Shield technology. The bags have a mesh backing which enables customers to see product and allows the potatoes to breathe while being protected from damaging sunlight. The bags accommodate 1.5 pounds of potatoes. Klamath Basin also markets product in boxes. "All of our potatoes are packaged with efficiency and care through Wong Potatoes' shed in the Klamath Basin," Ms. Baley said.

Sustainability figures prominently in the cooperative's business philosophy. "We believe in developing a farming method to sustain our environment for future generations," she went on to say. "Some of practices include farming organically, shorter growing seasons cutting back on water usage, participating in projects to enhance wildlife habitat such as the Walking Wetlands Project, providing safe and fair working conditions, purchasing seed from local growers and continuously improving management practices."

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