

POTATO FLAKE & FLOUR PLANT OPERATING IN CENTRAL WISCONSIN

Top Tier Ingredients facility built by Pavelski family to meet growing customer needs.

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, *Badger Common'Tater*

With knowledge and experience in the potato business dating back five generations, the Pavelski family of Heartland Farms, in Hancock, Wisconsin, is using that experience to improve its operations.

Top Tier Ingredients, LLC is a potato flake and flour manufacturing facility centrally located in Hancock, and integrates the newest sustainability and technology practices, as well as cutting-edge equipment.

Built to provide another market opportunity here in Wisconsin for Heartland Farms, Inc. and other growers, the potato flake and flour plant gives Heartland—a key supplier—the ability to provide an integrated supply chain for its customers.

“Many customers we work with today

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TOP TIER INGREDIENTS, LLC

on the raw potato side also utilize potato flake,” says Alicia Pavelski, administrative coordinator, and co-owner of Heartland Farms.

“By taking a holistic approach to the supply chain, and sustainability, we can deliver the highest quality potato products, whether raw potatoes or flake, to our customers while also increasing our regenerative ag focus and reducing waste.”

The facility can process potatoes that are slightly bruised or damaged.

An integral step in producing flake involves steam peeling. By doing this, any defect is removed, and it makes a high-quality flake.

This helps ensure the right potato goes to the right place and enhances the overall quality of the supply chain. According to the Pavelskis, there is a large and growing market

Above: Top Tier Ingredients in Hancock, Wisconsin, is the only food-grade potato flake and flour facility in the state of Wisconsin and the Midwest.



for potato flake and flour, particularly in the Midwest.

“We currently work with food manufacturers that utilize our flake and flour as ingredients to help make the products that ultimately get delivered to the consumer,” says Ben Creamer, sales and marketing leader at Top Tier Ingredients.



GROWTH IN RETAIL SECTOR

“We also see further growth for us in the retail sector,” he adds, “given our current discussions with many different retailers.”

Top Tier Ingredients is the only food-grade potato flake and flour facility in the state of Wisconsin and the Midwest.

Left: Potato flake can be used for mashed potatoes, potato salads, soups, and stews, and is found in various breads and rolls.

Right: Jeremie Pavelski checks the potato flake optical sorter.

“This is a significant advantage for us,” Ben says, “as it reduces shipping costs for our customers along with reducing our carbon footprint.”

continued on pg. 20

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continued from pg. 19

Additionally, all our raw products are sourced locally, which further reduces the environmental impact.”

Most of the equipment for the plant was purchased from Idaho Steel Products, a leading manufacturer in the potato flake space. Top Tier Ingredients also utilized J.H. Findorff to build the building and contracted with other local suppliers.

The new facility has already won a couple awards, and Heartland Farms utilized its own in-house automation expertise to enhance the facility even more.

“Building a manufacturing plant was a steep learning curve, but the team got up to speed quickly and received praise on the quality of our products after a couple initial bumps,” relates Jeremie Pavelski, president and co-owner of Heartland Farms.

“We conducted extensive research and testing,” Jeremie adds, “and



Above: General Manager Travis McIntee and Sales & Marketing Leader Ben Creamer are shown in the Top Tier Ingredients potato flake and flour plant.

we have a wonderful team in place. We always continue to analyze our operations and remain laser focused on our customer needs.”

GRINDING THE FLOUR

Potato flour is made by grinding the potato flake into flour. Potatoes are initially washed, sorted, and put through a steam peeler. The

potatoes are then scrubbed, cut, and sometimes blanched and cooled, depending on the product, then cooked, and put through a ricer.

After the ricer, the ingredients make their way to a large drum and come out as long sheets of essentially potato paper. There are further milling, screening, and detection steps to ensure the safety of the product, and the finished potato flour is then sent to customers.

One of the reasons Top Tier ingredients sees continued demand is that potato flour is a good alternative to wheat flour or corn starch. Potato flour is gluten free and high in fiber, carbohydrates, potassium, and vitamins B and C. It is also low in fat, so there’s a lot to like about it!

“One important point regarding our facility is that we can produce an all-natural product with no additives and low sugar,” Ben says. “To my knowledge, many potato flour facilities can’t do this across the country. All our flake and flour are also Kosher.”

There are a lot of everyday potato flour uses that probably wouldn’t come to mind for many people, including as an ingredient in snack products, soups, and sauces. Potato flour is also used to thicken the outside layer of French fries, resulting in those crunchy fries everyone loves.

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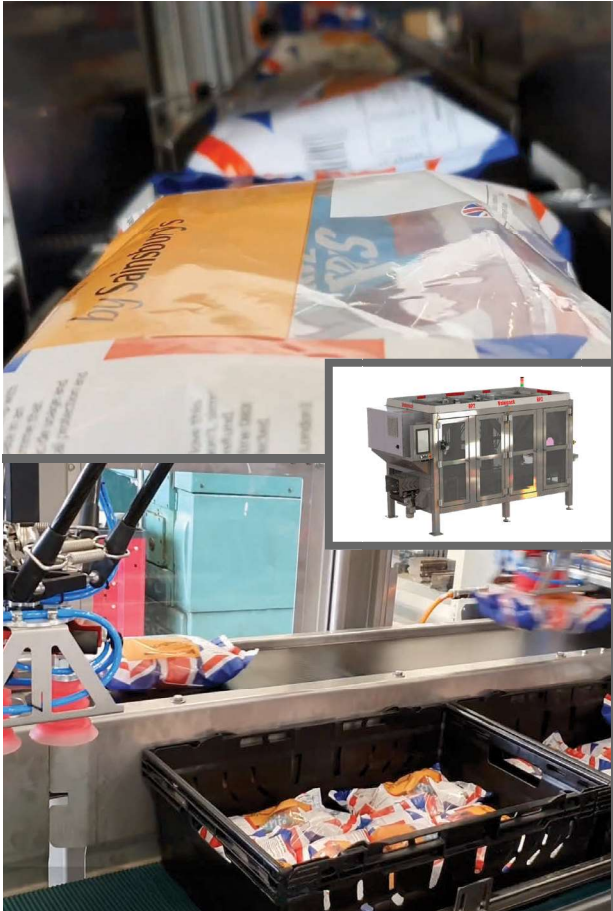
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Above: Just one step in the potato flake and flour manufacturing process involves product going through rollers of the drying drum.



Above: Once through the exit side of the drum shown here, the product is essentially potato paper.



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continued from pg. 21

Potato flake can be used for mashed potatoes, potato salads, soups, and stews, and is found in various breads and rolls. Potato flake and flour are also utilized to make many types of chips and other snack foods. The list goes on from there.

PILLAR OF THE BUSINESS

"Sustainability is an important pillar of our business and of our customers

as well," Alicia notes. "Every part of the potato will be utilized on our end to ensure little to no waste."

"For example, our potatoes are washed and any dirt that comes off the potatoes can be redistributed to the field that we later harvest," she says. "The skins from the potatoes can also be redistributed and provide further nutrients to our soils or for

animal feed."

"Because we can utilize potatoes that may not look visually appealing to the consumer, but other than that, they are still a great potato," she relates, "it opens up opportunities for the grower community and reduces waste."

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Above: Potatoes are ready for processing at the Top Tier Ingredients flake and flour facility.



Transportation of finished product to packaging or loading is through a Cablevey system.



Potato flour is used as an ingredient in snack products, soups, and sauces, and to thicken the outside layer of French fries, resulting in those crunchy fries everyone loves.

“We firmly believe that we have the most technology-driven potato flake and flour facility in the world.”

– Jeremie Pavelski,
Top Tier Ingredients, LLC



Potato flour (background) is made by grinding the potato flake (foreground) into flour.

trains its team in food safety, food quality control and in equipment operation on a day-to-day basis.

“We firmly believe that we have the most technology-driven potato flake and flour facility in the world,” Jeremie states. “All that is great, but you need people to understand the technology and use the data to ultimately deliver the best customer experience possible. That’s what drives us every day.”

As Top Tier Ingredients builds its

customer base, Jeremie says the facility has the capability to double its current capacity. The manufacturer is also exploring further packaging capabilities to meet customer specifications.

“I would add that we have a passion for the potato industry,” Jeremie stresses. “We are an approachable business where culture means a lot to us, and we have a great team that works hard every day to deliver a great product. Plain and simple, we are excited for what lies ahead for

Top Tier Ingredients.”

Top Tier Ingredients runs 24 hours a day, and it takes a lot of great people to make that happen.

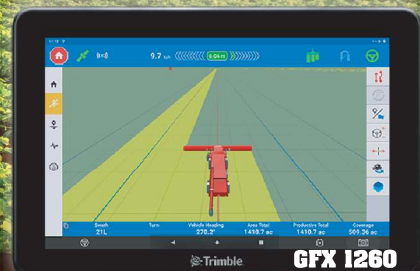
Next time you are at the grocery store, and you see potato flour or flake in the ingredients, there is a good chance it might have come from the facility right here in Hancock, Wisconsin. **BCT**



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