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CHIPS

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Potato NEWS

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Mexico lifts ban on US potato imports

"Mexico's Supreme Court released a final, unanimous ruling on a case that puts fresh potatoes from the United States (US) one step closer to finally gaining access to Mexico. This follows nearly 20 years of negotiations.

"The decision is important for American agriculture and for positive bilateral relations between the US and Mexico," said US agriculture secretary, Tom Vilsack. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has worked for years on a resolution to this ongoing issue. It is estimated that full market access for US potatoes could increase exports from approximately $50 million in 2020, to more than $150 million.

"We look forward to resuming bilateral technical engagements to finalise import requirements as soon as possible. Decisions like this one today are important for long-term export growth." – *Potato News Today*

Portuguese researchers develop edible packaging

Researchers from the Centre for Research in Engineering of Chemical Processes and Forest Products of the University of Coimbra in Portugal have developed edible and health-beneficial packaging made from fruit, vegetable and crustacean remains, as an alternative to plastic packaging.

The packaging is still a prototype, but the objective is to place it on the market soon. "There is already some edible packaging on the market, but these are pioneers in taking advantage of waste and including beneficial compounds for health, such as antioxidants and probiotics," the researchers stated.

Potato starch and quince pectin are two of the main ingredients of the packaging due to their structural polymeric characteristics, which allowed researchers to obtain very thin sheets through simple processing. This innovation allows for cooking the food without having to remove it from the packaging, as the edible film has been designed to contain bioactive properties. – *efeagro.com*

Smart robots increase value of fresh produce

From assessing and sorting fresh fruit to assembling vegetable packages, the intelligent robots of Wageningen AgroFood Robotics learn – from people – to perform multiple tasks. According to Wageningen University and Research, this makes the processing of fruit and vegetables much more cost-efficient.

All over the world, sorting, grading and assembling of fresh fruit and vegetables have always been done manually. "It would save companies a lot of time and money if robots could take over tasks from employees. And it would be even more efficient if one robot could perform multiple tasks," says Aneesh Chauhan, expert leader of the computer vision and robotics group at Wageningen Food and Biobased Research.

The Wageningen robots are equipped with cameras that capture the movements of a human expert performing picking and sorting tasks. – *Future Farming*

Namibian demand exceeds local supply

In Namibia, retailers and importing agents have spent N$120,1 million (Namibian dollars) between 2019 and 2020 on importing washed potatoes to meet local demand. At the same time, local producers are struggling to meet the demand.

This is according to statistics released by Emilie Abraham, horticulture manager of the Namibian Agronomic Board (NAB). Forecast for local production stands at 14 904 tons, which is only 40% of domestic demand. Domestic demand stands at 37 129,40 tons.

Abraham says only seven Namibian potato producers currently wash potatoes. The country's high import bill is not only due to the inability to wash potatoes, but also because of low volumes produced by local producers, she says. Abraham says if more could be produced, the seven producers who currently wash potatoes could assist with this at a cost, and, as a result, grow the local value chain. – *The Namibian*

USDA to deregulate genetically engineered potato

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is extending deregulation to JR Simplot Company's (Simplot) potato variety, which was developed using genetic engineering, designated as Snowden Z6 (Z6 potato).

The potato variety is engineered for late blight protection, lowered reducing sugars, low acrylamide potential and reduced black spot bruising. APHIS previously reviewed and deregulated these traits in another Simplot potato variety, referred to as Innate W8 Russet Burbank potato (W8 potato).

APHIS reviewed Simplot's extension request for its Z6 potato variety and prepared a plant pest risk similarity assessment (PPRSA) and a preliminary determination of non-regulated status, concluding that Z6 potatoes are not more likely to pose a plant pest risk than the previously deregulated W8 potatoes. APHIS reached a 'Record of Categorical Exclusion Determination' based on its similarity assessment. – *Potato Pro*