



INTERVIEW

ZACH KROGWOLD, owner/operator, The Potato Plant

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

NAME: Zach Krogwold

TITLE: Owner/operator

COMPANY: The Potato Plant, Inc.

LOCATION: Amherst, Wisconsin

HOMETOWN: Amherst

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: 1

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT:

Maintenance, Waupaca Foundry

SCHOOLING: Amherst High School

FAMILY: Wife, Krystal, and two boys, Everett and Westen

HOBBIES: Hunting and motorsports

Above: Representing the fourth generation to work in the family potato business, Zach Krogwold is an owner/operator of The Potato Plant in Amherst, Wisconsin. The packaging plant has been in business since 1979, but the Krogwolds have a history of growing potatoes in the area dating back to the 1940's.

As its name suggests, Potato Plant, Inc is a potato packaging plant that has been in operation, in Amherst, Wisconsin, since 1979.

"It was started by my great-grandfather, Lawrence, my grandpa, Jon, and my uncle, Lonnie," says Zach Krogwold, current owner/operator of Potato Plant, Inc.

"Great-grandpa Lawrence passed away in 1994, but everyone else is still involved," Krogwold explains, "and there have been many expansions over the years to get us to where we are now."

Where The Potato Plant is now includes being a respected storage and packaging business in the heart of Central Wisconsin potato country, capable of storing and shipping 200,000 cwt. (hundredweight) of potatoes a year.

The Krogwolds have a long history in Amherst and Waupaca County, having been a grower/packer from the 1940's until the late '70s, when the family quit farming to concentrate on potato storage and packaging.

HALL OF FAMER

Lawrence is a Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

(WPVGA) Hall of Fame member, and Lonnie is a past president of the WPVGA, having served two terms, and was heavily involved with the National Potato Board (now Potatoes USA).

"We supply a good product, we're timely and reliable," says Zach's father, Kraig Krogwold. "Last year, we didn't have a kicked load until the very end of the season."

Kraig is proud of the advancements in technology that The Potato Plant, Inc. has been able to make. "We just installed a brand-new bale stacking machine," he notes.

"We hate to do it—eliminate a job or two—but we can't find anyone to do it, stack 50-pound bales all day. As you know, the labor market is tight, but we're fortunate. We have very loyal employees who come back every year."



The Krogwolds were also one of the first families to use irrigation in Central Wisconsin, along with the Okray and Burns farms, among others. “My grandfather, Lawrence, and his father, Halbert, had a steam engine they used to pump water out of Onland Lake, in New Hope,” Kraig says.

The *Badger Common’Tater* sat down for an interview with Kraig’s son, Zach, whose uncle, Lonnie, describes as “really good mechanically—he knows his equipment.”

Who are your father and mother, and did one of them show you the ropes at The Potato Plant? My mother is Amy, and my father, Kraig, is an owner/operator as well, and has shown me the ropes along the way.

What do your duties involve—what

“It is important to keep tidy, not only for the audit, but also to create a clean work environment to make the process move as smooth as possible.”

— Zach Krogwold

do you personally do on a day-to-day basis? I set up in the morning and get things in order for the day. I spend a lot of time on the floor throughout the day helping where needed, checking over equipment and looking for the next thing that will make improvements to our process and operation.

How many truckloads of potatoes go through the plant each year, and

Above & Below: After potatoes are flumed into Potato Plant, Inc., washed and dried, they are sized, graded and sorted

are there other vegetables that you store and/or ship? We ship about 500 truckloads a year, and we only store potatoes.

How many hundredweight of potatoes does that equate to? It’s roughly 200,000 cwt.

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Do you have your own trucking arm, and if so, how many trucks? We do not.

What is your storage capacity?

We store 130,000 bags at our own facility, plus another 15,000 at our grower's farm where they have short-term storage.

All the potatoes that come into our

facility are flumed in with water and forced up through the flow, where they are washed, dried, sorted and graded. Some come straight off the field after a couple days of cooling at our grower partner's facility.

We often pull out of storage until the middle or end of May, and have even gone into June, but that's pushing it a bit.

Left: Zach Krogwold monitors a Volmpack Auto-Baler bagging spuds at The Potato Plant.

Right: From left to right, Zach, Kraig and Lonnie Krogwold pose with bags of spuds at The Potato Plant.

What varieties of potatoes do you ship? They are all russets, mostly Caribou, Goldrush and Norkotah potatoes.

You mentioned that you and your family are not growers, and that Larry Kizewski of Kizewski Farms is your grower. Do you accept potatoes from other growers? Yes, Kizewski Farms is our grower partner, and we do accept potatoes from other growers on occasion, if time allows.

Who are your customers in general—retailers, wholesalers, processors? Bushmans' Inc., in Rosholt, Wisconsin, brokers all our loads.

Are the potatoes sold in Wisconsin or nationwide? They are shipped nationwide, with a lot going to the East Coast. We pack in 3-, 5-, 8- and 10-pound bags. We also do 15's and 20's, as well as some bulk totes, about three bulk loads a week on average.



A Verbruggen VPM-5 automatic palletizer is hard at work stacking bales of potatoes at Potato Plant, Inc.

Interview. . .

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What other family members work for Potato Plant? We currently have three generations—my grandfather, Jon, great uncle, Lonnie, father, Kraig, and myself.

Do you take pride in being a fourth-generation business owner/operator, and if so, why? Absolutely, it is an accomplishment nowadays to keep a small family business going for four generations.

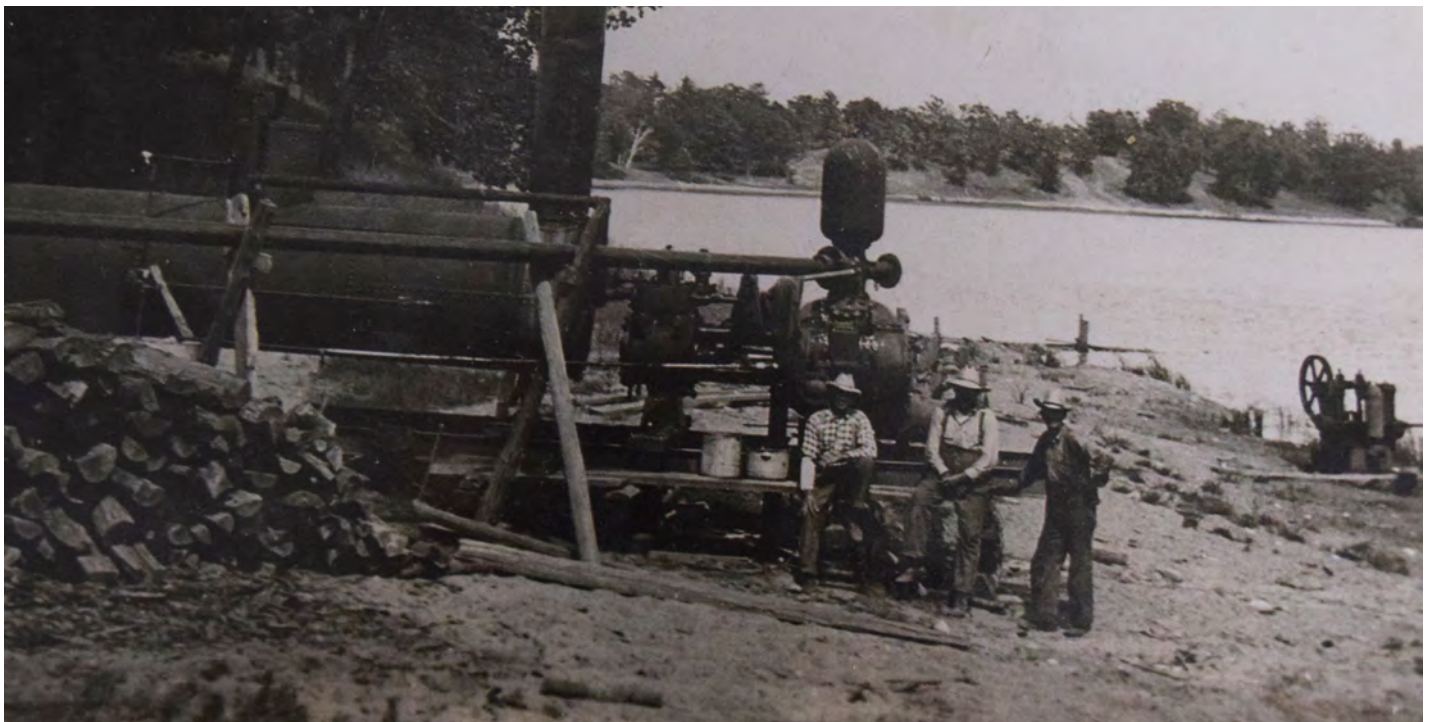


What are some storage secrets for keeping potatoes bruise and disease free? It is all about air movement and the correct moisture content.

How do you prevent storage rot? We keep storage rot at bay through

Left: Larry Kizewski of Kizewski Farms, Stevens Point, is The Potato Plant's primary grower partner.

Right: The old Krogwold family farmstead is shown in this color photo. The Krogwolds grew and packed potatoes from the 1940's until the late '70s, when the family quit farming to concentrate on potato storage and packaging.



With the Krogwolds being one of the first families in Central Wisconsin to use irrigation, a steam engine is used to pump water out of Onland Lake, in 1935. Pictured are, from left to right, Mike Jurgensen, Halbert Krogwold and Frank Karch.



air movement and temperature regulation.

I see that Potato Plant, Inc. is Primus certified. What does that entail?

It requires a once-a-year, two-day physical audit of the plant and paperwork to make sure we meet regulations.

How important are cleaning and disinfecting? Have they gotten more

detailed and regulated in recent years? It is important to keep tidy, not only for the audit, but also to create a clean work environment to make the process move as smooth as possible.

Regulations have remained the same from what I have been told, but there are always improvements to be made.

Above: Potato Plant, Inc., packages spuds in 3-, 5-, 8-, 10-, 15- and 20-pound bags, as well as shipping about three loads of bulk totes a week, on average.

What do you hope for the future of Potato Plant, Inc., Zach? Efficiency is my main goal ... to keep the place going, and hopefully I'll get to work with my boys one day in the family business. **BC'T**



A full storage bin is a beautiful sight at Potato Plant, Inc., of Amherst, Wisconsin.



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