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JANUARY 14-15, 2020

“ALL BETS WERE ON” AT POTATO EXPO 2020

Las Vegas welcomed the most exhibitors and largest crowd in event’s 12-year history

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

It just felt different—a buzz was in the air—and when the final numbers were tallied, the 12th Annual Potato Expo at the Mirage Convention Center in Las Vegas saw a record number of attendees, booth holders and square footage of exhibit space.

Taking place January 14-15, the Potato Expo 2020 recorded 2,019 (one shy of the year) attendees and 189 exhibitors who set up booths and

gathered in 90,000-plus square feet of exhibit hall.

Potato Expo has become highly regarded as not only the largest industry event of its kind in North America, but also a must-attend for potato and vegetable growers, associated companies, journalists, chefs, researchers, associations and professionals.



Above: During the National Potato Council’s Awards Banquet on Thursday, January 16, the day following Potato Expo, outgoing NPC President Larry Alsum (right) enlists assistance from his granddaughter, Madison (left), in drawing a raffle ticket for a prize. The raffle raised \$3,140 that evening, with proceeds going toward the potato industry’s new initiative, LEAF (Leadership Education & Advancement Foundation), formed to develop a future generation of leaders and ensure they can take on tomorrow’s challenges.

The Potatoes USA Winter Meeting and National Potato Council (NPC) Annual Meeting occur each year before and after the show, as well as conferences by several national and international industry organizations.

The event kicked off with a Potato Business Summit held by the United Potato Growers of America, Potato Growers of Canada and the Potato Marketing Association of North



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America, with participation from World Potato Markets, the NPC, Potatoes USA and state organizations. The Potato Business Summit is a comprehensive analysis of the global and North American potato industry, including a world commodity outlook, U.S. consumption trends and a 2020 planting outlook.

United Potato Growers of America President and CEO Mark Klompien said his association “passed the chairmanship gavel,” the previous evening, from Dick Okray of Okray Family Farms in Plover, Wisconsin, to Brian Bushman of J&J Potatoes and Bushman Trucking in Wittenberg, Wisconsin.

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Left: (L-R) Jeff Sommers and A.J. Bussan of Wysocki Produce Farm, Bancroft, WI, and Richard Pavelski of Heartland Farms, Hancock, WI, attend the Potato Business Summit held on the first day of Potato Expo.

Right: Representing United Potato Growers of America at Potato Expo 2020 are, (L-R) George Martin, Trisha Grezenski and Brian Bushman. It was made public at the show that Brian is the new chairman of United Potato Growers of America.



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The Potato Expo trade show itself showcases exhibitor booths, “meet-up lounges”—an Expo first where attendees network with other business professionals, breakout sessions at the “Innovation Hub,” “Potato Talks,” “Meet the Researchers” sessions and information-packed discussions.

Topics cover everything from soil

health to efficient fertilizers, nutrient management, hybrid potatoes, crop management, technology, satellite imagery, managing weather risks, and food safety and labeling.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

One panel discussion revolved around the question “Where is Society headed with Plastics?” Another

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Above: Chef Jeff Henderson (far left), creator of Food Network’s reality series “The Chef Jeff Project,” hosted the 5th Annual “Spud Nation Throwdown” cooking competition that requires renowned chefs to innovate using U.S. potatoes. Rahman “Rock” Harper (center, blue shirt) was judged winner of the competition, beating out fellow celebrity chefs Robert “Stew” Stewart (second from right) and Daniel Stramm (second from left). Lyla Davis (right), of the Colorado Certified Potato Growers Association, acted as “sous chef” in assisting Stewart.



As part of breakout sessions on the Potato Expo “Innovation Hub” stage, Wisconsin’s own Paul Bethke (left), research plant physiologist, and Shelley Jansky, research geneticist, both of USDA-ARS, presented a Potato Association of America research discussion: “Are Hybrid Potatoes in Your Future? And Identifying Herbicide Injury in Potato.”

16 BC’T February



Flipping through pages of the *Badger Common’Tater* magazine outside of the Wisconsin Certified Seed Potatoes booth are, from left to right, Javier Cipriano, Mike Barker and Richard Rashke of Okray Family Farms in Plover, WI.

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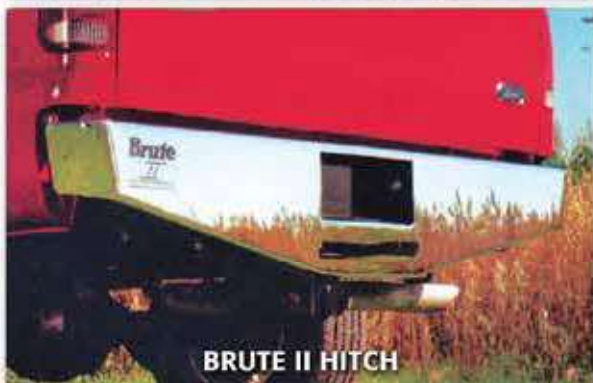
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Left: Potato Expo keynote speaker Erik Qualman, a technology and digital leadership expert and author of the book *Socialnomics*, gave a lively and colorful presentation on “The Five Simple Habits of Digital Leaders.”

Right: During keynote speaker Erik Qualman’s presentation on “The Five Simple Habits of Digital Leaders,” he instructed luncheon attendees to stand like a superhero and become empowered. That’s University of Wisconsin Professor Emeritus Walt Stevenson at center, in the red shirt, and Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) Director of Promotions Dana Rady, front and center.



adopted the premise of “It All Starts with the Seed. Changes Coming to Seed Certification Programs.”

“What the Heck is Going on in D.C.? A Discussion on National Issues” was an intriguing subject, as was “A Single Software Platform to Boost Your Operation’s Efficiency.”

Potato Expo 2020 served as the ideal platform for the potato industry to

Left: Donning “Eat Potatoes, Love Longer” light-up shades, University of Wisconsin Professor Emeritus Walt Stevenson announces a door prize winner at the WSPIA and Wisconsin Chip Committee reception.

launch the Leadership, Education and Advancement Foundation (LEAF) to support leadership development, including the Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI).

With the primary goal of LEAF being to develop a future generation of leaders and ensure they can take on tomorrow’s challenges, the foundation got off to a good start with the NPC pledging \$100,000 and Potatoes USA committing up to \$500,000 in matching funds this fiscal year (between now and June 30).

The National Potato Council also





Dale Nelson (left) of Nelson’s Vegetable Storage Systems and Randy Fleishauer (right), Plover River Farms, attend the Wisconsin Chip Committee and Seed Potato Improvement Association (WSPIA) annual reception in the Mirage Event Center immediately following Potato Expo.



From left to right, Lisa Runnels and Cathy Schommer of Compeer Financial enjoy a refreshment with Joe Seis, Sterling Farms, at the Wisconsin Chip Committee and WSPIA annual reception.

unveiled its new podcast, “Eye on Potatoes,” which provides a platform for potato growers and experts across the country to discuss the latest issues affecting the industry, and for policymakers in Washington to learn about and take up priorities.

The biweekly podcast is hosted by Lane Nordlund, a professional television and radio agriculture broadcaster, and is available on iApple Podcasts, Spotify and Google Podcasts.

Potato Expo keynote speakers included Brett Sciotto, a former U.S.

Army intelligence officer and captain in the 101st Airborne Division. Sciotto described his vision of “The Farmer of the Future” as it relates to food security, low commodity prices, farm consolidation, market share, succession planning, and traceability and accountability, among other subjects.

At Wednesday’s keynote luncheon during Potato Expo, Erik Qualman, a technology and digital leadership expert and author of the book *Socialnomics*, gave a lively and colorful presentation on “The Five Simple Habits of Digital Leaders.”

SPUD NATION THROWDOWN

Chef Jeff Henderson, creator of Food Network’s reality series “The Chef Jeff Project,” host of “Family Style with Jeff” and star of the television series “Flip My Food with Chef Jeff,” hosted the 5th Annual “Spud Nation Throwdown” cooking competition that requires renowned chefs to innovate using U.S. potatoes.

Rahman “Rock” Harper was judged winner of the competition, beating out fellow celebrity chef Robert “Stew” Stewart and Daniel Stramm, a “Chef de Cuisine,” in the Wolfgang Puck school of cooking.

These chefs are no strangers to contests, appearing on “Hell’s Kitchen” on FOX, various cooking shows on the Food Network, Oprah’s OWN and leading national culinary competitions.

Chef Jeff also gave a live interactive cooking performance, Wednesday,

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Left: Of the 189 exhibitors at Potato Expo 2020 were Volm Companies, La Patate, Tri-Steel, Logan, Daumer, Fox Solutions and the Wisconsin Certified Seed Potatoes booth where Tom Bulgrin (left) of Gumz Muck Farms and WPVGA Director of Promotions Dana Rady (right) pose for a picture.





January 15, at Potato Expo, demonstrating how to make his Smokey Warm Vichyssoise Soup with Chives.

After two days of whirlwind activity and a barrage of information and presentations, it was time to relax and unwind with two post-show receptions on Wednesday evening.

The Wisconsin Chip Committee

and Seed Potato Improvement Association held an annual reception in the Mirage Event Center immediately following Potato Expo, with refreshments, door prizes, cheese and sausage appetizers, networking and friendly conversation.

University of Wisconsin Professor Emeritus Walt Stevenson once again did the honors of emceeing the

Above: A fitting way to close the record-breaking Potato Expo 2020 was with an “Elton John & Billy Joel: The Ultimate Tribute Show” in the Mirage Hotel & Casino Grand Ballroom.

event and announcing winners of the quality door prizes.

Later, Potato Expo presented an “Elton John & Billy Joel: The Ultimate Tribute Show” in the Mirage Hotel



(L-R) Romain Cools, president of the World Potato Congress, Iris and Jaap Delleman (editor of *Potato World Magazine*) and Paula Houlihan of the Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary mugged for the camera at the Wisconsin Chip Committee and WSPIA reception.



What a beautiful family! Hancock Agricultural Research Station Superintendent Felix Navarro (left) took the opportunity to spend time with his son, Juan (center), and wife, Sonia (right), at the Wisconsin Chip Committee and WSPIA reception.



Larry Alsum (right in each image), outgoing president of the National Potato Council Executive Committee, took the opportunity during the NPC Annual Banquet, January 16, to present President's Awards to his wife and life partner of 44 years, Paula, and to his friend and dedicated Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Executive Director, Tamas Houlihan.

& Casino Grand Ballroom, a night of hit songs, energetic performances, outrageous costumes and true rock 'n' roll at its finest, not to mention incredible food and refreshments.

It was truly a spectacular way to close a Potato Expo for the record books. Don't miss out on the biggest event of the year—attend Potato Expo 2021, January 6-7, at the Gaylord Texan in Grapevine Texas. [BCT](#)

(L-R) Justin Dagen of Dagen Heritage Farms, Eric Schroeder, Schroeder Bros. Farms, and Ryan Krabill, Ascent Agricultural Insight, LLC, enjoyed the WSPIA and Chip Committee reception.



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