

Solutions for Excellence: Retail Handling

The Red River Valley is a breeding ground for potatoes. These potatoes are some of the best potatoes in the world and the producers in this area take great pride in knowing they have raised a quality product. Retailers must make sure that this quality continues on after the potatoes leave the producer. Quality factors such as, tuber size, shape, skin color, flesh color, texture, and flavor all influence consumers satisfaction. Consumers also want potatoes to be free from bruises, disease, and discoloration. Retailers must know that potato quality cannot be improved after harvest, so the goal then shifts to slowing down quality loss. To slow down the loss, potatoes have to be taken care of and handled properly after leaving the producer. The following recommendations are some basic guidelines that retailers should follow to enhance the shelf life of the potatoes and maintain quality. These nine steps should be done at all times to secure a quality product for the consumer:

9 Steps in Retail Handling and Display



1. Wash and Disinfect storage and display areas.

Disease will destroy potatoes; therefore storage areas must be disinfected, cleaned, and sanitized. Healthy potatoes will be less susceptible to post-harvest disease, but damaged or bruised tubers are more susceptible. This is why it is so important to disinfect properly. Potatoes are handled many times by the producer before they actually get to the stores. If some are bruised already, there is a higher potential for disease. Proper sanitation will slow down and prevent the quality loss.



2. Avoid dropping boxes or bags of potatoes

Rough handling at any link in the marketing chain can cause quality problems. Avoid dropping or bruising potatoes at all costs, because they are very susceptible to damage. Impacts from being dropped even just a few inches will cause bruising and defects, which in turn lead to quality loss.



3. Do not mist potatoes.

Misting or spraying water on the potatoes is not an appropriate for the potatoes. Misting or spraying of water on the potatoes promotes silver scurf and others diseases. Wet potatoes will also rot quicker, which will make them unappealing to the consumer.



4. Avoid keeping potatoes at temperatures below 45 degrees.

Low temperatures can accelerate bruising damage and cause discoloration. Retail managers should maintain potatoes at room temperature in storage areas as well as display areas.



5. Display potatoes away from other fruit and vegetables to avoid flavor transfer.

Flavor transfer can occur if fruits and vegetable are kept too close to each other. This is an appropriate reason to keep them separate. Potatoes should have their own section in the produce aisle to avoid such a problem.

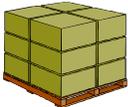


6. Keep new potatoes no more than 10 days

If retailers have good quality potatoes, consumers should have purchased within less than 10 days. If they are not sold in this time period, it is best to discard. Sprouting and rotting can start to occur and this will make them very unappealing to the consumer.

7. Rotate stock daily

Rotating the stock daily is a ritual for any retail store. Rotating is good for the potatoes because it minimizes the bruising and helps with the appearance of the potatoes. This practice helps minimize quality loss, because only one portion of the potato gets exposed to the light. This portion may become greener faster or damage easier because it is exposed. If stock is rotated daily, this problem can be eliminated and the stock will maintain quality.



8. Leave potatoes in shipping boxes and on pallets until displaying

Every time potatoes are handled they get bruised. It is best to leave them in containers and boxes until they are absolutely needed to minimize the bruising.



9. Limit exposure to light

Limited exposure to light for potatoes is the final point. Potatoes in a retailer's store are exposed to lights all day and partly at night. Too much exposure to light will cause the potatoes to green. Natural or artificial light causes the development of a green chlorophyll pigment. Green potatoes will have a bitter taste and be less appealing to the consumer. Keeping light exposure to a minimum is the proper control method to prevent greening.

