2019 Wisconsin Potato Crop Report

It was another challenging year, but overall, potatoes were harvested without heavy losses

In 2019, Wisconsin potato growers harvested approximately 63,000 acres. The average yield on acres harvested in Wisconsin is estimated to be 410 cwt. (hundredweight)/acre, an increase of 10 cwt./acre compared to 2018.

That puts Wisconsin's potato production at 25,830,000, an increase of 2,830,000 cwt., or 12.3 percent compared to 2018 (which was an extremely low production year with over 5,000 acres of unharvested potatoes due to heavy frost losses).

This estimation is a result of conversations with growers and is considerably lower than the estimate made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (29 million cwt.), but very close to the estimate made by the North American Potato Market News (25.7 million cwt.).

Total planted acres are similar to the 2018 crop, which were reported to be approximately 64,000 acres.

Due to cold, rainy weather, most Wisconsin potato growers got a late start on planting, with the crop going into the ground 10 days to two weeks later than normal.

WET CONDITIONS

Many growers reported that they were unable to harvest all their acreage due to very wet conditions in low spots in fields, but overall, the unharvested acreage is just 1-2 percent.

A deep freeze did not occur in October this year, which prevented a major disaster, as thousands of acres were still in the ground throughout much of the month.

Some storage potatoes are at risk due to less than ideal harvest conditions, particularly during warm, wet weather in September. On the positive side, several growers reported that the potatoes they were able to harvest showed better quality than what was expected.

Growers in the Antigo seed potato production area were forced to wait several weeks for fields to dry out before harvesting, but still reported average yields and good quality on that portion of Wisconsin's crop.

Above: Many Wisconsin potato growers reported that they were unable to harvest all their acreage, in 2019, due to very wet conditions in low spots in fields, but overall, the unharvested acreage is just 1-2 percent.

GENERAL REPORT

The 2019 Wisconsin potato growing season was challenging once again. The planting season was cold and wet, which put the crop about two weeks behind schedule from the get-go.

In May and June, Wisconsin had several weeks of cloudy, overcast skies, which resulted in a low photosynthesis rate and low evapotranspiration that slowed down tuber initiation and early stage tuber bulking.

Challenging weather conditions continued throughout the growing season with below average temperatures in June and July. Very warm overnight temperatures in August made it difficult for the crop to bulk up.

This was followed by excessive heat and frequent rainfall in September, delaying harvest.

Overall for 2019, Wisconsin potato growers report average to below average yields with a smaller than normal size profile, very good quality with good specific gravity readings and very little hollow heart.

Some growing areas got record rainfall in September, making harvest difficult at best. Many growers were forced to dig around low spots in fields.

RACE AGAINST THE CLOCK

Several heavy rain events during the harvest season and the short window of time remaining before the threat of frost forced some growers to work around the clock to get potatoes out of the ground when conditions were favorable.

continued on pg. 22

2019 Wisconsin Potato Crop Report . . .

continued from pg. 21

Fortunately, harvest conditions improved in October and temperatures remained above freezing, allowing the vast majority of the Wisconsin potato crop to be harvested without heavy losses.

A killing frost did not occur in October this year.

Growers report average to below average yields with a smaller than normal size profile, very good quality with good specific gravity readings and very little hollow heart.

There are some concerns with how the crop will hold up in storage due to the warm, wet weather in September.

There were no serious issues with late blight in 2019. Late blight was first confirmed in Wood County in mid-July. It was later found on potatoes in six additional counties but was limited to isolated fields.

All were of the US-23 genotype, which allowed it to be managed well by growers to prevent any outbreaks.

AREA REPORTS

Northwest Wisconsin – Potatoes were planted in this region in the normal timeframe, but cold weather followed, which delayed emergence.

Once the potatoes emerged, they did well. The growing season was manageable. Harvest was mostly completed before rains came, which delayed the final 15-20 percent of the harvest.

Overall, the harvest went well with virtually no unharvested acreage.

Yields were reported to be good with averages of approximately 550 cwt./acre. One grower reported yields to be down about 5 percent compared to last year due to a smaller size profile.

There were no disease or storage concerns in this area. Quality is above average and better than last year with fewer instances of hollow heart.

Antigo, Rhinelander, Eagle River – Despite a later than normal planting season with many farms planting well into June, several growers said this year's crop turned out to be one of the best ever.

Yields were reported to be in the 350-400 cwt./acre range, with russets on the high end and whites and reds lower. The average yield across the board was 375.

The Antigo area reported average to slightly below-average yields with very good quality. Harvest lingered into late October with many growers finishing one to two weeks later than usual.

Fortunately, the Antigo area had

close to ideal harvest conditions the week of October 7-11, which allowed growers to get a lot of work done.

Average yields on russets were reported to 400-425 cwt./acre; round whites were 350 cwt./acre; and reds 375-400 cwt./acre.

Certified seed potato acreage declined by 27 acres (a decrease of .3 percent) to a total of 9,242. The certified seed acres for major chip varieties increased by 5.2 percent (Lamoka acres were up 13.3 percent), while the russet seed area dropped by 1.2 percent.

The red seed area took a bigger drop, down 10.1 percent from last year to 979 acres.

Central Wisconsin/Stevens Point/ Plover – In the Stevens Point and Plover area, most growers reported very good quality with average yields and a slightly smaller size profile.

A late July storm with very high straight-line winds damaged hundreds of acres in the Plover area, including a number of potato and vegetable fields.

Fields that looked outstanding before the storm were defoliated and did not bulk up, resulting in a lot of B-size potatoes.

In some cases, such as with snap bean and pea fields, the crop was a total loss. Potatoes that were harvested early had below average yields (down 5-15 percent) as the crop had not yet bulked up.

Yields were down about 5-10 percent overall. Later harvested potatoes were reported to be excellent in both size and quality, with some fields yielding 575-600 cwt./acre. One grower described his Russet Burbanks as “huge.”

Average yields were reported to be between 400 and 450 cwt./acre for russets; 350 cwt./acre for reds and yellows; and 325 cwt./acre for round white potatoes.

continued on pg. 24

2019 Wisconsin Potato Crop Report . . .

continued from pg. 23

Several growers said they had a beautiful crop of yellow potatoes with high yields, although they did have a high percentage of small tubers.

Harvest in this region was about two to three weeks longer than normal, with some growers working to get their crop out of the ground throughout the month of October, but very little acreage was left unharvested.

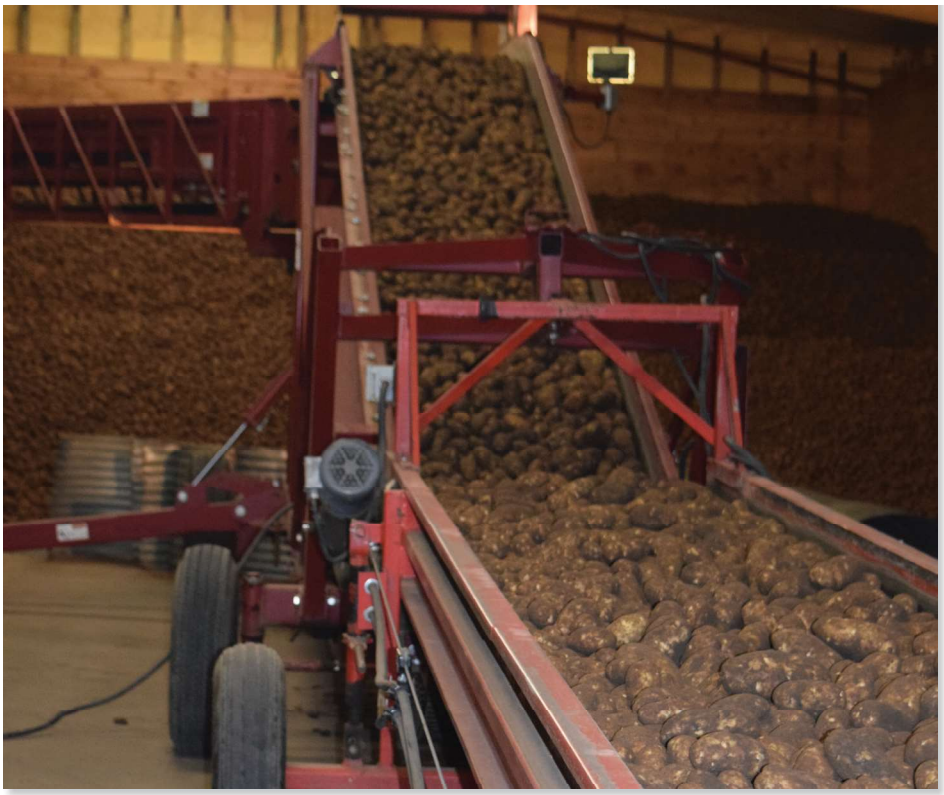
Some growers reported problems with enlarged lenticels. At this time, there are some storage concerns, but actual losses are yet to be determined.

Central Wisconsin/Hancock – Growers battled the weather throughout the growing and harvest seasons. A late July storm knocked out power for several days that delayed irrigation on some fields.

Growers reported that they dug some fields when it was too hot, others when it was too cold and some when it was too wet. Despite these issues, only about 1 percent of the acreage was left unharvested.

There are some concerns with how the crop will store due to the excessively wet growing conditions.

Yields on chip stock potatoes were reported to be 475 cwt./acre with average quality. Russet yields were reported to be 450-475 cwt./acre, which is slightly below average (5-7 percent off) due to an increase in the number of B-size potatoes.



There are some concerns with how the 2019 Wisconsin potato crop will hold up in storage due to the warm, wet weather in September.

Central Wisconsin/Plainfield/ Bancroft/Nekoosa – Growers were still harvesting in late October but were able to harvest their entire crop minus the low spots in fields.

One grower reported leaving approximately 200 acres in the ground.

Overall yields are down about 10 percent across the board with a smaller-than-normal size profile. The processing potato crop was reported to have average yields of 460-480 cwt./acre.

One grower reported that Ranger Russets had very low yields of about 300 cwt./acre, while Russet Burbank yields were closer to 500 cwt./acre.

Overall, yields in this area were reported to be in the 420-440 cwt./ acre range. Growers reported higher than normal bruising due to harvesting in colder than ideal temperatures.

Central Wisconsin - Coloma/Grand Marsh – This region also had a very difficult growing season, but it was described as "better than last year."

Potato planting was about two weeks later than usual, and several thousand

acres of potatoes were harvested two to three weeks later than normal.

Fortunately, there was not a hard frost that would have caused a major disaster. Very few acres were left unharvested.

Overall, yields were reported to be average at 450-475 cwt./acre, and quality is good.

There could be some problems in storage as some potatoes were harvested in warmer and wetter than ideal conditions, while others had some green ends nipped by field frost.

Russet Burbank yields were reported to be in the 460-470 cwt./acre range, with some fields hitting 500 cwt./acre, but with more culls than usual.

Yields on Atlantics were over 400 cwt./acre, which is above average. In Grand Marsh, Silverton yields were reported to be closer to 410 cwt./acre.

Yields on little potatoes were quite good across the board, averaging 300 cwt./acre on three different varieties, which is higher than any previous year.

Southern Wisconsin - Spring Green/ Endeavor – The growing season got off to a slow start in this area, with a later than usual planting season followed by a cool and wet spring.

There were good growing conditions throughout the summer months, but harvest was delayed by about 10 days.

Yields are reported to be about the same as last year, but below the five-year average for this region.

In the Arena/Spring Green area, average overall yields are 420 cwt./acre; Russet Norkotah yields were closer to 450 cwt./acre. Yields on yellows ranged from 415 to 550, with an average of 455 cwt./acre.

There is also a smaller size profile on this year's crop. Wet conditions prevented harvest of about 150 acres in this area.

There are some concerns about the potatoes in storage due to water damage and harvesting in warmer than ideal conditions in September.

On the positive side, there is less hollow heart than usual this year, and the red crop is reported to be in excellent condition with above average yields. BC'T

Crop Usage Breakdown

Seed Potatoes	
3,304,600 cwt.	13%
Chip Potatoes	
6,946,300 cwt.	26.9%
Frozen/Fry	
5,919,500 cwt.	22.9%
Fresh Potatoes	
9,659,600 cwt.	38%
Total	
25,830,000 cwt.	100%