POTATOES NZ AGRONOMY SUMMIT · PUKEKOHE · 6 AUGUST 2026

Potatoes NEW ZEALAND

57 to 33

What happened to the fresh potato, and what the shopper expects now.

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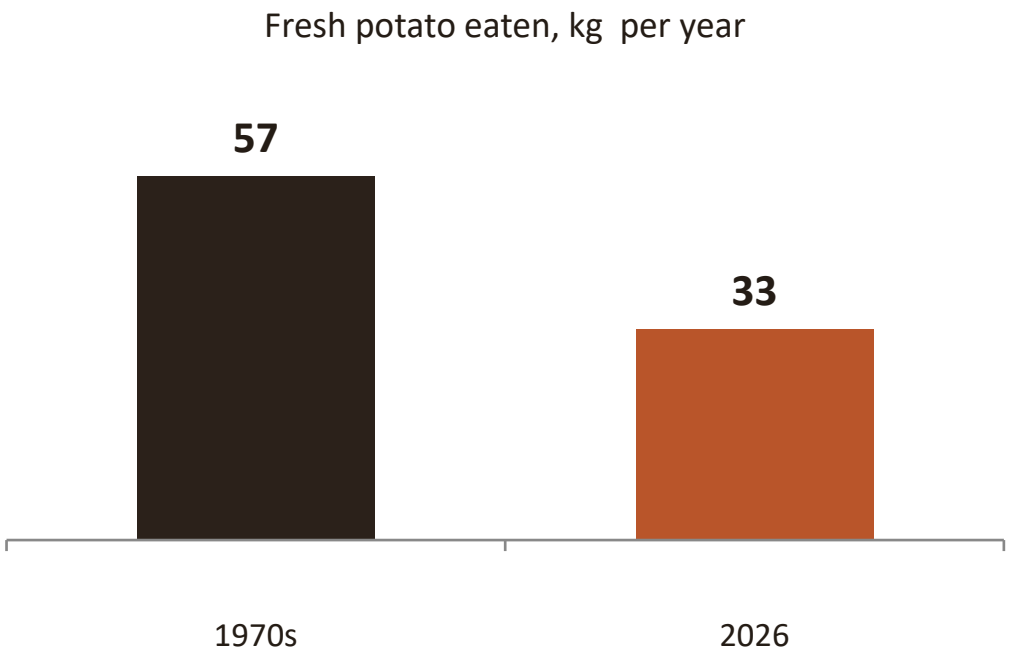
WHERE WE WERE · WHERE WE ARE

57 kilos to 33 kilos



Down 42 percent per head in about fifty years.

~177,000 t fresh, late 1970s **~178,300 t** fresh, today

The same tonnage of fresh potato. 3.1 million people then, 5.35 million now. The category stood still while the country grew around it.

WHERE THE FIGURES COME FROM

- 1970s: NZHistory, Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Potatoes 57 kg, carrots 8 kg, cabbage 5 kg. Indicative tier.
- 2026: derived from Fresh Facts. 40% table, less fresh exports, divided by population. Firm, method shown.

WHERE THE VOLUME WENT

The potato did not leave the plate. It left the kitchen.

1960s

Virtually all New Zealand potatoes were sold fresh, and prepared and eaten in the home.

2007

Over half the crop was processed, mainly into French fries and crisps.

Today

56% processing, 40% table, 4 percent seed. 518,282 tonnes.

−13.7%

production over five years, −72,800 t

+16.3%

sector value over five years, +$177.4m

~$1.0bn

a year, 87% of it domestic retail

50.9 t/ha

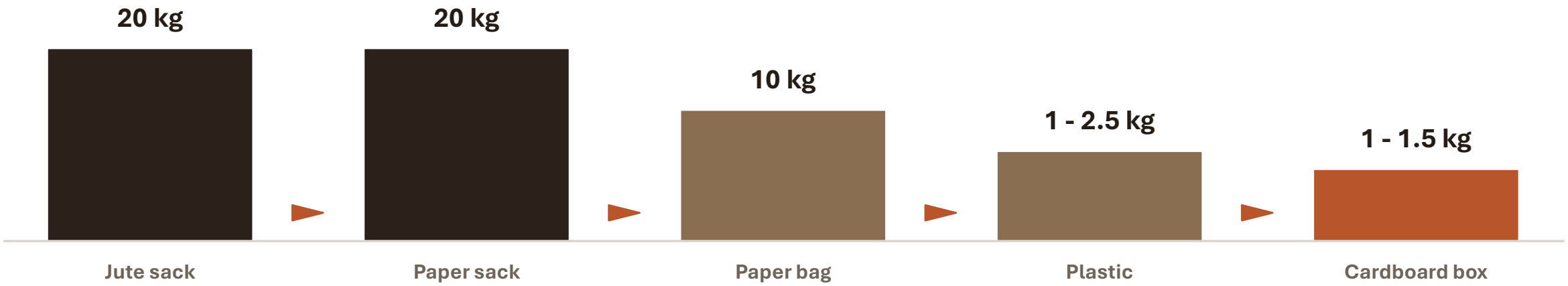
New Zealand Avg. yield, the highest in the world

That inversion happened inside one working lifetime.

Per-head potato consumption did not collapse. Total potato, fresh and processed together, was still around 65 kg in 2009 on a Minister of Agriculture's figure. What collapsed was the share of it that arrives in a household kitchen as a raw tubers - the part where the shopper has to do something with it.

THE PACK

20 kilos to 1 kilo



WHY IT SHRANK

- The average New Zealand household held 2.7 usual residents at the 2023 Census, and it is still falling.
- A 20 kg sack for 2.7 people is months of supply - long past the point where sprouting and greening make the purchase stupid.
- Australian tracking: 87% of households buy potatoes, averaging 1.63 kg a trip. They nominated 1 kg for convenience and 2 kg for value.

WHAT MANY PACKS NOW PROMISES

- Convenience claimed on the front panel - washed, ready, quick to cook.
- Cook-method guidance, increasingly as icons: boil, roast, microwave, salad.
- Health and nutrition signalling, including star ratings.
- The same line offered across several sizes, from a few kilos down to under one.
- Storage advice where it appears at all - still inconsistent across the category.

Washed. Small. Fast. Cook method spelled out - because the shopper is no longer assumed to know. (The pack ladder is this industry's own recollection, not a published series.)

WHAT WE HEAR FROM CONSUMERS

What the shopper is actually asking for

1

Reliability

They want products they can rely on. Consistency, versatility, and something that fits easily into everyday meals. Fresh potatoes are still valued because they are dependable and can be used a lot of different ways.

2

Simplicity

They are not looking for complexity. They want something they know will perform in the kitchen. Confidence in the purchase matters more than choice within it.

3

Usability over variety

Less focus on variety for its own sake, more on how well the product works across different meals. The question is not which potato - it is what can I do with it.

AND WHAT OUR OWN CATEGORY RESEARCH FOUND

80%+
eat fresh potatoes weekly

66%+
twice a week or more

Agria
dominant across the fresh market

Loose or unlabelled
how most shoppers buy, with little engagement with variety

THE EXPECTATION

“Consumers don't want surprises. They want to know that what they're buying today will cook the same way it did last week.”

What we are hearing from customers and buyers about expectations

It is a promise about performance

Not about appearance. A washed, uniform, well-presented potato that cooks badly has still broken it.

It is tested in a kitchen

With nobody from this industry in the room, no label to consult, and no way for us to find out what went wrong.

It is made every single time

80% of New Zealanders eat fresh potatoes weekly. Two-thirds twice a week or more. That is a lot of chances to get it wrong.

Reliability is the whole ask. Everything else on the pack is in service of it.

WHY THAT PROMISE IS HARD TO KEEP

The customer who changed their mind

AN ORDINARY TUESDAY

1. Mid-afternoon, decides on a baked potato with dinner. She buys accordingly.
2. Before she cooks, the plan changes. The family wants chips.
3. The variety in the bag was not bred to be a fries potato.
4. The result is poor. She does not know why - the pack never said.

WHAT BREEDERS SELECT FOR, BY END USE

French fries	Big squarish tubers. Low sugars.
Crisps	Round tubers. High dry matter, low sugars.
Fresh market	Small – medium tubers. Store well. Skin that washes well.

Source: Te Ara, the Encyclopedia of New Zealand

AND THEN IT COMPOUNDS

1. Customer does not conclude that this bag was wrong for chips.
2. Customer concludes that potatoes are unreliable for chips.
3. Next time, another form of carbohydrates is chosen – rice, pasta?

Nothing went wrong in the paddock, the packhouse or the store. The promise still broke - because the one thing the pack did not tell her was what this potato is for.

THE OTHER CONVERSATION

Two things are happening in the same household

THEY WANT TO TRUST THE SYSTEM

- There is growing awareness of where food comes from, and people want to trust what sits behind it.
- Fresh vegetables are seen as essential to a healthy diet, with an expectation that they are produced safely, sustainably and to a high standard.
- For growers that means being able to stand behind what we grow - the quality of it, and the way we farm it.

AND THEY ARE UNDER PRESSURE

- 47.7% of New Zealand adults reported cutting back on fresh fruit and vegetables as costs rose, up from 23.3% in 2018.
- 6.8% of adults now meet the vegetable guidelines, down from 9.0%.
- Around 180,000 tonnes of fresh potato are eaten in New Zealand each year - roughly four times the entire fresh tomato crop.

The provenance conversation and the affordability conversation are happening at the same kitchen table, and often to the same person. A shopper can want to know how her food was grown and still put the bag back on the shelf because it costs too much this week. Both are real.

Sources: Ministry of Health, New Zealand Health Survey 2024/25 · RNZ reporting on fruit and vegetable cutbacks · Potatoes New Zealand Category Survey 2025

WHAT IT MEANS FOR US

We are not just growing a crop

“We're growing something that has to meet an expectation when it gets into someone's kitchen.”

THE PACK CHANGED

Twenty kilos to one. Loose to packed. Unwashed to washed and ready. Nobody in this room was asked whether any of it made sense.

THE PROMISE CHANGED

It is no longer about how a potato looks on the shelf. It is about whether it performs the same way it did last week, in a kitchen we never see.

THE FAILURES COMPOUND

A shopper who has a poor result does not blame the bag. She revises her view of the category, and the next occasion goes somewhere else.

It has pushed us to be more focused on consistency and quality - not because a retailer asked, but because that is now the whole basis on which the category gets bought again.

Fifty years ago we sold 177,000 tonnes of fresh potato to three million people. Today we sell 178,000 tonnes to five and a third million. The question is not whether we can grow it. We are the best in the world at that. The question is what happens to it after the customer gets it home.

MEANWHILE, IN THE PADDOCK

What it takes to deliver all of that

1 Powdery scab

Spongospora subterranea. Spores stay viable in soil beyond a decade. Two University of Tasmania trials running - disrupting zoospore migration, and copper gluconate to germinate resting spores with no host present.

2 Tomato potato psyllid

And Candidatus Liberibacter solanacearum. Calcium propionate trials at Lincoln, work on how long insecticides stay active in the plant, and gut analysis to find where psyllids overwinter.

3 Potato tuber moth

Highest pressure at Pukekohe, compounded by soil cracking, warm humid seasons, pesticide resistance and ambient storage. Smart traps and post-maturity moulding under trial.

4 Early blight - Alternaria

Spore detection technology under consideration: airborne spores identified before symptoms appear, so spraying can be targeted rather than run to a calendar.

5 Common scab

Streptomyces spp. Rising concern has triggered a review of fifty years of global research, looking for rotation, soil and seed treatments that hold up in New Zealand conditions.

6 Nitrogen and freshwater

The Sustainable Vegetable Systems tool - nutrient decisions, reduced leaching, and compliance with regional freshwater rules, without giving up yield.

Current research priorities. Alongside them, the industry asked Parliament in June for resource management settings that support crop rotation, and timely access to modern crop protection tools. Every one of these sits behind a pack that says “washed and ready”.