

SunFresh of Florida Marketing Cooperative, Inc.

SunFresh of Florida Marketing Cooperative, Inc. is a group of farmers whose families have been growing potatoes for up to six generations. The farmers are located primarily in the Hastings, Fla., area as well as South Florida.

The Cooperative was formed with the goal of reviving the demand for potatoes, which has been steadily declining for several years due to competition and the low-carb diet trend. Members of the Cooperative wanted to grow a potato with characteristics that would set it apart from the competition. The Cooperative sought a new variety of potato whose taste, appearance and freshness would appeal to consumers. The farmers wanted to differentiate Florida potatoes from those grown in other states and kept in storage for months before reaching consumers.

Members of the group consulted Dr. Chad Hutchinson, program leader at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Research farm in Hastings, Fla., in search of a better tasting potato. Hutchinson and his team screen about 400 new varieties of potatoes a year for taste, shape, color and skin quality.

They eventually tested and suggested the SunLite™ variety, developed by Netherlands-based seed potato company HZPC, because it consistently led all others in taste, texture and appearance. Researchers later discovered that the new variety has 30 percent fewer carbohydrates and 25 percent fewer calories than the standard Russet potato.

After confirming Hutchinson's findings, the SunFresh of Florida Marketing Cooperative Inc. purchased exclusive rights to grow and market the SunLite™ potato in the United States. Today SunLite™ potatoes are grown on about 500 acres in St. Johns and Putnam counties in North Central Florida. The Cooperative strives to bring potatoes from the field to consumers as quickly as possible throughout the year. To do so while ensuring year-round availability, SunLite™ potatoes will be grown in additional states in the near future.