



## “Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Potatoes” Still Trending

Demand for locally grown and sourced produce is on the rise, and growers accommodate

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

It's not surprising that Wisconsin potato and vegetable growers are ready and willing to accommodate customers demanding fresh, locally grown produce.

The “buy local” movement has staying power, and retailers, chefs and farmers are taking note.

“We work with sales organizations and grocery stores who are looking to push the ‘buy local’ idea,” says Rod Gumz of Gumz Muck Farms in Endeavor, Wisconsin. “We also try to make sure to use product packaging that supports this.”

16 BC'T December

Gumz says his farm is located centrally in the state and nation, which allows the potato and vegetable grower a large area to be considered local.

Christine Lindner, marketing manager for Alsum Farms & Produce in Friesland, says, “We define local as anything grown in Wisconsin that can be marketed within Wisconsin and Midwestern neighboring states as local produce.”

“Wisconsin potatoes are marketed heavily in the Midwest and east of the Mississippi River,” she adds. “Our location offers a logistical advantage,

**Above:** Trig's grocery store in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, is proud of its award-winning displays such as these “Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin” and “Healthy Grown” bins of potatoes. “Today's consumers want to know where their produce is grown and support our local farmers more than ever before,” says Don Theisen, store director.

allowing for quick delivery and response time to orders. This results in fresher product for consumers.”

Like Gumz, she sees value in farmer-focused packaging that connects the consumer to the grower, such as a smiling picture of company president, Larry Alsum, emblazoned on potato bags.

“Additionally, starting in 2016, we added the words ‘Wisconsin Grown’ on the front of our russet, red and gold potato packaging, along with the ‘Something Special from Wisconsin’ logo,” Lindner states.



**Above:** The Healthy Grown label is visible on bags of Gumz Muck Farms onions stored in cardboard bins. *Photo courtesy of Cassie Krebs, Gumz Muck Farms*

**Left:** A display of Alsum Farms & Produce potatoes was set up for a tour that was part of the 2019 National Potato Council Summer Meeting.

“Today’s consumers want to know where their produce is grown and support our local farmers more than ever before,” says Don Theisen, store director for Trig’s in Rhinelander.

### LOVE IT LOCAL

“We have started our own campaign, ‘Love it Local,’ to help draw attention to what we are doing to support ‘Wisconsin Grown.’ We strongly

encourage farmers to share their stories and photos with the retailer,” Theisen stresses. “This really helps

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# Seed Potatoes

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## **“Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Potatoes” Still Trending . . .**

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**“Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin” is a popular message at Trig’s grocery store in Rhinelander.**



**An image of potatoes in the hands of Rod Gumz was part of a photo shoot coordinated with a retailer. “We work with grocery stores looking to push the ‘buy local’ idea,” Gumz says.**

connect the farmer to the consumer.” Lindner says it’s been a benefit for Alsum Farms & Produce to engage and create a farm-to-fork connection

through television, radio, digital and social media marketing campaigns, in-store samplings and other promotions.

Theisen points out that locally grown products are taking up more retail space in stores and that he loves to feature locally sourced products and farmers’ stories in store advertisements.

“Yes, we are seeing a trend toward retailers highlighting locally grown produce in ads, and chefs sourcing local ingredients and identifying them in their menus,” Lindner affirms.

“Create demand that customers can’t get anywhere else,” Theisen recommends. “Work together to educate the consumer on why local is better and what you are doing in Wisconsin that is better than surrounding areas, such as with your Healthy Grown program.”

Gumz points out that farmers markets are becoming more popular. “One can find a market to go to most days of the week and on weekends,” he says. “Restaurants in larger areas



**A bag of “Wisconsin Grown” russet potatoes comes off the line at Alsum Farms & Produce in Friesland.**

have started featuring local items, such as Café Hollander or Graze restaurant in Madison.”

“There are logistics issues on the smaller scale, though,” he explains. “We try to ship as locally as possible, but we do not provide shipping. A small fraction of our sales is direct to customers who pick up at the farm, and some of these sales do end up at farmers markets and local restaurants.”

So, while Gumz Muck Farms finds value in creating a local presence and sharing its agricultural story, the operation can’t logistically cater to all the smaller, local markets.

“Someday we may get into the shipping business, but at this point, our focus is on growing a quality crop,” Gumz says.

**SHIPPING CHALLENGES**

Lindner concurs, explaining, “Serving the local market has its challenges, including freight and coordination to fill a truck with produce as well as the equipment needed to unload it. It takes a level of efficiency to ship produce regionally.”

“Fewer miles to market means fresher produce, however,” Lindner reminds.

“Carbon footprint does seem to be a part of the reason why people want to go local,” Gumz agrees. “However, there are so many of these buzz words floating around lately that true meanings can be confusing to the general public.”

“It’s our job as agricultural stewards to keep educating with our story,” he surmises.

Locally grown products are a \$20 billion industry according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“With today’s shoppers seeking more information about how their food is grown and produced,” Linder says, “retail and foodservice partners

are vital in bringing consumers and farmers together to share knowledge and build trust and confidence in our food supply, all while putting a face to the farmer.”

“As shoppers look to provide healthy choices for their families,” she adds, “locally grown products provide that value.”

Gumz says his farm will continue to market its produce as locally as possible.

“We believe we have a great story to tell about our farm and are proud of our team that produces the food,” he says. “It is our hope that consumers will find value and view our story in a positive light.” **BCT**



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