

To meet growing market, Boyette Bros. installs organic packingline

[theproducenews.com /category-list/22475-to-meet-growing-market-boyette-bros-installs-organic-packingline](http://theproducenews.com/category-list/22475-to-meet-growing-market-boyette-bros-installs-organic-packingline)

by John S. Niblock | October 09, 2017

rock ridge, nc — Robert Boyette is bullish on organic sweet potatoes.

“Our organic sweet potato sales have been growing 20-25 percent annually for the last few years,” Boyette, co-owner of Boyette Bros. Produce, here, with his two brothers, told *The Produce News*.

Along the way, Boyette Bros. has increased the acreage for organic sweet potatoes to about 350 acres, and this spring it installed an organic packingline, bringing the packing operation for organics in-house. Boyette bought the machinery for the organic packing line from a Louisiana sweet potato grower.

Boyette Bros. developed a way that allowed it to build and run its own organic packingline without the need for hiring and training new staff. Instead, a restructured packing schedule allows for dedicated weekly production of organic produce. It will be used more frequently as sales increase in years to come, Boyette predicted.

A new 40-pound box of organic sweet potatoes debuted this spring fresh from the new organic packingline for sweet potatoes installed at Boyette Bros. Produce. Organic sweet potatoes are a premium product at premium prices at Boyette Bros. Produce.

“We hand pick them, hand size them, and cull any misshapen or oversized or undersized potatoes from the harvest,” he said. “We want to deliver a premium product.”

The organic sweet potatoes rejected from the final batch are sold to processors that make products such as organic pet food, Boyette noted.

The organic sweet potatoes offered by Boyette Bros. Produce are a variety of the popular Covington brand. They are sold in this country to supermarket chains and other retailers and are exported, primarily to European countries, Boyette said.

Boyette Bros. Produce holds the U.S. Department of Agriculture Certified Organic label awarded to farms that meet stringent standards, including no use of pesticides for at least three years prior to certification, no pesticide use while certified and passing routine inspections.

Organic foods are among the faster-growing categories in supermarkets. Sales of organic foods hit a record \$43 billion last year, up 8.4 percent over 2015, compared to the 0.6 percent growth in the overall food category, according to the Organic Trade Association. But organic food still represents only about 5 percent of total U.S. retail food sales.

Almost 15 percent of the vegetables and fruits consumed in the United States are now organic, according to the association.

About 45 percent of the shoppers surveyed by the Hartman Group, a research firm in Bellevue, WA, said they would pay extra for organic fresh vegetables.

“Finally, the conventional food and beverage industry has woken up and said, ‘Why, this isn’t niche anymore. It’s



eating into my share,” Senior Vice President Shelley Balanko of the Hartman Group said in a statement on the firm’s website.