



## UPGC Update 2023

Compared to the very cold and rainy spring of 2022 that delayed planting in most provinces, 2023 started off with a great planting season across the country. Although many input costs had stabilized to a certain extent compared to the sharp increases seen, particularly in fertilizer and fuel, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, it was still looking like a very expensive crop for a second year in a row. However, as always, our potato growers across the country persevered and the 2023-24 crop was in the ground quickly with only regional and varietal shortages in seed a limiting factor for some growers.

Now we are December, the harvest is complete and potatoes are in storage for at least a month, we have a moment to look back on what seems to be a typical roller coaster of a growing season; starting with beautiful weather for planting, June quickly took a turn... to rain and cooler temperatures in the east and very hot and dry conditions from Manitoba west. July and August turned hot and dry for Alberta and BC, tempered for Saskatchewan and Manitoba as well as parts of Ontario, but stayed very wet for Quebec, New Brunswick and parts of PEI. Saskatchewan and Alberta were able to use irrigation to combat the lack of rainfall, as well as certain parts of BC, but rain was scarce in the west with BC receiving only 2 inches the entire summer. Mid-summer the fields were looking beautiful in most parts of the country, sparking the remark “we don’t sell the plants, we sell what’s underneath” but still giving most growers a more positive outlook on the crop overall. However, Quebec and New Brunswick continued to see rain and very little sunshine through July and August with several fields being completely washed out. This weather continued through September but luckily both provinces had 2-3 weeks of nicer, and drier, weather heading into harvest, turning a very dismal outlook to a much more positive one. This was when the rain started in PEI however, already well soaked ground then suffered almost 3 weeks straight of precipitation, pushing the harvest right into November. These conditions were evident in the harvest overall, with low lying areas left in the field, some soft rot and much hollow heart in the russets that had been sitting in the moisture the longest, causing further concerns of long term storage. In the west things continued hot and dry right through the summer, however some timely rains and the help of irrigation allowed for an excellent harvest and high yields from Manitoba through to BC.

Based on the recently released Statistics Canada report, UPGC predictions on yields and potato production were very close, albeit a bit conservative perhaps. It is estimated that overall production in the country will be 128,115,000, up 3.7% over 2022 production of 123,520,000. The impact of weather in the east impacting yields and lowering production was offset by very good yields and a great growing season in the western provinces.

The question on everyone’s mind this crop season however is the production levels south of the border. With an extra 33,000 acres planted in Idaho alone there were concerns all summer for a very large crop this year, and with weather cooperating, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, the harvest did not disappoint. Total production is estimated at 434.22 million cwt, an 8.9% increase over last year and the largest potato crop since the year 2000. Idaho, returning closer to trend line yields, increased production by 21.16 million cwt and Washington state was up 5.76 million cwt with another 1.43 million cwt from adjoining Oregon. It is important to note that much of this crop is dedicated to the processing sector,

and after two years of shortages the processors did over contract acres in several regions, leading to the destruction of close to 3 million cwt of potatoes in the Pacific Northwest, including some in Alberta and Manitoba. PMANA and UPGC are keeping an eye for indications of movement of these potatoes into the fresh market, although growers have indicated this is not as easy as some may think due to variety, size, shape and even storage temperatures. Production is also up in Wisconsin and Michigan. Maine has a smaller Russet potato crop, while Colorado's crop nearly matches 2022 production.

With delayed planting in Europe this year, many growers were leaving their crops in the field as long as possible, however with over 3 weeks of rain through November this strategy has taken a turn for the worse. Reports out of Belgium and Netherlands were describing a very difficult harvest, with estimates of up to 20% of the crop still to be pulled from the fields the third week of November. Ireland and the UK had been reporting similar conditions but did have a bit of a reprieve toward the end of the month, allowing for a better harvest than anticipated, but still warning of increasing prices due to overall lower supply. It will be interesting to see if North American processors might be able to regain market share globally based on the lack of supply now apparent in western Europe and the UK.

We would also like to talk a bit about the activities of United Potato Growers of Canada this year and how we continue to work on improving data collection and analysis to better inform the decisions of growers about their crop.

In January, the Potato Business Summit, of which UPGC is a major sponsor, was held in Denver, Colorado. After a few years of online and/or hybrid events due to the pandemic the turnout for the conference, and Potato Expo, was excellent, with all enjoying the opportunity to network in person. This was the first time Victoria was able to attend the Expo and we an excellent opportunity to give visibility to UPGC and also strengthen the relationships with our US counterparts that had been built previously by Kevin Maclsaac.

This past January saw us again participate in the Potato Markets section of the Canadian Potato Summit hosted by Potatoes in Canada. Victoria was able to provide a good overview of the North American market as well as participate in the panel discussion. Victoria also attended and presented at the United Partner Seminar in PEI and then followed up with a booth at the New Brunswick Potatoes trade show and conference.

Following presentations to the Ontario Potato Board of Directors as well as the New Brunswick Potatoes Board and the NB Shippers Association, we were excited to announce in March that both provinces decided to return as members of United. These new members, along with Saskatchewan in November 2022, allow UPGC to be truly "united" across Canada.

The Crop Transition Conference was back in Minneapolis in June and saw a good turnout compared to the previous years with many Canadians in attendance in person post COVID. We also had many participating online allowing us to hold our UPGC Board of Directors meeting the day preceding the conference.

With the proven ease of virtual meetings due to improvements in technology and availability of several software platforms, we do expect that future travel to many of our regular meetings may be limited to two or three times per year, keeping it to the main Board meetings, Annual General Meetings and other

important industry events. Our counterparts in the United Potato Growers of America appear to be running a strong organization, and like UPGC, are continually raising the bar to return value to their membership.

The organization had another successful year delivering information back to the growers and saw some new looks for our regular reports including the Monthly Storage Holdings, Crop updates for planting, growing season, and harvest. Our monthly Canadian Potato Market conference call is still going strong, where growers and members across Canada can gather to discuss area reports and receive updates on the US crop and European crop.

Travel through the summer attending various variety trials, member meetings and conferences allowed Victoria to continue to make new contacts and strengthen existing relationships in the industry as well as continue to improve the visibility and recognition of UPGC with potato growers and packers. In her role as GM, Victoria has also been busy working with UPGA to continue to expand the type of information UPGC is providing to members, reaching out to Ag Canada and Statistics Canada to begin the important task of improving the collection of this data across Canada. The Board completed the Strategic plan setting goals and objectives for 2023-2026 as well as an Action Plan for the GM moving forward and Victoria began the important update of the website. Two working groups were established to assist Victoria on Board Governance issues including the update of UPGC By-laws as well as Data Collection, helping to establish priorities, elaborate goals and work with industry partners to make improvements in the data available for analysis.

In closing, it has been a busy year facilitating some of the changes in our organization and we are happy to welcome back Saskatchewan, Ontario and New Brunswick as members and look forward to many successful collaborations of all provinces in the future to achieve our goals of expanding lines of communication and providing more and different types of data to our grower base.

PROVINCE	Planted Acreage	Statistics Canada Report December 5, 2023			PRODUCTION COMPARISON		
		Harvested Acreage	Yield	Production ('000 cwt)	2023 VS. 2022	2022	2021
PEI	84,500	83,000	311	25,813	-7.1%	27,789	27,209
NEW BRUNSWICK	52,815	50,515	295	14,879	-12.5%	17,000	18,200
NOVA SCOTIA	800	780	285	222	-7.5%	240	357
NEWFOUNDLAND	425	370	134	50	-3.8%	52	55
TOTAL MARITIMES	138,540	134,665		40,964	-9.1%	45,081	45,821
QUEBEC	44,919	43,873	292	12,805	-10.3%	14,278	14,100
ONTARIO	37,700	37,400	230	8,602	5.4%	8,160	8,953
MANITOBA	81,000	80,000	372	29,760	13.9%	26,139	24,024
SASKATCHEWAN	7,300	7,200	247	1,780	22.8%	1,450	1,519
ALBERTA	80,100	76,440	420	32,063	19.6%	26,813	24,614
TOTAL PRAIRIES	168,400	163,640		63,603	16.9%	54,402	50,157
BRITISH COLUMBIA	5,830	5,790	370	2,140	33.8%	1,600	2,080
TOTAL CANADA	395,389	385,368	332	128,115	3.7%	123,520	121,111

Canadian Potato Production Summary – Based on Statistics Canada report released December 5, 2023