



New England Agricultural Statistics Service

a field office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service
United States Department of Agriculture

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Maine Potatoes Dug to Measure Yield, Size, and Grade

Now that the 2004 fall potato crop is planted, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has plans in place to forecast production for the upcoming year. An important measure of production is the annual Potato Objective Yield Survey conducted in seven major potato-producing States across the country since 1968. In Maine, the study is administered by the New England field office of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

The information collected is used to establish official USDA statistics of fall potato harvested acreage by variety and production for the 2004 crop. Another important use of the data is to generate the annual **Maine Potato Size and Grade** report. The summary includes counts by type for tubers per hill, hills per acre, tuber size and grade, providing valuable data to the industry to determine how different potato types are performing. The January 2003 **Potato Stocks** report included 2002 crop size and grade data for the seven major producing States for the first time, a tribute to the industry's support of this important project. Size and grade data for the 2003 crop and subsequent years will be published in the December **Potato Stocks** report.

In Maine, local interviewers will be contacting about 140 farmers to gather information for 210 potato fields across the State. Farmers selected for this study will be notified by letter requesting their participation. The cooperation of potato farmers is crucial to ensure that the Maine crop is accurately represented in National potato production statistics.

Since the objective yield survey is designed to measure production, enumerator visits are timed as close to harvest as possible. Interviewers contact farmers after planting to collect preliminary information and request permission to harvest three hills from each of two randomly selected plots per sample field. Within three days of harvest or when potato vines are dead, tubers are harvested from six hills of potatoes for each sample then sent to the lab to record counts, grade, size, and weight measurements. After harvest, one in four sampled fields will be re-visited to measure harvest losses. As with all surveys conducted by NASS, individual operator information is kept strictly confidential and is exempt from requests under the Freedom of Information Act. Individual reports are only used in combination with other reports to establish State and National statistics.

The first National production forecast will be printed in the **Crop Production** report from Washington, D.C. on November 12, 2004, and the final forecast will be published on December 10, 2004; both reports will be released at 8:30 a.m. All reports are available on the Internet within minutes of the scheduled release time. A brief summary of Maine statistics will be reprinted in the November and December issues of the **Ag Review** (a monthly newsletter from the Concord, NH field office). The **Maine Potato Size and Grade** report will be published in early January.

[The New England Agricultural Statistics Service is a field office of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. Located in Concord, New Hampshire, it is responsible for agricultural statistics in all six States in the region. The office can be reached at 1-800-642-9571 or through e-mail at nass-nh@nass.usda.gov. All National statistics and State level newsletters are available free from E-mail subscriptions and on the Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/nass/>.]

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