

## Idaho potato industry eyes Mexico, Brazil

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MEXICO CITY -- Potato industry representatives who met with top-level officials of major food companies during Idaho's trade mission to Mexico and Brazil believe the meetings will translate into more sales of frozen spud products in Mexico.

And they see significant potential for frozen and dehydrated potato products in Brazil, which is a relatively new market for Idaho spuds.

Half an hour after a meeting with La Huerta, the top producer of frozen vegetables in Mexico, an Idaho potato industry representative received an e-mail from the company's president asking to make further contact.

"That never happens; it's a very good sign," said Mark Gabrylczyk of Teton Valley Ranch, a division of Nonpareil that sells frozen potato products. "I'm extremely excited about the possibilities to work with that company."

La Huerta President Felipe Arteaga appeared very interested in several frozen potato products demonstrated by Gabrylczyk. Arteaga said La Huerta, which dominates the foodservice industry in Mexico, wants to focus more on specialty frozen products because "french fries are everybody's business."

Seth Pemsler, vice president of the Idaho Potato Commission's retail and international divisions, said the Dec. 8 meeting with La Huerta was very encouraging and he believes it will open another door for many types of frozen potato products produced by Teton Valley and other Idaho processors.

"I think (Arteaga) walked away with the understanding that ... Idaho companies produce quite a lot of different types of specialty (potato) products," he said.

Pemsler and Gabrylczyk also met Dec. 8 with high-level officials of supermarket chain Soriana, Mexico's second-largest retailer.

While Soriana already sells a lot of frozen potatoes and other products from Idaho, "We do believe we can do more tomorrow," said Miguel de la Pena Silva, sub-director of perishables for Soriana's super-stores.

While Mexico is an established market for Idaho potatoes, Brazil is relatively new territory, but industry representatives and state officials came away from the mission believing there is a lot of potential in that country of 203 million people.

Lt. Gov. Brad Little, who led the 35-member delegation, said Brazil's distance from Idaho and the fact the country grows a lot of potatoes means there is more potential there for value-added potato products rather than fresh spuds.

"It's a long way to send fresh-pack potatoes, but there was a lot of interest in the processed potatoes that we have in Idaho, both dry and frozen," he said.

With tens of millions of Brazilians forecast to shift from poverty to middle class in the next several years, Pemsler believes there is significant potential in that country.

Pemsler met with a representative of a major retailer in Brazil who "suggested that they are looking for higher-value ... frozen products because of the significant growth in the economy."

"The growth of the middle class has developed a lot of opportunities there," he said. "It was very worthwhile for us to investigate the value of Brazil" and "it's certainly worth further exploration."