



Sweetpotato Tips

The Sweetpotato Industry in Merced County

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Approximately 70 growers produce sweetpotatoes (*Ipomoea batas*) on 7,800 acres in Merced County, and another 2,000 acres are grown in adjoining counties. Production is about 12.5 tons of marketable roots per acre and they sell for \$460.00 per ton, giving the crop a value of \$45,500,000 per year.

The sweetpotato crop is started as “slips” in the spring in hot beds from roots that are stored over winter. The hot bed slips are harvested in May and June and transplanted into fields around the Livingston and Atwater areas. These sandy soils are preferred for sweetpotato production because they produce the best-shaped roots. The crop is harvested July through October. The roots are then stored at 55° F until they are brought to the packing line, sorted and packed into 40 pound boxes for shipping.

Most of the sweetpotatoes grown in Merced County are shipped to other parts of the United States and to Canada.

Approximately 22 packing facilities operate year-round to fill orders from clients on an “as needed” basis. Few sweetpotatoes are used locally as there are no canning, freezing or other packing facilities.

The nutritive value of sweetpotatoes is very high. They are a good source of complex carbohydrates; of calcium, iron, and other minerals; and of vitamins – especially vitamin A and beta-carotene. One source refers to the sweetpotatoes as the MOST nutritious food. Humans have used sweetpotatoes for consumption for many centuries by the peoples of Central and South America, as well as tropical islands in the Pacific. Columbus is said to have introduced sweetpotatoes to Europe.

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