

Commission launches program promoting the sweet potato

Tomeka Sinclair, The Robesonian, Lumberton, N.C.

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Apr. 10—BENSON — As North Carolina sweet potato growing season begins, the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

Founded in 1961, the NCSPC is one of North Carolina's oldest agricultural commodity groups and serves as a go-to resource for all things sweet potatoes.

With spring officially here and temperatures beginning to rise, sweet potato growers are preparing their fields for planting by "bedding" seed potatoes — placing the whole potato in the ground covered by a thin layer of soil and plastic. Mostly grown in the state's coastal plain region, sprouts will be cut and transplanted to a different field in May or June to be harvested beginning in August, just in time for the NCSPC's birthday.

The NCSPC was chartered on June 30, 1961, to support the state's sweet potato growers, packers and shippers, and today is made up of more than 400 sweet potato farmers, packers, processors and the business associates who support them. Dedicated to increasing sweet potato consumption through education, promotional activities, research and honorable horticultural practices, the Commission has supported its growers and helped North Carolina maintain its status as the No. 1 sweet potato-producing state in the country since 1971. The state currently grows nearly 60% of the U.S. supply.

In honor of this milestone, the NCSPC has launched multiple initiatives aimed at promoting sweet potato consumption throughout the year, including:

- Collaborating with North Carolina Ag in the Classroom to develop classroom-ready curriculums featuring sweet potatoes for grades kindergarten through 12th. Curriculums meet standards set forth by the U.S. Department of Education, including video lessons, activity guides, posters and more.

- Launching the Registered Dietitian Toolkit, a resource to help educate health professionals and the general public about the many nutritional benefits of North Carolina sweet potatoes. The toolkit is free to download and features healthy sweet potato recipes, nutrition trends and teaching tools, among other information.

— Working to promote North Carolina sweet potatoes in new markets by initiating targeted earned and paid media campaigns in target out-of-state cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Minneapolis and Washington, D.C.