



Public Relations

Background

In 1971 the USPB was established to defend the reputation of potatoes, to reverse negative attitudes and to renew America's love affair with the potato. Domestic Public Relations has long had the goal of improving positive attitudes for potatoes, while also managing issues of concern to the industry. At the very root of the program is a robust nutrition science and research program that serves as the foundation for the key areas of the overall PR program: **Consumer PR, Foodservice, Nutrition Communications, and Issues Management.**

Over the years, there have been varied levels of emphasis placed on nutrition, as consumer concern ebbed and flowed. However, since 2003 nutrition has stood front-and -center in all of the USPB's domestic marketing work. It was at the height of the low-carbohydrate craze, after a serious drop in consumer attitudes, the USPB redoubled its efforts to create the first phase of an industry-wide nutrition campaign – The *Healthy* Potato Campaign – which put the label at the center of all USPB communication. Within 18 months, consumer attitudes towards potato nutrition improved four percent.

The next platform used to generate publicity for the nutrition campaign from the autumn of 2005 to 2007 was the *Healthy* MR.POTATO HEAD™ (HMPH) character. Despite more than 800 million media impressions delivering the potato nutrition story over the course of four years, consumer attitudes did not fully rebound and industry support was mixed.

"Potatoes...Goodness Unearthed®" was introduced in 2008, marking the third and most current iteration of the nutrition campaign. This campaign illuminates not just the nutritional benefits of the potato but reveals strong emotional connections that lie beneath the surface: family-favorite vegetable moms love to serve; a "good for you food" that nurtures the family, a satisfying and filling food that registered dietitians love to recommend; a versatile and profitable blank canvas chefs love to create with.

Nutrition Communications

Reclaiming the potato's rightful position as America's favorite health food requires credible documentation and support from the scientific community. USPB compiles pertinent research and publicizes it when appropriate. In addition, custom research is commissioned to fill the research "gaps" for the positive potato story. Many scientists, registered dietitians and other nutrition opinion leaders have been allies in communicating the potato nutrition story. By regularly attending meetings and conferences, making presentations and providing key segments with materials that enhance their library of nutrition insights, that scientific foundation maintains its strength.

Consumer Communications

An agile approach enables this program to shift its focus to meet the needs of a changing consumer. In the early years of the program, efforts were focused on nutrition and low-calorie messages. Later, changes in dinnertime preparation time and style – ranging from traditional meals to quick-and-easy – prompted the USPB to emphasize recipes and messages highlighting the convenience of potatoes. As household demographics changed, new menu ideas for one- and two-person households were added. The recession led to emphasis on potato's budget-friendly properties. And new USPB segmentation research helped redefine the needs and priorities of the target consumer. Reaching consumers through mainstream media has remained an important element to the consumer PR program, as it is broad and far reaching. However, with the proliferation of electronic media, especially over the past five years, influential on-line media, blogger communities, and direct communication has also been used to extend potato messaging.

Foodservice

Foodservice, which accounts for more than 50% of potato sales volume and 48% of the consumer food dollar, is an increasingly important channel for USPB, not only because of its size (\$584 billion in annual sales), but also because restaurants are at the forefront of American food trends. Innovation is the driving strategy behind USPB's foodservice marketing program. The cornerstone of the foodservice program is the "Menu Innovations with Potatoes" culinary seminar, designed to inspire chefs with innovative ideas, is now in its sixth year. It is an eye-opener for chefs who might not otherwise have taken the time to take potatoes beyond mashed, baked and fried.

As demand for healthier menu option and bold global flavors continues to grow, the USPB is responding with fresh new potato ideas and recipes. USPB's innovation platform is reinforced with messaging focused on the many benefits that potatoes uniquely deliver: phenomenal versatility, satisfying flavor, unparalleled popularity (#1 foodservice side dish), proven profitability and a remarkably strong nutrition story.

Issues Management

The USPB, in coordination with the National Potato Council, serves as the focal point for the industry on issues of concern. To protect and defend the good reputation of potatoes as a wholesome, nutritious food, the USPB increased monitoring in 2007. Potential issues are reported and analyzed, and when needed response plans are developed. At all times, USPB stands prepared to proactively responds to issues that could negatively impact the potato industry.

Challenges

The emphasis on nutrition is vitally important to all elements in the PR program. As the obesity epidemic in the United States grows, so does confusion about the potato's rightful role in weight loss and healthy weight management. Diets limiting potato consumption continue to gain exposure, such as those based on the Glycemic Index.

Potatoes have a substantial advantage over many other vegetables – they are delicious. They also have unique qualities providing potential to make them special to consumers, chefs and nutritionists, alike. They are gluten-free, economical, nutritious, family-friendly vegetables that can be used as a base for a main dish or as a side dish. Expanding current audience perceptions is required to make these benefits well-known:

- Preparation of potatoes needs to go beyond the "traditional"--mashed, baked and fried, to get consumers out of their potato "rut". In an environment that rewards healthy innovation in the home or restaurant kitchen, potatoes should have an important role to play.
- Convenient preparations of potatoes are not well known, and in time-pressed environments, this is a major concern. Making it even more daunting is that "convenience" has a different definition depending on who you ask.
- The health of the potato is often defined by the company it keeps (butter, sour cream, cheese). Providing tasty recipes that are also healthy are imperative to bridge the gap between potatoes lower "health" perception and potatoes assets as a "fresh" and "natural" starch.
- Specific to a new target market within foodservice, while potatoes are a popular side at restaurants, they are still finding their role in the supermarket deli. What's more, Supermarket delis/prepared foods sections are rapidly growing and competing with restaurants in the food "to go" category. Currently, 61% of foodservice meals are purchased "to go."



A new challenge relates to public health, as food and food companies are being scrutinized more than ever for their contributions to food-related diseases and our country's obesity epidemic. This debate is being taken up by policy makers now, an audience that the USPB cannot directly seek to influence. Some of the legislative issues include:

- Potatoes recent exclusion from the list of allowable fresh fruits and vegetables approved for purchase by the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. This exclusion sends the message that potatoes aren't a nutritious food staple that belongs on this important reimbursable list of allowable fruits and vegetables. Despite two waves of aggressive campaigns by the National Potato Council arguing that excluding white potatoes is not based on sound nutrition science and is certainly not in the best interest of WIC participants, the decision was made to exclude white potatoes from the program.
- A preliminary report, delivered by the Institute of Medicine on revising the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, proposed a limitation of starchy vegetables to no more than one serving per week. USPB-funded research demonstrates removal or significant reduction of potato consumption may put many children at risk of decreased nutrient intake.
- The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law in 2010 was a provision that requires sweeping changes within foodservice. Designed to help consumers make informed food choices, it requires that calories must be posted on menus or menu boards. Additional nutritional information – such as calories, calories from fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, fiber and protein – must be available at point of purchase. Although this legislation does not directly impact potatoes, without much more education of the trade, some chefs may struggle to keep potatoes on the menu because of current less-healthy preparation methods.

Resolutions

Build USPB's scientific information database. The nutrition facts label and a scientific foundation that supports our nutrition claims remains the core of our PR programming. Scientific evidence that proves that potatoes can be a healthy part of a balanced diet provides credibility and third-party evidence for our claims/messages. The base of scientific proof continues to give us credible permission to reach out to all our audiences with fact-based messages that ultimately guide consumers to eat more potatoes.

Engage key influencer segments and increase base of goodwill among influencers for potatoes. It is more important than ever that we motivate key influencer segments, including partner organizations, to speak more often to their audiences about the potato nutrition message by strengthening their library of potato science and nutrition information. At the same time, we will work to increase the number of credible voices speaking positively on behalf of the potato and the depth of their understanding. Mentioned as one of our challenges, public opinion is/has been critical to the potato industry. By fortifying our relationships with many in the nutrition community, the USPB is in an excellent position to grow our sphere of involvement through continued distribution of nutrition information as well as new scientific development information in an effective and efficient manner.

Demonstrate potatoes' high nutritional ROI based upon its ability to fit any lifestyle. Telling consumers that potatoes contain no fat, sodium or cholesterol has proven to change attitudes. It continues to be the foundation of the public relations campaign, as it is our strongest message. Marrying core nutrition points with lifestyle motivators (gluten-free, nutrition on a budget, convenient meals, etc.) provides a stronger message by helping our target audience to understand the breadth and depth of potato benefits.

Maintain appetite appeal message. Recent ethnography research shows appetite appeal is the number one criteria when consumers plan their meals—more important to our target audience than nutrition, convenience or economics. Therefore, reminding consumers of how much they love the flavor of potatoes needs to be a part of the programs. However, we must also qualify that the potatoes they love can be prepared in healthful ways without sacrificing taste.

Create consumer-friendly programs that are motivating and adaptable for industry. By providing USDA approved messages, materials and information about the USPB nutrition program, we make it easier for the industry to carry consistent messaging in their own packaging, promotion and publicity efforts. Consistent messaging from the same industry is important so that consumers, media and influencers are not confused. What's more, when the entire industry is reading from the same "play book" and everyone has similar messaging, the likelihood is greater that consumers uptake of our messages will increase thus enhancing their understanding of potatoes' nutritional and lifestyle benefits.

Issues Management. The USPB, in conjunction with the National Potato Council, serves as the focal point and leader for the industry on issues of concern. To protect and defend the good reputation of potatoes as a wholesome, nutritious food, the USPB monitors and manages issues that could negatively impact the potato industry. Without this important strategy, there would be no early warning about potential issues/crisis, nor would there be a central organizing point for analysis, response or industry alignment. The NPC is the defender in public policy issues. The USPB supports their work in providing the key messages and nutrition research need to defend the potato.

Continue to drive potato menu innovation, particularly healthy innovation, across all segments of the foodservice industry via an integrated marketing communications program. Continue to target the Top 350 foodservice chains and expand the target to include leading supermarket deli/prepared foods operations.

Public Relations

<i>Growth Strategy</i>	<i>Productivity Strategy</i>
<p><i>Build Scientific Nutritional Support</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand current database with scientific nutrition research to further fortify PR programming <p><i>Position potatoes with high nutritional ROI</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marry the nutrition message with lifestyle motivators to prompt increased use <p><i>Focus on potatoes' appetite appeal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep flavor appeal front-and-center of communications <p><i>Expand potato menu innovation, particularly healthy innovation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote potato innovation by showcasing creative dishes developed by leading professional chefs in an integrated foodservice <p><i>Educate chain chefs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue the "Menu Innovations with Potatoes" seminar at the Culinary Institute of America and seminar information and highlights online <p><i>Drive potato menu innovation at retail/deli menus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the emerging retail/deli segment with education to increase potato penetration and usage. 	<p><i>Engage key influencers and build base of goodwill</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivate key segments to speak more often about potato nutrition and grow number of credible positive voices <p><i>Manage issues of Concern</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor, evaluate and respond to issues, as necessary to protect and defend the good reputation of potatoes and the industry <p><i>Create consumer friendly materials for industry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide materials that motivate the industry to extend consistent messaging to consumers