



# 2014 Minerals Yearbook

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## POTASH [ADVANCE RELEASE]

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# POTASH

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In 2014, domestic production decreased by 11% to 850,000 metric tons (t) potassium oxide ( $K_2O$ ) equivalent from 960,000 t  $K_2O$  equivalent in 2013<sup>1</sup>. U.S. sales of potash were 6% higher in 2014 than in 2013 and apparent consumption increased by 9%, to 5.8 million metric tons (Mt) of  $K_2O$  in 2014 from 5.3 Mt of  $K_2O$  in 2013 (table 1). In 2014, world potash production increased to 40.6 Mt from 35.6 Mt in 2013, owing mainly to higher output from Belarus, Canada, and Russia (tables 1, 5). Global consumption of all forms of potash was estimated to be 35.1 Mt of  $K_2O$  in 2014, compared with 33.4 Mt of  $K_2O$  in 2013 (Prud'homme, 2015).

Potash denotes a variety of mined and manufactured salts, all of which contain the element potassium in water-soluble form. The majority of domestic potash was produced near Carlsbad, NM, with most of the potash coming from the mineral sylvite. In agriculture, the term potash refers to potassic fertilizers, which are potassium chloride (KCl or sylvite), potassium sulfate [ $K_2SO_4$  or sulfate of potash (SOP), usually a manufactured product], and potassium-magnesium sulfate [ $K_2SO_4 \cdot 2MgSO_4$  or langbeinite or double sulfate of potash magnesia (SOPM or K-Mag)]. Muriate of potash (MOP) is an agriculturally acceptable mix of KCl (95% pure or greater) and sodium chloride (halite) for fertilizer use that includes minor amounts of other nontoxic minerals from the mined ore.

## Production

Domestic production data were developed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) from a semiannual voluntary canvass of U.S. operations. All of the seven operations canvassed for production data responded to the surveys. Potash companies in the United States produced MOP, SOP, and SOPM. Published production data of all types and grades of potash in the United States are adjusted to avoid disclosing the proprietary data of companies that produce SOP and SOPM, which together are known as sulfates.

Three companies produced potash from seven operations in three States. Most production was from southeastern New Mexico, where Intrepid Potash, Inc. (Intrepid) operated three mines and The Mosaic Company (Mosaic) operated one mine. Mosaic stopped production of MOP at the end of 2014 from its mine in New Mexico because of diminishing reserves. The company will continue to produce SOPM in New Mexico (Green Markets, 2014b).

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<sup>1</sup>The potash industry has established a common standard of measurement for defining a product's potassium content (or purity) because the potassium content of its common salts varies in terms of equivalent percentage of potassium oxide ( $K_2O$ ). A  $K_2O$  equivalent for muriate of potash is 60%; sulfate of potash, 51%; and double sulfate of potash magnesia products, 22%. All tonnages are reported in metric tons,  $K_2O$  equivalent, unless otherwise specified. All percentages are computed on rounded  $K_2O$  equivalent values.

Intrepid began full production at its HB solar-solution mine near Carlsbad, NM, in 2014, and the mine was expected to reach full production levels of 150,000 to 200,000 metric tons per year (t/yr) in 2015 (Intrepid Potash Inc., 2015, p. 31).

In Utah, Intrepid produced potash from a solution mine in Moab and from a solar evaporation facility in Wendover; Compass Minerals International, Inc. operated a solar evaporation facility in Ogden that only produced SOP.

IC Potash Corp. (ICP) (Toronto, Ontario, Canada) continued drilling and permitting activities at its Ochoa project east of Carlsbad in Lea County, NM. The company completed a feasibility study in early 2014. In April 2014, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) granted approval for ICP to begin construction and operate its new mine and mill. ICP planned to produce SOP and SOPM from a polyhalite deposit. The project was to consist of an underground mine and surface processing facilities. The company reported reserves of more than 400 Mt of  $K_2O$  and resources of more than 800 Mt of  $K_2O$ , with potential for more than 100 years of mine life. ICP expected to begin production in 2016 (IC Potash Corp., 2015, p. 29–30).

## Consumption

Apparent consumption of all forms of potash in 2014 increased by 9% over that of 2013. The principal use of potash was as an agricultural fertilizer (plant nutrient) as a source of soluble potassium, which is one of the three primary plant nutrients required for plant growth and maturation; the others are fixed nitrogen and soluble phosphorus. Potash and phosphorus are mined products, and fixed nitrogen is produced from the atmosphere using industrial processes. Modern agricultural practice uses large quantities of these primary nutrients and additional nutrients, such as boron, calcium, chlorine, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, molybdenum, sulfur, and zinc, to ensure plant health and proper maturation. The three major plant nutrients have no cost-effective substitutes. Low-nutrient-content alternative potash sources, such as animal manure and guano, bone meal, compost, glauconite, and "tankage" from slaughterhouses, are available, but the cost of transportation per metric ton of nutrient beyond relatively short distances can reduce their desirability. In addition to its use as a fertilizer, potassium chloride is used in refining secondary aluminum, producing potassium hydroxide, electroplating, oil-well drilling mud, snow and ice melting, steel heat-treating, and water softening.

Potassium hydroxide is used in industrial water treatment and in soap manufacturing, and is the precursor of potassium carbonate, several forms of potassium phosphate, and many other potassic chemicals. Potassium carbonate is used to produce animal feed supplements, cement, fire extinguishers, food products, and textiles. It is also used in brewing beer,

pharmaceutical preparations, and as a catalyst for synthetic rubber manufacturing. Generally, these nonfertilizer uses have accounted for about 15% of annual potash consumption in the United States and 8% worldwide.

## Prices

The price of standard-grade MOP produced in the United States averaged \$565 per metric ton of  $K_2O$  equivalent in the first half of 2014, \$595 per ton of  $K_2O$  in the second half, and \$580 per ton of  $K_2O$  for the entire year, compared with \$640 per ton of  $K_2O$  in 2013, according to sales data reported to the USGS (table 2). The Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, spot market price for MOP (gross weight of product), which is the benchmark price for North American potash shipments, began the year at \$332 per ton and fell to low of \$287 per ton in March and then rebounded in the fourth quarter to finish the year at \$306 per ton (CRU International, 2015).

## Foreign Trade

Total U.S. imports of all forms of potash ( $K_2O$  equivalent) increased by 7% over those of 2013. Potassium chloride accounted for 98% of the import tonnage. Canada was the leading source for imports, accounting for 86% of all types of potash. Russia was a distant second with 7% of total potash imports. Total customs import value decreased by 26% from that of 2013, owing to lower international potash prices (table 4).

The United States is not a significant exporter of potash. In 2014, exports of all forms of potash ( $K_2O$  equivalent) decreased by 61% from those of 2013, owing to a 74% decrease in potassium chloride exports (table 3).

## World Industry Structure

World production of potash increased to 40.6 Mt in 2014 from 35.6 Mt in 2013. Canada, Russia, Belarus, and China were the leading producing countries, by order of output, accounting for 76% of total production (table 5). Global potash capacity increased to 52.2 Mt in 2014 from 49.8 Mt in 2013 (Prud'homme, 2015).

In 2014, about 25 potash-mining projects were in progress and were planned to be completed by 2020, with most of the increased tonnage located in just three countries: Canada, China, and Russia. Projects were in various stages of development in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Congo (Brazzaville), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Peru, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. None of these projects, however, were expected to be completed until after 2020 (Fertilizer International, 2014b).

## World Review

**Canada.**—Canada was the leading potash producer in the world, in actual production and capacity. Annual production capacity was projected to increase incrementally to 37.6 Mt of MOP in 2018 from 29.4 Mt in 2014. Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan Inc. (PotashCorp), the leading producer in the world, completed a 2.0-Mt expansion to annual production capacity at its Allan Mine in Saskatchewan in 2014. It continued with an expansion project at its Rocanville Mine

in Saskatchewan and the construction of the new Picadilly Mine in New Brunswick. Both projects were planned to be completed in 2015. After the Picadilly Mine opens, PotashCorp planned to close the existing Penobsquis Mine because of diminishing reserves. The company projected that total annual nameplate capacity would increase to 19.1 Mt of MOP in 2019 from 14.9 Mt of MOP in 2014 (Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan Inc., 2015).

German potash producer, K+S Aktiengesellschaft, planned to commission its new Legacy solution mine in Saskatchewan in 2016. The mine was designed with an annual production capacity of 2.0 Mt of MOP, with further expansion of 0.9 Mt by 2023 (Green Markets, 2014a).

BHP Billiton Group continued development of the 10-million-metric-ton-per-year (Mt/yr) MOP Jansen project in Saskatchewan. The company planned to complete two mine shafts in 2016, but the commissioning of the mine would be contingent on market conditions after 2020 (Fertilizer International, 2014b).

**China.**—Potash was produced by about 45 companies with a total annual capacity of 6.2 Mt of  $K_2O$ . MOP was produced only in Qinghai Province and SOP was produced only in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Active expansions to facilities in both regions were expected to increase annual capacity to 6.7 Mt of  $K_2O$  by 2019 with about 75% of the increase from MOP (Fertilizer International, 2014b).

**Laos.**—Production began in Laos from two companies operating underground mines that produce MOP. Lao Jiaxi Potash Co. operated a 50,000-t/yr facility in Wanxiang and Lao Kaiyuan Mining Co. operated a 0.5-Mt/yr facility in Ganmeng. Most of the output from Laos was exported to neighboring countries (Prud'homme, 2015).

**Russia.**—In late 2014, the underground portion of OJSC Uralkali's Solikamsk 2 Mine was closed because of flooding. The company announced in early 2015 that it would build a new mine at Solikamsk 2 by 2020 to recover the ore. Uralkali continued to work on incremental increases to annual production capacity at its other mines in Berezniki and Solikamsk. It also was developing new mines at Polovodovsky and Ust Yayvinsky that were planned to be completed after 2020. The company planned to increase annual capacity to 14.5 Mt of MOP in 2020 from 11.2 Mt of MOP in 2015 (OJSC Uralkali, 2015, p. 34).

EuroChem MCC, OJSC had two mines under development in 2014. The VolgaKaliy project, which would mine potash ore from the Gremyachinskoe deposit, was scheduled to be completed in two phases, each with a production capacity of 2.3 Mt/yr of MOP. The first phase was projected to open by 2018, and the second phase was expected to be completed after 2020. The Usolskiy project, which would exploit the Verkhnekamskoe deposit, also was planned to be completed in two phases. The 2.3-Mt/yr first phase was expected to begin production of MOP in 2017. The opening of the 1.4-Mt/yr second phase was yet to be announced (Fertilizer International, 2014a).

JSC Acron Group continued development of its Talitsky Mine project through its subsidiary, Verkhnekamsk Potash Co. The mine was planned to have an initial capacity of 1.3 Mt/yr of MOP and then increase to full capacity of 2.0 Mt/yr of MOP

2 years later. Acron delayed commissioning of its mine, which was expected to reach full capacity in 2023, until after 2021 (JSC Acron Group, 2015).

## Outlook

Potash is an essential fertilizer nutrient that cannot be substituted. About 90% of world potash consumption is in fertilizer products. Growing world population and its need for food will require continued growth in potash production and consumption. Additionally, increased ethanol production from corn and other crops will require a proportional growth in fertilizer use.

According to the International Fertilizer Industry Association, world potash consumption for all uses is projected to increase to 39.5 Mt in 2019 from 35.1 Mt in 2014. Asia and South America are projected to be the regions with the largest growth (Heffer, 2015). Consumption for industrial uses is expected to grow at a slightly higher rate than for agricultural uses (Prud'homme, 2015).

Potash exploration and development is expected to remain very active during the next decade. A significant number of new mines are planned to start up before 2025 in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Congo (Brazzaville), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Significant expansions of capacity were planned in Belarus, Canada, and Russia. However, many of these projects were likely to be delayed owing to changes in demand, company financial performance, permitting procedures, prices, and other factors. The largest area expansions during the next decade are expected to take place in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and North America (Fertilizer International, 2014b).

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TABLE 1  
SALIENT POTASH STATISTICS<sup>1,2</sup>

(Thousand metric tons and thousand dollars unless otherwise specified)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
<b>United States:</b>						
<b>Production:</b> <sup>3</sup>						
Gross weight	2,200	2,300	2,100	2,200	1,800	
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	930	1,000	900	960	850	
<b>Sales by producers:</b>						
<b>Quantity:</b> <sup>3</sup>						
Gross weight	2,400	2,300	2,200	2,000	2,000	
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	1,000	990	980	880	930	
Value <sup>3,4</sup>	660,000	740,000	750,000	630,000	680,000	
<b>Average value:</b> <sup>5</sup>						
Gross weight	dollars per metric ton	275	320	340	315	345
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	do.	630	745	770	715	740
<b>Exports:</b>						
Gross weight	657 <sup>r</sup>	576 <sup>r</sup>	566 <sup>r</sup>	611 <sup>r</sup>	292	
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	264 <sup>r</sup>	178 <sup>r</sup>	202 <sup>r</sup>	257 <sup>r</sup>	100	
<b>Imports for consumption:</b> <sup>6,7</sup>						
<b>Quantity:</b>						
Gross weight	7,840	8,210	7,010	7,660	8,200	
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	4,760	4,980	4,240	4,650	4,970	
Value, customs	2,620,000	3,450,000	2,220,000	2,640,000	1,960,000	
<b>Consumption, apparent:</b> <sup>3,8</sup>						
Gross weight	9,600 <sup>r</sup>	9,900 <sup>r</sup>	8,700 <sup>r</sup>	9,100 <sup>r</sup>	9,900	
K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	5,500 <sup>r</sup>	5,800 <sup>r</sup>	5,000 <sup>r</sup>	5,300 <sup>r</sup>	5,800	
World, production, marketable K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent	33,900 <sup>r</sup>	35,700 <sup>r</sup>	32,700 <sup>r</sup>	35,600 <sup>r</sup>	40,600	

<sup>r</sup>Revised. do. Ditto.

<sup>1</sup>Includes muriate of potash, sulfate of potash, potassium magnesium sulfate, and some parent salts. Excludes other chemical compounds that contain potassium.

<sup>2</sup>Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup>Data are rounded to no more than two significant digits.

<sup>4</sup>Free on board mine.

<sup>5</sup>Rounded to the nearest \$5 to avoid disclosing proprietary data.

<sup>6</sup>Excludes potassium chemicals and mixed fertilizers.

<sup>7</sup>Includes nitrate of potash.

<sup>8</sup>Calculated from sales plus imports minus exports.

TABLE 2  
PRICES OF U.S. POTASH, BY TYPE AND GRADE<sup>1,2</sup>

(Dollars per metric ton of K<sub>2</sub>O equivalent)

Type and grade	2013			2014		
	January– June	July– December	Yearly average	January– June	July– December	Yearly average
<b>Muriate, 60% K<sub>2</sub>O minimum:</b>						
Standard	660	615	640	565	595	580
Granular	610	530	570	555	555	555

<sup>1</sup>Average prices, free on board mine, based on sales.

<sup>2</sup>Data rounded to nearest \$5.

TABLE 3  
U.S. EXPORTS OF POTASH, BY TYPE<sup>1</sup>

	Approximate average K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent content (percentage)	Quantity (metric tons)		Principal destinations, by gross weight
		Gross weight	K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent <sup>e</sup>	
2013:				
Potassium chloride	61	284,000 <sup>r</sup>	173,000 <sup>r</sup>	Brazil, 50%; Mexico, 15%; Chile, 10%.
Potassium sulfate <sup>2</sup>	25	313,000 <sup>r</sup>	77,800 <sup>r</sup>	Colombia, 16%; Mexico, 14%; Japan, 12%.
Potassium nitrate	45	13,900	6,240	Mexico, 39%; Netherlands, 33%; Chile, 9%.
Total	XX	611,000 <sup>r</sup>	257,000 <sup>r</sup>	Canada, 15%; Mexico, 13%; Chile, 11%.
2014:				
Potassium chloride	61	73,400	44,800	Brazil, 35%; Mexico, 32%; Chile, 13%.
Potassium sulfate <sup>2</sup>	24	210,000	51,400	Colombia, 20%; Canada, 13%; Peru, 13%.
Potassium nitrate	45	8,690	3,910	Mexico, 73%; Canada, 13%; Republic of Korea, 3%.
Total	XX	292,000	100,000	Mexico, 19%; Colombia, 15; Canada, 13%.

<sup>e</sup>Estimated. <sup>r</sup>Revised. XX Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup>Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

<sup>2</sup>Includes potassium magnesium sulfate.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; data adjusted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

TABLE 4  
U.S. IMPORTS FOR CONSUMPTION OF POTASH, BY TYPE<sup>1</sup>

	Approximate average K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent content (percentage)	Quantity (metric tons)		Value (thousands)		Principal sources, by gross weight
		Gross weight	K <sub>2</sub> O equivalent <sup>e</sup>	Customs	C.i.f. <sup>2</sup>	
2013:						
Potassium chloride	61	7,450,000	4,550,000	\$2,550,000	\$2,590,000	Canada, 87%; Russia, 8%; Israel, 1%.
Potassium sulfate	51	126,000	64,200	41,900	42,600	Germany, 60%; Canada, 24%; Chile, 10%.
Potassium nitrate	45	78,600	35,400	45,100	45,800	Chile, 87%; Germany, 9%; Israel, 1%.
Potassium sodium nitrate mixture	14	1,100	154	264	268	Canada, 55%; Israel, 27%; Chile, 17%.
Total	XX	7,660,000	4,650,000	2,640,000	2,680,000	Canada, 87%; Russia, 7%; Chile, 2%.
2014:						
Potassium chloride	61	7,990,000	4,870,000	1,890,000	2,240,000	Canada, 87%; Russia, 7%; Israel, 1%.
Potassium sulfate	51	104,000	53,000	31,100	36,800	Germany, 60%; Canada, 35%; Netherlands, 2%.
Potassium nitrate	45	108,000	48,700	33,500	39,600	Chile, 84%; Germany, 13%; India, 1%.
Potassium sodium nitrate mixture	14	1,850	259	196	231	Canada, 78%; Israel, 16%; Chile, 3%.
Total	XX	8,200,000	4,970,000	1,960,000	2,310,000	Canada, 86%; Russia, 7%; Israel, 4%.

<sup>e</sup>Estimated. XX Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup>Data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

<sup>2</sup>Cost, insurance, and freight.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; data adjusted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

TABLE 5  
MARKETABLE POTASH: WORLD PRODUCTION, BY COUNTRY<sup>1,2</sup>

(Thousand metric tons of K<sub>2</sub>O equivalent)

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Belarus	5,223	5,306	4,840	4,243	6,286
Brazil	418 <sup>r</sup>	395 <sup>r</sup>	347 <sup>r</sup>	311 <sup>r</sup>	311
Canada	9,700 <sup>r</sup>	10,686	8,976	10,196 <sup>r</sup>	10,818
Chile	929 <sup>r</sup>	810 <sup>r</sup>	965 <sup>r</sup>	1,122 <sup>r</sup>	1,073 <sup>e</sup>
China <sup>e</sup>	3,600	3,800	3,770 <sup>r</sup>	5,300	6,110
Germany	3,024	3,215	3,149	3,075 <sup>r</sup>	3,127 <sup>e</sup>
Israel	1,650 <sup>r</sup>	1,610 <sup>r</sup>	1,830 <sup>r</sup>	1,824 <sup>r</sup>	1,772
Jordan	1,166 <sup>r</sup>	1,355 <sup>r</sup>	1,094 <sup>r</sup>	1,046 <sup>r</sup>	1,255
Laos	NA <sup>r</sup>	NA <sup>r</sup>	43	86 <sup>r</sup>	211 <sup>e</sup>
Russia	6,283	6,498	5,563 <sup>r</sup>	6,100	7,439
Spain <sup>e</sup>	514 <sup>r</sup>	521 <sup>r</sup>	632 <sup>r</sup>	711 <sup>r</sup>	711
United Kingdom	427	470	549 <sup>r</sup>	610	610 <sup>e</sup>
United States <sup>3</sup>	930	1,019	1,000	960	850
Total	33,900 <sup>r</sup>	35,700 <sup>r</sup>	32,700 <sup>r</sup>	35,600 <sup>r</sup>	40,600

<sup>e</sup>Estimated. <sup>r</sup>Revised. NA Not Available.

<sup>1</sup>World total, U.S. data, and estimated data are rounded to no more than three significant digits; may not add to totals shown.

<sup>2</sup>Includes data available through March 1, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Rounded to no more two significant digits.