



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Highlighted here, WPVGA had a successful 2020 as an organization

By Tamas Houlihan, WPVGA Executive Director

They say that hindsight is 20/20, but I think I speak for many of us when I say let's put the year 2020 in the rearview mirror and not look back!

The global pandemic disrupted life as we know it and forever changed the future of many businesses and industries, not to mention the countless cases of illness and massive loss of life.

The size and scope of the changes that have occurred in the past 12 months may have altered how we live, how we work and how we play for a long time, and in some cases, permanently.

While working remotely became the new norm for millions of Americans, others lost jobs or were laid off for long stretches. But farmers and the agricultural industry continued to work as hard as they always do, going about their essential duties of feeding the world.

I am proud to say I work for farmers, food producers and their suppliers, who form the backbone of our



The 2020 Wisconsin potato growing season was on-time, with a lot of potatoes in the central and southern areas of the state being planted in early- to mid-April and continuing throughout the month. Potatoes are shown being planted on Schroeder Bros. Farms, Inc., in Antigo, Wisconsin.

country.

Potato and vegetable growers serve on the front lines in the battle for food security and the overall health of our nation. Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) members all help an

industry that grows food and feeds a hungry world. You should be proud!

Despite all the disruptions due to COVID-19, the WPVGA had a successful year as an organization. Following are some of the highlights for the industry in 2020.

Above-Average Growing Conditions; Excellent Harvest Season

The 2020 Wisconsin potato growing season was a welcome relief compared to the previous two years. The planting season was on-time, with a lot of central and southern Wisconsin potatoes being planted in early- to mid-April and continuing throughout the month.

This was followed by several weeks of cold, wet and cloudy weather, which caused a delay in emergence.

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The crop quickly caught up, however, with normal temperatures arriving by late May and remaining through mid-June.

In late June and early July, Wisconsin had two to three weeks of extreme heat, which may have led to a reduction in overall yields.

Weather conditions returned to normal in mid-July and continued for the remainder of the growing season throughout the Central Sands. Cool nights throughout the month of August helped with tuber bulking.

Fortunately, harvest conditions were excellent in August, September and October, and there was not a deep frost until very late October, which allowed the vast majority of the Wisconsin potato crop to be harvested without losses.

Growers reported average to above average yields with a large size profile, excellent quality and very few defects.



Another 2020 highlight of the Promotions Committee was the huge promotion of Wisconsin potatoes at 188 Jewel Osco stores, in Chicago, during the month of October. The promotion featured billboards (example shown), digital posters, elaborate potato displays in stores and employees wearing "Powered By Wisconsin Potatoes" T-shirts, along with frequent postings on social media.

There were no serious issues with late blight in 2020. Late blight was confirmed on one potato field in Adams County on August 10. It was immediately managed to prevent any

further outbreaks.

Wisconsin growers harvested 62,000 acres of potatoes with an

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average yield of 425 hundredweight (cwt.)/acre. That puts the crop at 26,350,000 cwt., an increase of 2 percent over 2019.

Wisconsin is Well-Positioned in the Marketplace

Strong demand and high prices along with various government support programs all helped strengthen the Wisconsin potato industry in 2020.

While COVID-19 led to a virtual shutdown of the foodservice industry and significant volume cuts for Wisconsin's process potato growers, that business recovered quickly and did not result in big losses for our growers.

The frozen process sector of our industry is about 20 percent of total production, and of that, a significant portion is sold to retail markets. Furthermore, the drive-through

business at quick-serve restaurants was robust, which helped boost French fry consumption.

Meanwhile, the fresh, chip and seed potato sectors were all quite healthy, with potato products (and even canned vegetables) flying off the shelves at grocery stores.

Add to that our advantage in freight costs due to our central location, and you can see why Wisconsin continues to be a national leader in the potato and vegetable industry.

Many potato growers out West were not as fortunate, however, as their reliance on the foodservice market is much greater and their losses were more severe. We hope this sector continues to recover and we wish our fellow potato growers nothing but the best.

Governmental Affairs, Research and Water Task Force Focus on Water Quality

As part of the effort to address groundwater issues and protect drinking water and public health across Wisconsin, the Department of Natural Resources is working with key public and agriculture industry stakeholders to update Chapter NR 151 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code.

The NR 151 rule modification is to develop a targeted performance standard to abate nitrate pollution in sensitive areas of the state for the purpose of achieving compliance with the nitrate groundwater standards.

The rule revisions will define sensitive areas in the state and the performance standards needed to protect groundwater quality



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Also, a big Thank You!

We want to thank many businesses and individuals who in 2020 contributed time and resources for the success of our research and outreach activities. We are thankful for your generosity as you help us sustain our research farm and Storage Facility activities. Among these are:

- AgRay Inc.
- AMVAC Chemical Corp.
- Coloma Farms
- Case IH Program
- Farmers Implement LLC
- Gramma Miller's
- Heartland Farms
- McCain Foods
- MWFP
- Medius Ag
- Nelson's Vegetable Storage Systems
- Nutrien Ag Solutions
- Paul Miller Farms
- Potatoes USA
- Roberts Irrigation
- Swiderski Equipment, Inc.
- Syngenta
- Twin Creeks Nursery & Greenhouses
- Vantage North Central
- Waushara County Master Gardeners
- Willis Family
- WPVGA
- WPVGA Associate Division

in these areas.

The potato and vegetable industry is well-represented on the NR 151 Technical Advisory Committee by grower Larry Alsum along with University of Wisconsin (UW) Horticulture Professor Dr. Jed Colquhoun.

The WPVGA Governmental Affairs Committee, led by co-chairs Mike Carter and Steve Diercks, continues to closely monitor this issue, along with the WPVGA's lead attorney, Jordan Lamb.

Research related to reducing nitrogen (N) use on potatoes has been the focal point of the WPVGA in recent years.

UW scientists Yi Wang and Matt Ruark continue to work on low N trials for various potato varieties.

Wang is also leading a project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which involves collecting and processing data using hyperspectral imaging to determine in-season nitrogen status and assist growers with management.

NITROGEN USE IN POTATOES

Paul Mitchell and Deana Knuteson are beginning to work on an economic impact statement related to N use on potatoes.

Troy Fishler, the new Superintendent at the Hancock Ag Research Station, is also conducting an extensive potato variety trial with Jeff Endelman looking at elite new cultivars in a low nitrogen environment.

The WPVGA Water Task Force works closely with Ankur Desai of the UW Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences Department on his Eddy Covariance Flux Tower research.

This state-of-the-art technology is used to gain even more accurate measurements of evapotranspiration (ET), which is directly related to crop water use and can be utilized to help reduce nitrate leaching.

The Healthy Grown program

managed by Knuteson continues to evolve. A component focusing on water quality and quantity was added for 2020-'21.

Deana also helped create an online Water Stewards training course. This six-module course focuses mainly on water quantity issues within Wisconsin, but water quality is also discussed in many of the modules since the two are closely linked.

The WPVGA also continues to cooperate with Discovery Farms on a phosphorus reduction project in Antigo, and plans are underway to team up on a nitrate reduction project in Central Wisconsin.

WPVGA Group Receives Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant

Six farms in Central Wisconsin have joined together in an effort to protect the watershed that includes the Little Plover River and a portion of the Wisconsin River.

With leadership from Plover River Farms, the group includes Feltz Family Farms, Firkus Farms, Myron Soik & Sons, Okray Family Farms and Worzella & Sons.

With matching funds from the WPVGA and working closely with Robin Rothfeder at UW-Stevens Point-Extension, the group was successful in securing a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection in 2020.

This partnership envisions a healthy and productive working landscape in Wisconsin's Central Sands region.

Through on-farm conservation and collaborative partnerships, the group seeks to promote innovative stewardship practices that benefit the watershed, the landscape and land managers themselves.

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Left to right: Sid, John, Jonathan, Carl, Nick and Cliff.

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WPVGA Uses \$2 Million in Matching Funds to Establish two Endowed Chairs at UW

Thanks to the generosity of John and Tashia Morgridge, a \$70 million matching gift became available for faculty professorships, chairs and distinguished chairs at UW-Madison in 2020.

The Wisconsin Potato Industry Board acted on this opportunity by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the UW Foundation whereby it will provide a dollar-for-dollar match for two \$2-million endowed faculty Chairs.

Gifts to support endowed faculty positions help the university attract and retain the best thinkers, teachers and researchers in an increasingly competitive hiring market.

The two Potato & Vegetable endowed chairs will support faculty whose research is in potatoes and/or vegetables, and the impact of these crops on water, economics and the environment.

The Chairs will also be named to



Harvest conditions were excellent in August, September and October, and there was not a deep frost until very late October. Shown here, potatoes are harvested on Mortenson Bros. Farms, Inc., west of Plainfield, Wisconsin.

honor the work of potato industry research icons Larry Binning, Dave Curwen, Keith Kelling, John Schoenemann, Walt Stevenson and Jeff Wyman.

Process Growers Agree to Terms on Two-Year Contract

The WPVGA Process Frozen Committee worked together to coordinate improved contract

terms for all growers with its potato processing partner in Plover.

The contract talks were entirely cordial and have led to a much-improved relationship between growers and McCain Foods.

With both sides collaborating, a compromise was reached on a mutually beneficial two-year deal. As the economy continues to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, we look forward to increasing business in this sector of the industry.

Political Campaign Funding Pays Dividends

One of the most effective tools used by the Association to help growers is its conduit fund. This fund is managed by the WPVGA and its legal partners, DeWitt, LLP and Michael Best Strategies, and is used to support state legislative candidates who support agriculture.

Many of these candidates were successful in their 2020 campaigns and we look forward to working with a favorable legislature for years to come.

Promotions Committee Shifts Gears
Although the Spudmobile was

A large yellow tracked machine, likely a trencher or pipe layer, is shown in a field. The machine has "Precision Farm Drainage & Excavation LLC" and "715-409-1177" written on its side. The background shows a line of trees under a clear blue sky.

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effectively put into storage in 2020, it did make appearances at a few key events (the Wisconsin State Fair and the Portage County Fair), and even served as a billboard while parked at several businesses.

The WPVGA Promotions Committee further shifted gears in the new COVID-conscious environment by utilizing more electronic media.

A new TV commercial was developed and aired frequently along with prior commercials in multiple markets; online and social media promotions were greatly increased; and radio advertising was also used effectively.

An amusing and entertaining television episode of *Mad Dog & Merrill's Midwest Grill'n* was produced and aired this fall and featured WPVGA members Eric Schroeder, Mike Carter, Doug Posthuma and Gary Beadles, along with Promotions Director Dana Rady.

A new billboard was created and displayed along I-39 between Stevens Point and Hancock, while a previous billboard was moved to the I-41 corridor between Green Bay and Milwaukee.

Chicago Means Business with Wisconsin Potato Promotion

Another 2020 highlight of the Promotions Committee was the huge promotion of Wisconsin potatoes at 188 Jewel Osco stores, in Chicago, during the month of October.

Already a primary target market for Wisconsin potatoes, this promotion featured billboards, digital posters, elaborate potato displays in stores and employees wearing "Powered By Wisconsin Potatoes" T-shirts, along with frequent postings on social media.

Sales data are not yet finalized, but according to early reports, potato volume and dollar sales increased tremendously.

Some Events Cancelled, but Golf Outings Go On

With health and safety concerns first

and foremost, two summer field days were cancelled in 2020 along with the annual Industry Show, which was set for February 2021.

And it was with great disappointment that we made the decision to postpone the WPVGA Member Development Program for one year. This has proven to be one of the most valuable leadership training and networking programs offered by

the Association, with 25 members graduating from the 2018-'19 class.

Many of these graduates are now serving on various industry boards and committees. Plans are in place to conduct the program over the fall and winter of 2021-'22.

Despite the concerns with COVID-19, the industry held two highly

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successful outdoor events in 2020—the Spud Seed Classic and Putt-Tato Open golf outings.

Both events drew over 100 golfers and were conducted with extensive safety protocols in place. The events raised thousands of dollars for the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association and the WPVGA Associate Division.

New Trap Shoot Event Hits the Target

To engage more members, the Associate Division brought a new idea to fruition in 2020—the first annual Trap Shoot event at the Wausau Skeet and Trap Club in Brokaw.

The Associate Division knows that not everyone is a golfer, so plans were made to offer an alternative activity that is certainly popular with many members.

The Trap Shoot was held safely and was a big success, with a full flight of 15 five-person teams. The event also served as one more fundraiser for the organization, which provides scholarships and grants among its many programs.

Virtual Field Day Reports on Research; Grower Ed Conference Plans Virtual Event

I'm sure there's one word everyone became a lot more familiar with in 2020: Zoom. With "virtually" no in-person meetings held after the onset of COVID-19, plans quickly changed to offer Zoom conferences and other

virtual meeting formats.

One such meeting was a virtual Langlade Ag Research Station Field Day, featuring multiple reports from the researchers whose projects were underway, in Antigo, over the summer.

The Grower Education Conference planning committee also decided to conduct the upcoming 2021 conference virtually via Zoom.

The conference will still offer the same outstanding educational presentations along with timely research reports and have additional online content on a dedicated conference website that will be beneficial to growers.

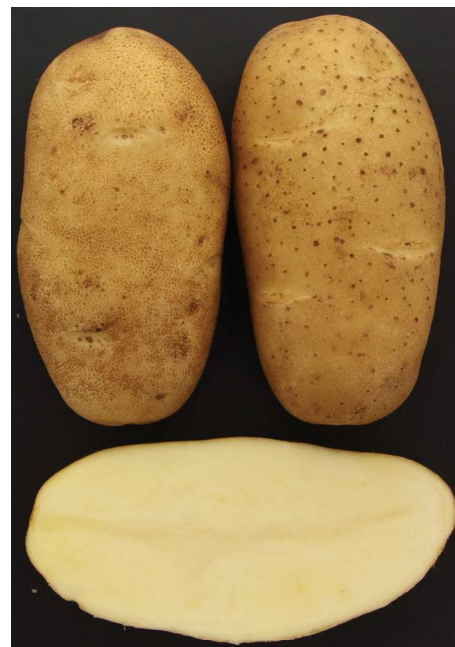
Another New Potato Variety

For the second year in a row, the SpudPro Committee, led by Dr. Jeff Endelman and Mike Copas, named a new potato variety: the W9433-1rus potato is now called "Lakeview Russet." A dual-purpose russet, good for fresh and fry use, it is a remarkable early bulking variety that yields well.

Uncommonly Good Magazine

WPVGA Managing Editor Joe Kertzman keeps the industry well-informed by consistently producing the outstanding *Badger Common'Tater* magazine.

With top-notch editorial content and loaded with color photos of industry people, places and events, this trade



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publication is widely recognized as the best in the business.

National Potato Industry Leadership

Wisconsin also had excellent representation on national industry organizations in 2020, with Larry Alsum serving as the Immediate Past-President of the National Potato Council, while Heidi Randall and Mike Carter served on the Potatoes USA Executive Committee.

Brian Bushman served as Chairman



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of the United Potato Growers of America in 2020.

Farming for the Future

An exciting new venture founded by the Pavelski family, Farming for the Future Foundation is dedicated to helping families understand and appreciate their food and the people who grow it.

The Food and Farm Exploration Center will be a place for education, unforgettable family experiences and great, wholesome food.

A tremendous resource for teachers and schools, it will be an excellent destination for families and agritourists as well as school groups.

It will offer a unique way to learn about careers in agriculture. In keeping with its mission, the Foundation will also continue the creation of plans to increase agricultural literacy in Wisconsin

classrooms.

Stay tuned for more about this project and the discovery center, which will serve as a hands-on educational learning facility with interactive exhibits focused on various areas of crop production and cutting-edge technology used in agriculture.

Plans are to break ground on land donated by the Worzella family, in Plover, in 2021.

Teamwork Leads to Success

Vince Lombardi said, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." That is also what makes the WPVGA work.

Working in concert with all our members, each individual on our staff contributed to the organization's success in 2020. I want to thank Dale Bowe, Julie Braun, Doug Foemmel,

Jane Guillen, Joe Kertzman, Dana Rady and Karen Rasmussen for their hard work and dedication to the Association.

Of special note is Financial Officer Karen Rasmussen, who celebrated her 25th anniversary at the WPVGA on December 1, 2020. Congratulations, Karen!

In closing, I would like to thank all the members of the WPVGA, along with our outstanding Board of Directors led by President Rod Gumz.

I am proud of how we all worked together to meet the challenges of 2020. Be thankful for each new challenge because it will build your strength and character. The bigger the challenge, the bigger the opportunity for growth. **BC'T**

Sincerely,

Tamas Houlihan
Executive Director, WPVGA



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