



POTATO GROWERS OF CANADA

LES PRODUCTEURS UNIS DE POMMES DE TERRE DU CANADA

The Importance of Unity

The United Potato Growers of Canada was formed in 2006. Our country followed a similar initiation of our sister organization (UPGA) formed by our neighbors south of the border. It was formed out of desperation. Growers were losing their shirts financially and it was an attempt to bring a tide that would raise all boats.

Even more importantly it was recognized at that time that the industry had no idea how many potatoes were being produced, or how many potatoes were actually needed by the marketplace. Our purpose then (and still is today) was to help balance “supply and demand” through better data and analysis. We do not control acres or pricing – it is up to each individual grower to use the information as they see fit. Having said that, if we were to look at the five-year average potato acreage in Canada before and after our inception, the industry has adjusted downward by 75,000 acres from 430,500 acres (2001-2005) to 355,279 acres (2011 – 2016). Growers seemed to have used some of the data provided to make this 17.5% reduction.

When our organization was formed, it was the insight of our founding directors that all major potato producing areas in Canada would participate. Board governance allowed for two directors from each province, usually a grower plus a provincial organization rep to provide input to the organization based on each province’s needs. This worked well and at one point, all provinces except N.S. and NFLD. were members. Unfortunately there are now two provinces, New Brunswick and Ontario, who do not see value in the information we provide and have chosen to discontinue membership in our association. This has challenged the many facets of our organization when it is no longer truly national, both on a data gathering issue and a data sharing function.

One of our major strengths has been the Canadian Tablestock Call, allowing participants to hear about supply and shipping in regions both east and west across the country, helping to understand why there may be pressure on some markets, but also sorting out “real vs. perceived” prices in the supply chain. Unfortunately provinces no longer at the table are unable to benefit from information exchange, which ultimately maximizes market prices and avoids leaving money on the table.

Our organization has prided itself in being funded entirely by potato growers without government contributions. Cost to growers in all parts of the country is \$.35/acre of potatoes grown. For those who like cost per unit comparisons, that would be \$.00125 cents per hundred weight (using an average yield of 280 cwt./acre). For comparisons sake one application of a systemic fungicide could cost \$.18/cwt. Without the participation of all provinces we have had to explore other methods of funding to maintain the same low cost fees to our growers based on fewer acres. Fortunately in the short term we have been able to form partnership agreements with generous organizations like AMVAC and Farm Credit Canada and we appreciate their support.

The theme of this article is “Unity”; can we afford not to be part of an organization that can provide this on a national scale?

UPGC has helped foster a better working relationship with the U.S. potato industry. A prime example of this is the upcoming Crop Transition Conference being held in Minneapolis on June 21st. Each year the U.S. and Canadian industry sits down to determine when old crop will wind down in each area and when new crop will transition in – key to preventing market glitches. All are welcome to attend and please feel free to contact us for more information.

Kevin Maclsaac

General Manager, United Potato Growers of Canada

Kevin@unitedpotatocanada.com