



Equipment Manufacturing Ltd.



INTERVIEW

TRENT COUSINS, partner, Allan Equipment Manufacturing Ltd.

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

NAME: Trent Cousins

TITLE: Partner

COMPANY: Allan Equipment Manufacturing Ltd.

LOCATION: Covehead, Prince Edward Island, Canada

HOMETOWN: Kensington, Prince Edward Island

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: Eight

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Farming/
small business

SCHOOLING: Economics, University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI 2009)

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: A master mason, present chairman of ML Development Inc. (non-profit housing corporation) and King Edward Lodge No. 16 member, 2007 to present

AWARDS/HONORS: Top 50 Emerging Leader, 2013; Governor General Leadership Conference member, 2015; and Inspiring Young Alumni Award, UPEI, 2014

FAMILY: Wife, Catherine, and children, Arthur (4), Alice (2) and Edwin (5 months)

HOBBIES: Farming, building, skiing and boating

Allan Equipment designs and manufactures potato harvesting equipment in Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada, and has a storied history of over 60 years in business.

Don Allan built the first potato harvester himself for his own farm in the early 1960's. At the time, there was no simple and reliable harvesting option available to purchase, so he decided to build his own.

From then on, Allan Equipment has been designing its equipment based on the same need.

"We listen to customers and base our designs on what the market is asking for," says Trent Cousins, active partner in Allan Equipment Manufacturing Ltd. "We strive to be simple, efficient and reliable with all of our equipment."

"While retired, Don still drops in and assists us in developing new products," Cousins adds, "and telling us what we are doing right, and most importantly, what we are doing wrong!"

Staking its claim as "Canada's largest

designer and manufacturer of potato harvesting equipment," Allan Equipment also builds blueberry harvesters and mowers.

Its 120,000-square-foot Prince Edward Island facility includes a large parts inventory and full-service machine shop.

What is your own history in the potato business or with Allan Equipment, Trent? What is your background? I was born and raised on a potato, beef and grain farm. Our farm grows potatoes for the fresh pack and processing markets.

Above: From its headquarters in Covehead, Prince Edward Island, Canada, Allan Equipment stakes a claim, according to co-owner Trent Cousins (inset), as Canada's largest designer and manufacturer of potato harvesting equipment. The 120,000-square-foot facility includes a large parts inventory and full-service machine shop.



From early on, I always enjoyed operating and working on the equipment in all aspects of the operation.

In 2013, a few years after graduation from university, I was still helping on the farm part time while operating a couple small businesses. I heard there was an opportunity to purchase Allan Equipment as the original owner was looking to retire.

I was interested in the opportunity, but still being involved in the farm and with other business interests, I felt I needed a partner to tackle such a large endeavor.

I thought of my friend, Daniel van Schalkwyk, who had recently moved to PEI. We saw great potential in the company and its products, moved forward with the purchase, and in late 2013, took ownership of the company from Don Allan.

I look after the financial and sales management, and Daniel handles the manufacturing and general operations.

What potato harvesting machines do you manufacture? We manufacture a full lineup of 2-, 3-, 4- and 6-row harvesters, 2-, 4- and 6-row windrowers, live-bottom bulk bodies, trailer inserts, pilers, hillers, crop carts, conveyers and numerous types of grading equipment.

We manufacture a planter press wheel kit for increasing potato planting speeds and accuracy, and we are currently developing a new

potato planter.

We sell all these products worldwide and have exported as far as South Africa and Eastern Europe.

Do you also deal in and service other brands, and if so, what lines? Locally in PEI, as a full-line dealership, we sell and service Miedema/Dewulf, CLAAS farm equipment, Agrifac crop sprayers and Vaderstad planting and tillage equipment. We also sell a lot of used equipment of varying brands that we bring in on trade, all across North America.

What's your largest line of potato equipment? Harvesters and windrowers would be the most popular lines we manufacture. Our windrowers are known to be the

Left: Pulled by a John Deere tractor, an Allan Equipment Basket Hiller is put to work on a farm in Wisconsin.

Right: Allan Equipment offers 2-, 4- and 6-row windrowers with frames that deliver excellent visibility and product flow.

simplest and easiest to operate on the market, and our harvesters are the same.

In 2014, we released a full electrically powered harvester in 2-, 3- and 4-row sizes, and it has proven to be head and shoulders above the competition in capacity and cost of operation.

The harvesters and windrowers boast the cheapest cost of operation and maintenance on the market.

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We use almost all common parts, which you can purchase at any machine shop or parts supply store.

This is why our customers keep coming back—they know they can get parts anytime, anywhere and for a reasonable price.

I would think most of the potato growers on Prince Edward Island look to and deal with Allan Equipment, is that true, or are there other dealers there? We have 80-plus percent of the market share in harvesting and handling equipment

Above: In this vintage photo, one of Allan Equipment's first customers heads to the field with his new harvester in the early 1960's.

locally in PEI. There are other brands represented here, but no other dealer puts as much emphasis on potato equipment as we do.

We know potatoes and take pride in designing equipment that solves problems for farmers and makes growing their crops easier.

What do you most take pride in, Trent, as far as servicing your customers? We take pride in never sacrificing customer experience. We always strive to improve our customer experience and we do this by providing equipment that is second to none in total value.

Both me and my partner are farmers, so we know the importance of keeping equipment rolling when it matters most. We treat all of our customer farms as if they were our own.

During harvest, the entire team is on call for our customers, even if the customer is in a different province or state, and we will be there as fast as possible to assist with any problems.

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Do you stock parts for many brands, and if so, what lines?

For potato equipment, we stock only Allan equipment parts, but we supply belt chain for many brands of equipment and a lot of our common parts, like rollers and chain, fit on any brand. Therefore, we usually end up selling parts to our customers' whole farm whether they are all Allan Equipment or not.

You are a member of the Associate Division of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association and attend the Industry Show in Stevens Point. Do you have customers in Wisconsin, or are you looking to expand your territory?

We have

a few customers in Wisconsin and would love to gain more! We have some transport equipment and press wheel kits on planters, as well as a crop cart for a cucumber farm, all currently working in Wisconsin.

We are keen to have our harvesters

and windrowers demonstrated in Wisconsin, as we see huge potential for them there.

What can you offer Wisconsin potato and vegetable growers that they perhaps don't have access to otherwise?

Most of our equipment is quite similar as far as concept goes to the rest of the market, but we keep the operation, controls, function and construction as simple as possible.

Our customers who switch from other brands always tell us they have a much easier time operating and maintaining the equipment. There are very few specialty parts and 90 percent of them can be bought anywhere that sells bearings, chain and hydraulic hose.

This comes from a concerted effort in the design process to keep the equipment simple. We take great pride in being able to do as much or more than the competition but be simpler in the process.

We also offer some products such



Clockwise: These beautiful shots show an Allan Equipment harvester following four windrowers and closeups of the windrowers and potato harvester in action, the latter with dirt flying. The company manufactures 2-, 4- and 6-row windrowers; 2-, 3-, 4- and 6-row harvesters; and has released an electrically powered harvester in 2-, 3- and 4-row sizes.

as our electric harvester and planter press wheel kit that are not available anywhere else.

Talk about your 120,000 square-foot facility and what you are capable of manufacturing there. We can manufacture pretty much anything within our facility. We focus on potato equipment but have been known over the years to manufacture custom products for numerous industries.

We try to stay versatile and be able to tackle any size or type of project if need be and do not shy away from custom or specialty equipment.

I see you have a 400 Amp CNC Plasma cutter, 24-foot press brake and a 4-foot Radial Arm Drill Press—you're working a lot of steel and iron—aren't you? We are. We also have a full electrical panel shop, hydraulic system design/build capabilities, and in 2019, we installed a welding robot cell.



Allan Equipment co-owners Daniel van Schalkwyk (left) and Trent Cousins (right) stand in front of an Allan 2 Row Harvester after setting it up to harvest in Christiana, South Africa. It features an open-throat frame and conventional product flow design.

In addition to potato hilling and harvesting equipment, I understand you also offer blueberry harvesting equipment. Why potatoes and blueberries? Are they two of the largest crops on PEI? We fell into the blueberry industry through potatoes.

A retired potato farmer who had used our equipment for decades on his farm came and asked us to build him a blueberry harvester.

There are very few companies building blueberry harvesters to

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Being so far east, do you have a lot

of Maine, New York, Vermont and Michigan customers or ...? We have sold several pieces of equipment into Maine, New York and throughout the East Coast, as well as across the United States and Canada.

Every growing area has its own unique set of conditions, so we are always interested to learn

Above: Potato harvest takes place in fields of green, Manitoba, Canada, in 2021.

new practices and make sure our equipment can suit each of them.

When we took over the company in 2013, the former owner had sold little to no equipment outside of our home province. This was one of the main opportunities we saw when purchasing the company.

Our main goal for marketing is to grow our footprint. We realize we will likely never achieve the 80 percent market share we have at home, but with our excellent line of products, we can sell to and help every growing area with their equipment needs.

How many employees does Allan Equipment have, and are most in sales, service and manufacturing?

We currently employ about 45 people, including three in sales, five in design and engineering, three in research and development (R&D), one electrician, four in administration, four servicemen, two machinists, 12 welders and 11 in assembly.

We pride ourselves in having a diverse team with a wide range of abilities. From our sales team



Allan Equipment developed an electric potato harvester that is powered by a diesel generator. Being electric, Trent Cousins says the machine is safe, clean and easy to operate and service, using off-the-shelf electrical components.

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to the welders, we have all worked in different parts of the factory and business.

Our team members all know our product and may be drawn in to help with any part of the process at any time. Many of our team have experience in potato farming and can help in the setup or service of equipment at home or abroad, and we are all ready to pitch in during the busy seasons.

Do they spend much time in the field with customers and servicing equipment? Our service department is always busy setting up equipment on site and helping customers learn about their new equipment.

Our R&D team always looks forward to getting out and testing the new products and observing the improvements they are making, and the whole team likes seeing how the



Allan Equipment had a nice showing at the 2022 Potato Expo in Anaheim, California, with David Shaw (left) and Patrick Byrne (right) manning the booth.

new products perform.

We try and have any new team members come out to the fields during the growing season so they

can learn exactly what it is they are building and how it helps our customers. We find it helps our team take pride in their work.

Is it a short potato growing season there? It is definitely a short season compared to more southerly climates, but we are blessed to avoid a lot of extreme weather.

Our island climate is protected by a gulf to the north and strait to the south, which seems to keep frost at bay until October and allows for a growing season from late May to the end of September before any amount of frost shuts the crop down.

Main harvest starts the last week of September and is generally complete by the final week of October.

How did harvest go for most of the island in 2021? Overall, it was a great harvest. We had excellent growing conditions all season and there was a good stretch of weather to complete the potato harvest in.

What is your hope for the future of Allan Equipment, Trent? We plan to continue to develop new and innovative products that can help our customers. We are only getting started!



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My hope is that we continue to expand our sales across North America with our product line. We love breaking into new markets and helping new customers grow, harvest and handle their crops better.

We are firmly cemented in the ag and specifically potato industry and take immense pride in that.

Is there anything I missed that

you want to add? If anyone is interested in any of our products, please reach out. We often hear how people have never heard of us or didn't realize how many products we manufactured. We truly have a unique lineup of equipment that is just beginning to be discovered outside our home market.

I discovered your magazine, "The Badger," as I call it, when we took

Above: Shown in 1979 are a two-row harvester and, in the second image, the first four-row harvester built by Allan Equipment.

over the company in 2013. The former owner had subscribed for years, but I had never heard of it before then. I've always enjoyed the magazine and truly thank you for the opportunity to be a part of it. **BCT**



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