
The potatoes grown on Neumiller Farms are for processing, salads and for making potato chips. Neumiller Farms has its roots in Wisconsin. Was Fred Neumiller your father, and how did he get his start and why in potato and vegetable growing? Our headquarters is in Savanna, Illinois. It was founded by my father, Fred Neumiller. He farmed, trucked and brokered potatoes with his family.

Fred Neumiller began his family business in Wisconsin. In 1974, the Neumiller family expanded their operation to Hanover, Illinois, located in northwest Illinois. Five years later, land was purchased in Savanna, Illinois, located along the Mississippi River.
I graduated from The University of Wisconsin-Stout in 1971, where I met my wife, Wallene. My wife and I have three daughters, Sarah, Jenny and Katie, and we’re blessed with three good sons-in-law and four grandchildren.

You have expanded several times. How many acres do you farm? Of potatoes? Other vegetables? Illinois only has pockets of good potato ground similar to Central Wisconsin. Because of this, we had to develop our farm in different locations. We grow around 3,000 acres of potatoes every year.

We have expanded because of our customer needs. We are always looking to improve our farm with good land, better rotation, updating our equipment and attracting employees who can contribute.

We like to have a three-year rotation of crops, so we also grow snap beans, field and sweet corn, soybeans and occasionally other crops that our customers ask us to grow.

How many people do you employ full-time and seasonally? We employ around 45 people full-time and a few more seasonally.

How was the 2016 growing season? Your yield and quality? Our 2016 growing season was a good one with most of our yields exceeding our goals.

Do you take pride in the fact that the operation remains in the family, and if so, why? Though our farm is run as a business, it is nice that our family can work together. My wife, Wallene; daughter, Katie; brother, Ron; sister, Carrie; son-in-law, Matt; and nephew, Scott, are the family members who work for the farm.

They all have their specific areas to focus on for the good of the company. Our trucking area has worked well for our business. We can respond quickly to our customers’ needs.

I understand you grow for the processing, chip and salad market segments. Can you give me more details? Where do most of your potatoes and vegetables go? The customer base we supply potatoes to is quite diversified. Our potatoes are used for chips, French fries, mashing, salads, canning and soups.

We also grow some small potatoes and some fresh market varieties.

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Above: Using a Western Star with EZ-Tarp, a Challenger tractor and Spudnik harvester, these potato plants are harvested while still green on Neumiller Farms and then shipped to a canning factory. Soybeans are planted on the field after the potato harvest.

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Our farm is a long-term, full service operation. We use this philosophy in relations with our customers, employees, suppliers and friends with whom we have been able to grow our business for over 50 years.

**How do you remain competitive in the business?** Trying to stay competitive is an ongoing issue. We work with our suppliers to make the most of our inputs, and we always keep communications open with our customers and their changing needs. The key is to respond quickly to the changes from customers in quantity, quality and scheduling. If they are happy, we’re happy. As stated before, our goal is for long-term customer and supplier relationships.

**Has your farming operation advanced technologically and how?** To remain a potato grower in today’s markets, you need to embrace technology and make long-term investments for the success of the business.

**Are the challenges of being a grower**
the same today as they were, and how have they changed or remained the same? In all areas of our farming operation (seed, irrigation, chemicals, fertilizer, the working of the ground, trucking and our office), to remain competitive, we have to look for what is most effective and efficient yet still stay environmentally friendly.

That issue has moved more into the forefront than when we first started farming. We are also looking at a lot more dollars. You don’t have the option of making mistakes, it’s just too costly. Yet, as in the past, it comes down to doing a good job for your customer.

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Right: "I liked the idea that potato chips were once thought of as a health food," relates Tom Neumiller, posing in front of his collection of vintage potato chip tins. "You could get your vitamins, and they were considered a diet food. My dad, Fred, also supplied many of these customers on the tins. Maybe at one time, the tins had our chips in them."
You’ve been a grower member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, and have supported the association over the years. Why, and how or why is that important to you? The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association is a great organization. We have always looked to it for support and up-to-date information. Every year we send a group to their meetings and they always come back with heads full of new ideas that we can incorporate into our farm. We find not only the growers association helpful, but also the associate members. Throughout the years, they have been a source of info and friendship.

Even though we are across the state line, we feel we are all a part of a unique niche of agriculture. We all have the same questions, issues and concerns that the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association helps us with.

What does 2017 and beyond promise for Neumiller Farms? In this coming 2017 growing season, we are faced with the same challenges as in the past. We aren’t afraid of the future, we look forward to it. We are staying on course to our commitments and customers. We are fortunate in partnering with Paul Sproule in our Bath operation and having Dave Ames as our manager down there. They are exceptional men who we are proud to not only work with, but call our friends.

Although it is a great feeling to have supplied some of our customers for over 50 years, it is even a better feeling that a lot of our employees have been with us for 40 of those years. No matter how well we manage and make plans for our sustainability, it really comes down to our employees and how well they perform.

We believe that if Neumiller Farms succeeds, then our employees succeed. It’s a win-win situation. We are now seeing the younger family members of our employees seeking to work with us and we are bringing them onto our team and looking forward to utilizing their talents.

Above: The crew makes headway during harvest at Neumiller Farms.

Left: Shown here in July 2016, as part of the Neumiller Farms trucking end of the business, the trucks are all loaded with potatoes and ready to roll.