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NEWS RELEASE

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IDAHO SHIPS CHIPPING POTATOES TO JAPAN, ENDING 60-YEAR-OLD BAN

(BOISE) Idaho is shipping fresh potatoes to Japan, ending a ban of nearly 60 years.

"This is an exciting opportunity for Idaho's potato industry," says Pat Takasugi, Director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, "During the Governor's Trade Mission to Asia last May, he met with Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. Allowing Japanese chip processors access to U.S. potatoes was a topic of discussion. We knew that there was a demand and that the processors wanted access. It's a win-win situation."

Under the agreement announced on February 2, imports of potatoes to be processed into potato chips are allowed to approved plants. At this time, only one plant has been approved. After sending experts to the United States last summer for inspections, Japan authorized imports of potatoes from 14 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin. Final inspections of United States facilities will be required before shipments can begin. To date, inspections have been completed in Idaho, Texas and California.

Potatoes are being shipped under a strict protocol that covers seed, field inspections, storage, soil removal, packing and shipping.

"Our inspectors are very diligent in ensuring that shipments meet the protocol set forth in the agreement," says Takasugi. "We have no doubt that we can meet their quality and phytosanitary requirements."

Because access was granted due to the shortage of chipping potatoes in Japan each spring, shipments are limited to the February to June period. According to John Toaspern, Vice President for International Marketing with the United States Potato Board, 10 container loads are expected to be shipped this year, mostly from Idaho. That number is expected to increase as additional Japanese chip processors are approved to import U.S. potatoes.

Japan banned potato imports in 1950 due to phytosanitary concerns relating to the potato wart bacteria and the cyst nematode. The decision to conditionally lift the import ban follows a notice from the United States that it has eliminated the potato wart bacteria and has contained the cyst nematode to a limited area.

"The opening of this market has been a joint effort between many organizations," says Takasugi. "Idaho has been pleased to work with the Idaho Potato Commission, USDA, the Japan Potato Chip Manufacturers Association (JPCMA), other states, the U.S. Potato Board, and others to achieve access to Japan's chipping potato market."

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