

Potato Varieties Purchased by North Dakota Consumers

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THE two varieties of potatoes that appear to be most popular with the consumers of North Dakota are the Triumph and the Early Ohio. The Cobbler, an important commercial variety for North Dakota, ranks surprisingly low. There is, however, considerable variation with respect to the varieties used by consumers in different sections of the state.

These conclusions are based on information secured from retail food store managers or owners during personal interviews made in July, 1943. Each manager was asked to estimate the amount of each variety of potatoes sold by his store during the period of July 1, 1942, to June 30, 1943. The estimated number of bushels sold by each of 60 stores was combined by varieties and the percentage of each variety purchased by the customers of these stores was thus determined. The Triumph potato was the principal variety purchased by consumers in western North Dakota

(Minot, Williston, Dickinson, Mandan, Bismarck). The Early Ohio was the principal variety purchased by consumers in southeastern North Dakota (Fargo, Valley City, Jamestown). In the northeastern section of the state (Grand Forks, Grafton, Park River, Devils Lake) the Triumph and the Early Ohio were purchased in almost equal amounts for the section as a whole. The percentage of the various varieties purchased by consumers in these three sections of North Dakota and for the entire group of stores is given in the following table.

Table 1.—Potato Varieties Purchased by Consumers from A Selected Group of Retail Food Stores in North Dakota, 1942-43.

Location and Number of Retail Stores	Potato Varieties Purchased						
	Triumph	Early Ohio	Cobbler	Other Potatoes			Total
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Northeast N. Dak.	17	37	35	14	3	11	100
Southeast N. Dak.	21	21	63	3	2	11	100
Western N. Dak.	22	73	16	2	3	6	100
Total in N. Dak.	60	43	40	5	2	10	100

Forty-three percent of the potatoes purchased by the consumers of the 60 retail food stores included in the survey were Triumph potatoes. The Triumph potato ranked

first in Western North Dakota where 73% of the potatoes purchased from the 22 western North Dakota stores included in the survey were of the Triumph variety. In 20 of

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these stores 50% or more of the potatoes sold were Triumph and in 16 of them 75% or more of the potatoes sold were Triumph. According to information obtained during the interviews, the extensive use of Triumph potatoes in western North Dakota is a comparatively recent development in term of years. The Triumph potato also ranked first in northeastern North Dakota with a percentage of 37. Twenty-one percent of the potatoes purchased in southeastern North Dakota were Triumph.

The Early Ohio potato ranked very close to the Triumph for the group of stores as a whole as 40% of the potatoes purchased by the patrons of the 60 stores were of the Early Ohio variety. The Early Ohio easily ranked first in southeastern North Dakota with a percentage of 63. Fifty percent or more of the potatoes sold by 19 of the 21 stores in this area were Early Ohio. In 8 of these stores 75% or more of the potatoes sold were Early Ohio. The combined reports of 17 stores in northeastern North Dakota show that 35% of the potatoes purchased from these stores were Early Ohio. For the stores in western North Dakota 16% were Early Ohio. The average store in western North Dakota sells comparatively few Early Ohio potatoes, however, as over half of the Early Ohio potatoes reported by the 22 stores were sold by one store. The combined reports of northeastern and southeastern North Dakota show that 54% of the potatoes purchased by the customers of the 38 stores in the eastern half of the state were Early Ohio. A number of the managers stated that they could have sold even a larger volume of Early Ohio potatoes if more of a satisfactory quality had been available.

Only 5% of the potatoes purchased at the 60 North Dakota retail

food stores were of the Cobbler variety. It was only in the northeastern section of North Dakota that any appreciable volume of Cobbler potatoes were purchased by the customers of the stores included in the survey where 14% of the potatoes purchased were Cobblers. The percentage of Cobblers purchased in southeastern North Dakota was 3% and in western North Dakota, 2%. In only one of the 60 stores was the Cobbler potato the principal variety handled. Seventy percent of the potatoes sold by this store were Cobblers. Only three other stores sold as much as 25% Cobblers but none of the three exceeded 32%. These four stores are all located in northeastern North Dakota.

The prominence of the Early Ohio potato in the preference of consumers is rather interesting in view of the fact that this variety is now of minor importance in North Dakota from a production standpoint. Only 6% of the potatoes produced in the major potato producing counties of North Dakota in 1942 were of the Early Ohio variety according to another survey made by the Department of Agricultural Economics of the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. This same survey indicated that in 1942 40% of the potatoes produced were Cobblers, whereas, as has already been stated, only 5% of the potatoes purchased at the 60 retail food stores were Cobblers.

The reader will note that Table 1 indicates that 10% of the potatoes purchased by consumers were from other areas. These were largely the so-called new potatoes that were shipped in and sold between seasons. This 10% does not seem to be an unreasonable amount as it coincides very closely with the length of time when good sound local potatoes are generally not available.

It was found that the management of these North Dakota stores make a real effort to handle local potatoes in spite of the fact that they often have trouble in securing the type of potatoes that the consumers prefer and in spite of the fact that only too often they have no recourse but must take a loss if the potatoes 'turn out bad.' On the other hand, the potatoes from other areas quite generally are purchased from jobbers and the management of the stores are given adjustments by the jobber if the potatoes 'turn out bad.'

As has already been stated, 10% of the potatoes handled by the 60 retail food stores were purchased from jobbers. The table which follows (Table 2) also indicates the source of the other 90% of the potatoes handled by these stores that is, it shows what percent of the volume handled by the stores was purchased from each of four sources — local producers, regular truckers or dealers, itinerate truckers, jobbers.

According to their reports, 83% of the potatoes handled by the 60 North Dakota retail food stores during the season of 1942-43 were purchased from local producers, 6% from regular truckers or dealers, 1% from itinerate truckers and 10% from wholesalers (commonly called

jobbers). Table 2 indicates the corresponding percentages for the three areas. In all sections of North Dakota a large portion of the potatoes handled by the stores was purchased from local producers. Forty-three of the 60 stores purchased 90% or more of their potatoes from local producers. Thirty-three purchased 95% or more from local producers. Seven stores handled only locally produced potatoes which they bought direct from producers.

The managers of the North Dakota retail food stores are to be commended for their efforts in selling locally produced potatoes. Oftentimes in order to do this, they are compelled to handle potatoes that are far from satisfactory. A majority of the managers frankly stated that they would like to see the local producers from whom they purchase potatoes do a much better job of handling, sorting, grading, cleaning and storing the potatoes. A number suggested the use of better seed especially in the western part of the state. Some suggested better packing and a little more honesty as the consumers simply do not want the dirt and small potatoes that sometimes appear in the bottom of the sacks. More than one manager flatly stated that potatoes gave him more trouble than any other item handled in the store.

Table 2—Source of Potatoes Purchased by a Selected Group of Retail Food Stores in North Dakota, 1942-43.

Location and Number of Retail Stores		Potatoes were Purchased From					Total
		Local Producers	Regular Trucker or Dealer	Itinerate Trucker	Wholesaler (Jobber)	Percent	
Location	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	
Northeast N. Dak.	17	89	0	*	11	100	
Southeast N. Dak.	21	75	12	2	11	100	
Western N. Dak.	22	90	3	1	6	100	
Total in N. Dak.	60	83	6	1	10	100	

*Only a fraction of 1 percent.