

MANUFACTURING
Page 12

MONEY TALK
Page 14

ON THE LINKS
Page 16

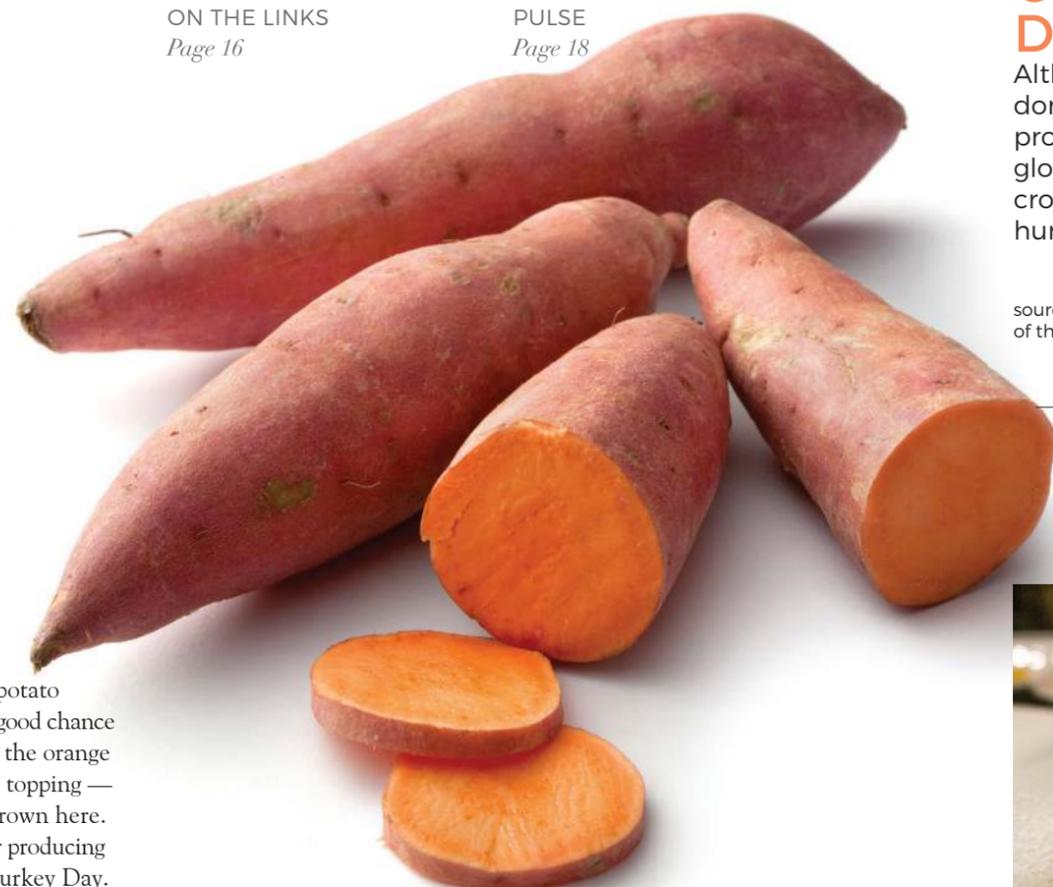
PULSE
Page 18

FIRST TAKE

HOW SWEET IT IS

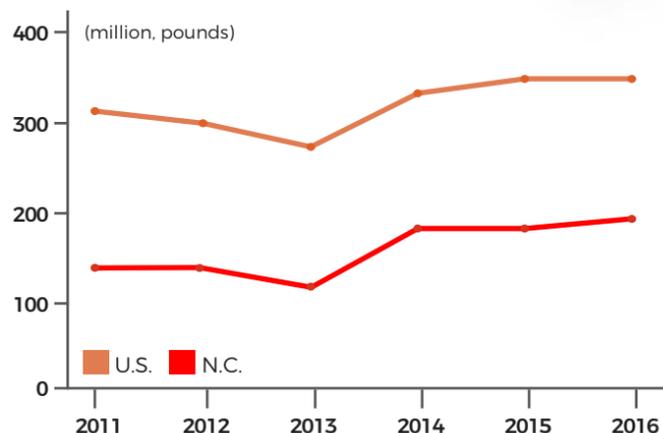
BY ALLISON WILLIAMS

When Americans dig into their sweet potato casserole this Thanksgiving, there's a good chance that a North Carolina farm supplied the orange mash underneath that marshmallow topping — more than half of the country's sweet potatoes are grown here. North Carolina farmers are tops in taters and No. 2 for producing turkeys, which means they have a starring role on Turkey Day. But the root vegetable is undergoing a renaissance, and not just at holiday time: In 2015, U.S. farmers produced more sweet potatoes than in any year since World War II.



YOU SAY POTATO

The national increase in sweet potato production reflects an increase in North Carolina.



source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

95,000 ACRES

North Carolina harvested 95,000 acres of sweet potatoes last year, **38,000 more acres than the next three top states — Mississippi, California and Louisiana — combined.**

SAMPSON COUNTY

leads N.C. sweet potato production — and state agriculture, in general — rolling out 309.7 million pounds in 2015.

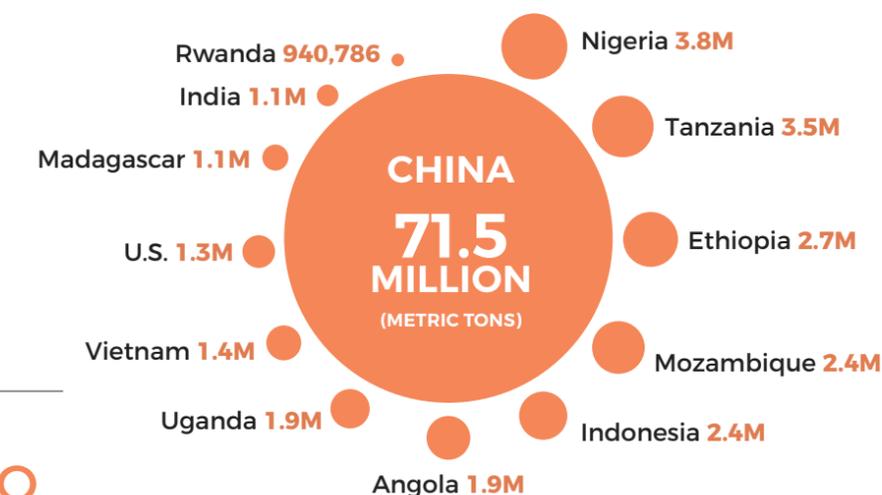
sources: USDA, N.C. Department of Agriculture

CHINA DOMINATES

Although North Carolina dominates U.S. sweet potato production, China is the clear global leader. Much of China's crop goes to animal feed, not human consumption.

source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

2014 GLOBAL SWEET POTATO PRODUCTION:



SWEET POTATO ... ICE CREAM?



Ice cream made from N.C. sweet potatoes is served at International Sweet Potato Week in Germany, where locals are cooking up new ways to eat the Southern staple.

Sweet potato fries are ubiquitous on restaurant menus these days, but chefs are finding unexpected uses for the humble tuber, from Thai curries to cinnamon buns. Southerners have been eating sweet potatoes for generations but might be surprised to be served sweet potatoes for breakfast. Where avocado toast once reigned, sweet potato toast rules today's trendy American plates — Germans are already embracing the breakfast "superfood." The adventurous are even attempting sweet potato ice cream. It's a seasonal flavor at Maple View Farm's ice cream shop in Hillsborough.

PHOTOS BY CINDY BURNHAM

GOING TO THE DOGS



Smashing pumpkins at Yamco LLC in Snow Hill serves a purpose — gourds, sweet potatoes and more are ground into puree the company sells to manufacturers.

It's not just humans who appreciate an N.C. sweet potato — pets are following their owners' tastes. Sweet potatoes, "ancient" grains, blueberries, pumpkin and spinach are rising to the top of a nearly \$30 billion market that meat-loving brands once eschewed. Pet-food, baby-food and snack manufacturers, breweries, and distilleries seek out Yamco's 450-pound drums and 2,300-pound totes of sweet potato puree. Steps from where workers grind potatoes, pumpkins and more at the Snow Hill plant, sister company Covington Spirits LLC uses the potatoes for its "gluten-free and Putin-free" vodka. ■