# EVALUATION OF POPCORN BOARD ACTIVITIES OUTCOMES



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## ABOUT THE FRESH APPROACH, INC.

The Fresh Approach, Inc. (TFA) is a progressive consulting company created to address the unique needs of organizations, including commodity boards, non-profits as well as for profit companies. William Watson, TFA's president, has twenty five years leading results-oriented marketing, sales, strategic planning campaigns as a partner, manager/owner, including thirteen years with the National Watermelon Research and Promotion Board and fours years with the National Mango Board as executive director. Through his experience and extensive network, Watson provides clients with experienced management services in strategic marketing, research, program evaluation, communications, leadership development and training, as well as coalition building.

#### **EVALUATION APPROACH**

The evaluation of the Popcorn Board was carried out as part of the 1996 Farm Bill requirement that each Research and Promotion board fund an independent evaluation of its programs at least every 5 years. Through comparing Popcorn Board activities with similar programs of scope and resources we have produced an outcomes based evaluation with recommendations that may provide improved evaluations in the future. It was determined there is not enough significant data to produce an overall ROI nor enough data exists to utilize econometric techniques.

This report summarizes information which can be used to:

- Improve decision making
- Meet the accountability requirements of USDA and constituents, and
- Acknowledge and enhance project performance.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Nearly all the world's popcorn production is in the United States and popcorn is grown in 25 states. Most popcorn is grown under contract to processors. As with any specialty crop, marketing is extremely important to assist processors and growers maintain a profitable economic environment. In 1998, processors established the Popcorn Board to expand the popcorn market by conducting special promotions, research and informing consumers of the qualities and economic importance of popcorn. The Board consists of nine at-large processors.

Popcorn is sold either as a plain or flavor-added popped product or as an unpopped product in moisture-proof containers ranging from plastic bags and sealed jars to ready-to-use containers both for conventional and microwave popping. Nutritionally, it is one of the best all-around snack foods. The mission of the Popcorn Board is to raise awareness of US popcorn as a whole grain and versatile food.

Generally, three markets are available for good quality popcorn: popcorn-processor contracted acreage, open-market sales and local sales. If the crop is not marketable as popping corn, it can be ground and fed to livestock or poultry.

Pounds of Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed						
2003	847,318,251					
2004	836,831,013					
2005	840,788,601					
2006	804,349,865					
2007	795,660,826					

Table 1 – US & Canada Pounds of Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed

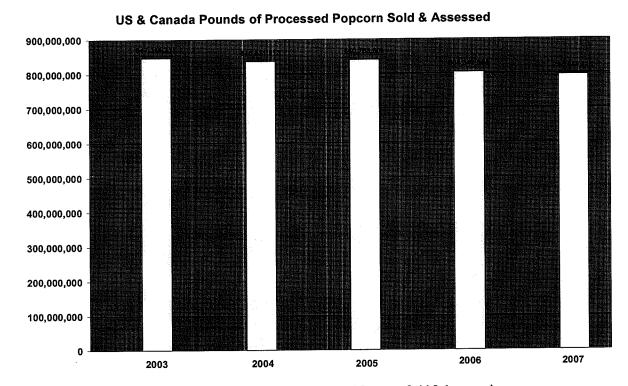


Chart 1 - US & Canada Pounds of Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed

While the United States remains the single largest consumer of popcorn worldwide, retail sales have slipped after more than 20 years of steady increases. Domestic popcorn sales accelerated rapidly in the 1980s with the introduction of microwave popcorn. Popcorn consumption peaked in the U.S. in the mid 1990's and has been trending slightly downward ever since.

According to the National Popcorn Board, popcorn exports from 2003-2007 totaled 719 million pounds. Competition for the world market is strong in places like Argentina, Canada, Korea, Spain, France, Hungary and India where they produce 382,717 metric tons collectively.

Pounds of Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed						
2003	114,898,133					
2004	146,270,095					
2005	142,452,282					
2006	153,324,347					
2007	162,258,481					

Table 2 - Export Pounds of US Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed

# 180,000,000 160,000,000 120,000,000 100,000,000 40,000,000 20,000,000 120,000 120,000

Chart 2 - Export Pounds of US Processed Popcorn Sold & Assessed

U.S. exports of popcorn totaled 162 million pounds in 2007, with a value of approximately \$127 million. Popcorn was exported to over 90 countries. The two largest markets in 2007, excluding Canada were Mexico with 21,000 metric tons and Japan with 8,500 metric tons. Other major destinations for U.S. popcorn included the Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

#### POPCORN BOARD ACTIVITIES' OUTCOMES

For each year of its operations (1998-2007), the Popcorn Board has conducted direct domestic marketing projects. Beginning in 2000, the Popcorn Board began administering the USDA/FAS/MAP which provides funding for foreign markets targeted for US popcorn exports.

The goal of the program for the last five years has been to increase sales of popcorn and popcorn products through promotions directly to consumers. Target audiences are defined

annually during a strategic marketing meeting. Board member experts are utilized to help determine which audience the programs will target. For the past five years, the target audience has been defined as women between the ages of 24 and 54. Youth are a secondary target. By influencing the target audience of women 24-54 who do the primary grocery shopping, it is expected that youth will also be influenced. Some programs have been developed to reach youth directly through schools and sports events.

The Popcorn Board's efforts have centered on public relations campaigns with news and public service releases to the media. A toll-free consumer telephone and the website are the two concerted efforts to make popcorn information available as a result of the campaign. The campaign's effectiveness was measured by tracking web visitors.

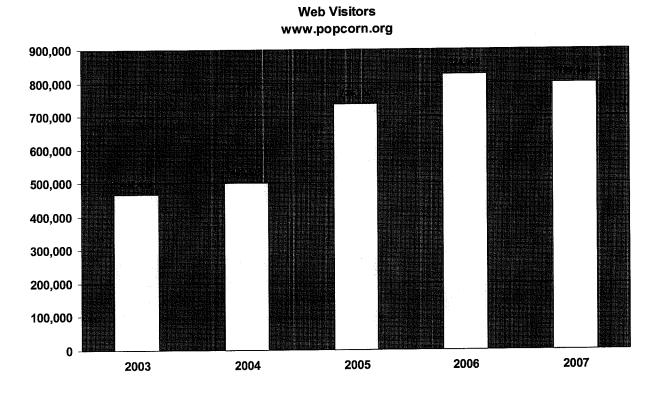


Chart 3 - Number of Web Visitors - www.popcorn.org

Although there has been a concerted effort to concentrate information on popcorn on the Web site and to move away from the toll-free number as a vehicle for two-way communication with consumers, the toll free number continues to be a reliable method of access of popcorn information. Access to the popcorn web site (<a href="www.popcorn.org">www.popcorn.org</a>) also is growing strong and increases annually.

#### **ECONOMIC OUTCOMES**

The US popcorn industry processed and sold over 4 Billion pounds of popcorn in the US, Canada and targeted markets abroad, between 2003-2007. The efficient domestic and international marketing campaigns designed and executed by the Popcorn Board during the same time, provided the processors the support needed to speak with a unified voice, while convincing consumers to purchase US popcorn.

Revenue	2003 Audit Results	2004 Audit Results	2005 Audit Results	2006 Audit Results	2007 Audit Results
Assessments	\$583,100	\$ 590,656	\$ 590,127	\$574,700	\$575,550
MAP Reimbursement	\$299,726	\$ 195,168	\$ 249,874	\$354,232	\$269,164
AMS Refund	\$ -	\$ 1,881	\$ 1,947	\$ -	\$ -
Technical Issues Support	\$ -	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ -	\$ -
Logowear	\$ -	\$ 476	\$ 88	\$ -	\$ -
Interest	\$ 620	\$ 853	\$ 5,591	\$ 11,220	\$11,021
Total	\$ 883,446	\$ 790,034	\$ 848,627	\$ 940,152	\$855,735
Expenses					•
Administrative	\$ 142,651	\$ 146,217	\$ 140,704	\$ 161,412	\$179,782
International Marketing	\$ 340,635	\$ 229,334	\$ 299,186	\$ 417,385	\$322,347
Domestic Marketing	\$ 326,324	\$ 318,877	\$ 369,409	\$ 422,056	\$404,253
Total	\$ 809,610	\$ 694,428	\$ 809,299	\$1,000,853	\$906,382
Income (Loss)	\$ 73,836	\$ 95,606	\$ 39,328	\$ (60,701)	\$(50,647)

**Table 3 Board Revenues and Expenses** 

# US Popcorn 2003-2007 Revenues

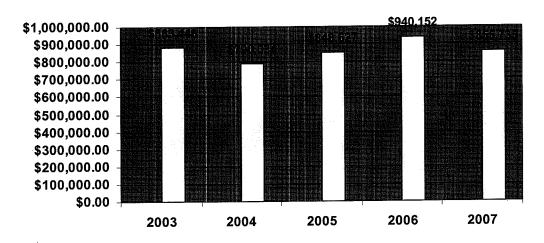


Chart 4 - US Popcorn 2003 - 2007 Revenues

# US Popcorn 2003-2007 Expenses

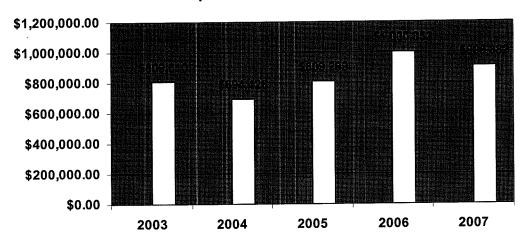


Chart 5 - US Popcorn 2003 - 2007

#### A FAVORITE FOR FOOD MEDIA

Food editors respond very favorably to information provided by The Popcorn Board through ongoing communications activities and articles and photography available on the board's website.

"They provide wonderful material," said Janice Denham, Food and Home Editor of the Suburban Journals in St. Louis, MO. "I tend to use things that work well for children. We have a weekly column called 'Kids Corner,' and The Popcorn Board provides a valuable resource. Their recipes are colorful and the materials are wonderful. I use them all the time."

Other food editors said they enjoy the featured recipes of the month and the nutritional information that is available on the board's website. Health matters are becoming an increasing news hook for food editors, who are continually seeking out fresh angles. The Popcorn Board is well-positioned to meet their needs. A single example of positioning the Popcorn Board as a media source is below:

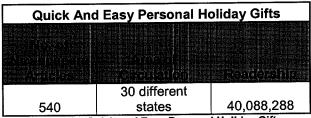


Table 4 - Quick and Easy Personal Holiday Gift

The Popcorn Board turned an initial investment of less than \$750 into a return which netted the industry coverage in 540 newspapers in multiple states across the country, which equates to a readership of over 40,000,000. The power of working together as a unified voice and resource through the Popcorn Board gives each popcorn processor significantly more leverage to tell the overall popcorn story than as an individual company.

Popcorn and other grain-based foods are riding an upswing. Evidence is mounting across the nation that the whole grains movement is trending upward at an accelerating pace. Whole grain products grew 18 percent in 2005, after growing at less than 1 percent growth annually in 2001-

2004, said keynote speaker Dr. Robert Post at the Nov. 5-7, 2007; "Just Ask for Whole Grains" conference in Kansas City, MO. Post is Deputy Director of the United States Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

Whole grains or foods made from them contain all the essential parts and naturally-occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed, according to the Whole Grains Council, a nonprofit consumer advocacy group working to increase consumption of whole grains for better health. If the grain has been processed (e.g., cracked, crushed, rolled, extruded, and/or cooked), the food product should deliver approximately the same rich balance of nutrients that are found in the original grain seed. Corn, including popcorn, is one example of a whole grain.

Corn is lately being reassessed and viewed as a healthy food, according to the Whole Grains Council. A recent study showed that corn has the highest level of antioxidants of any grain or vegetable – almost twice the antioxidant activity of apples, the council reported.

According to the International Food Information Council's 2007 Food and Health Survey, 71 percent of Americans are trying to consume more whole grains. Mintel's Global New Product database reveals that whole grain product launches doubled from 2005 to 2006.

Serving more whole grains was the No. 1 change noted by school foodservice operations in 2007, with 85.1 percent reporting an increase, according to the School Nutrition Association's 2007 Trends Report. Dr. Len Marquart, Assistant Profession of Nutrition at the University of Minnesota, reported that children in school cafeterias are eating more whole grain foods.

Portion-control foods are another major trend enjoying an upswing in the food industry. According to the Snack Food Association (SFA), approximately \$24 billion is spent each year on snacks, and Research and Markets, a Dublin, Ireland-based source for international research and market data, found that Americans consume more than 6.5 billion pounds of salty snacks per year.

Snack manufacturers are responding with whole-grain, reduced-calorie and portion-controlled versions of familiar favorites such as the ever-popular 100-Cal pouches. Mintel International Group, a Chicago, IL-based consumer, media and market research company, reported a growth in the snack category of 20% between 2001 and 2006. Although consumers age 55 and older are most likely to eat three square meals a day, baby boomers drive the healthy snack market with a preference for fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, dried fruit, trail mix, crackers and popcorn.

The Popcorn Board has carefully helped media understand how popcorn fits among these trends.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EVALUATIONS

The data required to determine whether the Popcorn Board's promotion efforts have had an impact on sales does not exist. Identifying a direct correlation between sales and Popcorn Board activities are difficult to assess. However, based on the quantitative and qualitative data, it can be objectively deduced that the Popcorn Board is achieving its goals and having a positive impact on its shareholders. It is important to note that the Popcorn Board has limited resources and achieving goals can only be done with a conservative, focused strategy and by establishing priorities.

It is recommended that the Popcorn Board consider identifying and then measuring the value of program activities back to it's' shareholders. For example, what value do shareholders see in the Popcorn Board's ability to be an industry resource in a crisis situation, as a leads provider

(as a result of industry trade show presence) and market trend information? What sources would the industry use in these scenarios if the Popcorn Board was not available?

Building results-oriented marketing campaigns for unique industries such as the US popcorn producers and processors is a challenge due to the lack of expansive, reliable resources. However the Popcorn Board's history and reputation has smartly provided a reliable communication tool with consumers, through its media partners for the popcorn industry. With the ever-changing trends of consumer behavior, the Popcorn Board's expertise in this area will be a critical component of the industry's future.

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**Project Title:** 

**Direct Marketing Program** 

Timeframe:

January 1, 2003 - March 31, 2004

**Project Summary:** 

The Direct Marketing program has been designed to impact three major audiences: Females 18-54 with children in the home, teachers and their students, and concessionaires. This program includes activities specifically designed to create immediate demand for popcorn and to invest in a developing youth market. These activities will keep popcorn snacking in front of consumers to encourage increased consumption.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Objectives:

Promote and increase awareness of popcorn by communicating directly with consumers. Includes:

- Tie-in promotion activity for the youth market; specifically a tie-in promotion with youth soccer leagues/tournaments.
- Tie-in promotion activity for the youth/family market; specifically a tie-in promotion with Four H clubs and Ag in the Classroom.
- Tie-in promotion activity for the family market; specifically, a tiein promotion with car dealerships and the Automobile Association of America (AAA).
- Information resource through 1-877-POP-A LOT and www.popcorn.org.
- Media placement and request fulfillment.
- Issues monitoring, as appropriate, and messaging of issues impacting the popcorn processing industry. Includes crisis communications activities.
- Technical Issues monitoring, including production and dissemination of the Agri-Chemical Handbook.
- Support for National Popcorn Poppin' Month through fulfilling requests for information and media interviews.

**Evaluation:** 

**Project Title:** 

**Direct Marketing Program** 

Timeframe:

January 1, 2004 - December 31, 2004

**Project Summary:** 

The Direct Marketing program has been designed to impact general audiences, via a public relations campaign. Media (newspaper and popular magazines) will receive monthly, family-focused press releases featuring popcorn photos, recipes, and tips. This program includes activities specifically designed to create immediate demand for popcorn and to encourage ongoing purchase and use of popcorn. These activities will keep popcorn snacking in front of consumers to encourage increased consumption.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Objectives:

Promote and increase awareness of popcorn by communicating directly with editors who can influence a wide number of consumers. Includes:

- Public relations promotion activity to reach newspapers, magazines and radio stations across the nation.
- Promotional activity associated with Isiah Thomas and Popcorn Poppin' Month.
- Additional support for National Popcorn Poppin' Month through fulfilling requests for information and media interviews.
- Information resource through 1-877-POP-A LOT and www.popcorn.org.
- Media placement and request fulfillment.
- Issues monitoring as appropriate, and messaging of issues impacting the popcorn processing industry. Includes crisis communications activities.
- Market research to evaluate program on targeted audiences.
- Technical issues monitoring, including production and dissemination of the Agri-Chemical Handbook.

**Evaluation:** 

**Project Title:** 

**Domestic Marketing Program** 

Timeframe:

January 1, 2005 - December 31, 2005

**Project Summary:** 

The Domestic Marketing Program has been designed to impact general audiences, via a public relations campaign. Media (newspaper and popular magazines) will receive monthly, family-focused press releases featuring popcorn photos, recipes and tips. This program includes activities specifically designed to create immediate demand for popcorn and to encourage ongoing purchase and use of popcorn. These activities will keep popcorn snacking in front of consumers to encourage increased consumption.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and

popcorn-related products.

**Objectives:** 

Promote and increase awareness of popcorn by communicating directly with editors who can influence a wide number of

consumers.

Includes:

Public relations activities to targeted market, including press releases, color photography, recipe development.

- Information resource through 1-877-POP-A LOT and www.popcorn.org.
- Media placement and request fulfillment.
- Issues monitoring, as appropriate, and messaging of issues impacting the popcorn processing industry, including crisis communications activities.
- Technical issues monitoring, including production and dissemination of the Agri-Chemical Handbook, registration of new chemistry for maintaining the crop; cooperation with universities on breeding/crop management research projects.
- Support for National Popcorn Poppin' Month including filling of requests for information and media interviews, and use of spokespersons as applicable.

**Evaluation:** 

**Project Title:** 

**Direct Marketing Program** 

Timeframe:

January 1, 2006 - March 31, 2007

**Project Summary:** 

The Direct Marketing program has been designed to impact three major audiences: Females 18-54 with children in the home, teachers and their students, and concessionaires. This program includes activities specifically designed to create immediate demand for popcorn and to invest in a developing youth market. These activities will keep popcorn snacking in front of consumers

to encourage increased consumption.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Objectives:

Promote and increase awareness of popcorn by communicating directly with consumers. Includes:

- Public relations activities to targeted market, including press releases, color photography, recipe development, consumer recipe contests, mascot enhancements and story placements.
- 1-877-POP-A Information resource through www.popcorn.org.
- Media placement and request fulfillment.
- Issues monitoring, as appropriate, and messaging of issues impacting the popcorn processing industry. Includes crisis communications activities.
- Technical issues monitoring, production and dissemination of the Agri-Chemical Handbook, registration of new chemistry and breeding/crop management research projects.
- Support for National Popcorn Poppin' Month through fulfilling requests for information and media interviews and use of spokesperson.

**Evaluation:** 

**Project Title:** 

**Direct Marketing Program** 

Timeframe:

January 1 - December 31, 2007

**Project Summary:** 

The Direct Marketing program has been designed to impact three major audiences: Females 18-54 with children in the home, teachers and their students, and concessionaires. This program includes activities specifically designed to create immediate demand for popcorn and to invest in a developing youth market. These activities will keep popcorn snacking in front of consumers to encourage increased consumption.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

**Objectives:** 

Promote and increase awareness of popcorn by communicating directly with consumers. Includes:

- Public relations activities to targeted market, including press releases, color photography, recipe development, consumer recipe contests, mascot enhancements and story placements.
- Information resource through 1-877-POP-A LOT and www.popcorn.org.
- Media placement and request fulfillment.
- Issues monitoring, as appropriate, and messaging of issues impacting the popcorn processing industry. Includes crisis communications activities.
- Technical issues monitoring, production and dissemination of the Agri-Chemical Handbook, registration of new chemistry and breeding/crop management research projects.
- Support for National Popcorn Poppin' Month through fulfilling requests for information and media interviews and use of spokesperson.

**Evaluation:** 

**Project Title:** 

International Marketing Program

Timeframe:

July 2003 – June 2004

**Project Summary:** 

The Board will continue in 2003 with conventional demand-building programs in Mexico and the Czech Republic and new market research/opportunities in Greece and in the Caribbean. The overall goal was to influence women 18-54 with children in the home since they are the primary snack purchasing decision maker. The Board worked to influence and convince snack food purchasers in Mexico and the Czech Republic through awareness, tie-in promotions and trade show participation, that US popcorn is the most versatile, best quality, best tasting snack. Audiences to influence include retail and concession trade, consumers, and the all-important and growing youth market.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

**Objectives:** 

Develop, maintain, and expand commercial export markets for USA popcorn. Programs could include:

- Partnering with Czech Automobile Association Cooperation for regular promotions aimed at families.
- Production of new information kits for elementary school teachers focusing on the history, whole-grain goodness, nutritional value and versatility of US popcorn for use in the classroom.
- Cinema promotions for young consumers to learn characteristics, nutritional value and quality of US popcorn.
- Development of a consumer campaign to develop the market for US popcorn at video rental stores.
- Hosting of www.popcorn.cz for the Czech Republic.

**Evaluation:** 

Expected results and time frame are outlined in 2003-04 Unified Export Strategy (UES).

**Project Title:** 

International Marketing Program

Timeframe:

July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005

**Project Summary:** 

The continuation of promotion programs in Mexico and Greece and will conduct market research in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia to assess the viability of future programs in the region.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Objectives:

Develop, maintain, and expand commercial export markets for USA popcorn. Programs could include:

- Market research in Southeast Asia to develop a clear picture of the market for US popcorn.
- Production of new information kits for elementary school teachers focusing on the history, whole-grain goodness, nutritional value and versatility of US popcorn for use in the classroom.
- Cinema promotions for young consumers to learn characteristics, nutritional value and quality of US popcorn.
- Joint Popcorn/Pet Food Promotion at pet shows and special events.
- Development of a consumer campaign to develop the market for US popcorn at video rental stores.

**Evaluation:** 

Expected results and time frame are outlined in 2004-05 Unified Export Strategy (UES).

**Project Title:** 

International Marketing Program

Timeframe:

July 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

**Project Summary:** 

To do research and, where applicable, host public relations programs in the Caribbean, Greece, Mexico and Southeast Asia to raise awareness of US popcorn as a wholesome, versatile snack. A Unified Export Strategy (UES) application for 2005-06 MAP funds to support international marketing efforts will be submitted to the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in March.

Goal:

To increase awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Objectives:

Develop, maintain, and expand commercial export markets for USA popcorn. Programs could include:

- Media relations campaigns to raise awareness of USA popcorn as a snacking choice
- Tie-in promotions with cinemas, grocery outlets, convenience stores and other outlets where snacks are sold to spur popcorn sales
- Research to determine snacking habits of targeted countries to better plan promotions to meet consumer needs, thereby growing popcorn consumption
- Participation at trade shows and snack-food industry events to inform and educate participants on USA popcorn as a snack choice.

**Evaluation:** 

Expected results and time frame are outlined in 2005-06 Unified Export Strategy (UES).

**Project Title:** 

International Marketing Program

Timeframe:

July 1, 2006 - June 30, 2007

**Project Summary:** 

To host public relations programs in the Caribbean, Greece, Mexico and Southeast Asia to raise awareness of US popcorn as a wholesome, versatile snack. A Unified Export Strategy (UES) application for 2006-07 MAP funds to support international marketing efforts will be submitted to the Foreign Agricultural

Service (FAS) in March.

Goal:

To raise awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

**Objectives:** 

Develop, maintain, and expand commercial export markets for USA popcorn. Programs could include:

- Production of information kits for elementary school teachers focusing on the history, whole-grain goodness, nutritional value and versatility of US popcorn for use in the classroom.
- Implementation of cinema promotions for young consumers to learn characteristics and quality of US popcorn.
- Distribution of popcorn samples and information brochures at trade/consumer shows emphasizing superior quality, taste and ease of preparation. Collection of trade leads for subsequent distribution to the US industry.

**Evaluation:** 

Expected results and time frame are outlined in 2006-07 Unified Export Strategy (UES).

**Project Title:** 

International Marketing Program

Timeframe:

January 1, 2007 - December 31, 2007

**Project Summary:** 

To host public relations programs in the Caribbean, Mexico and Southeast Asia to raise awareness of US popcorn as a wholesome, versatile snack. A Unified Export Strategy (UES) application for 2007-08 MAP funds to support international marketing efforts will be submitted to the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in May.

Goal:

To raise awareness, thereby increasing sales, of popcorn and popcorn-related products.

Develop, maintain, and expand commercial export markets for Objectives:

USA popcorn. Programs could include:

 Production of information kits for elementary school teachers focusing on the history, whole-grain goodness, nutritional value and versatility of US popcorn for use in the classroom.

• Implementation of cinema promotions for young consumers to

learn characteristics and quality of US popcorn.

• Distribution of popcorn samples and information brochures at trade/consumer shows emphasizing superior quality, taste and ease of preparation. Collection of trade leads for subsequent

distribution to the US industry.

• Hosting of www.popcorn.cz for the Czech Republic.

**Evaluation:** 

Expected results and time frame are outlined in 2007-08 Unified

Export Strategy (UES).

# Sources

Auditor:

Wolf and Company LLP, 2100 Clearwater Drive, Oak Brook, IL 60523-1927 www.wolfcpa.com

National Popcorn Board

USDA