



It was All Systems Go for Grower Ed Conference & 72nd Annual Industry Show

WPVGA & UW Division of Extension hold trade show and educational presentations for the ages

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

Anticipating the event more than ever, 2022 Grower Education Conference & Industry Show attendees overwhelmingly indicated that it was nice to be back in person after a year off due to COVID-19.

A nice, bright light shone on Wisconsin's potato and vegetable growing industry when all parties convened, February 8-10, 2022, at the Holiday Inn & Convention

Center in Stevens Point.

A combined effort between the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) and University of Wisconsin (UW) Division of Extension, the massive undertaking provides an opportunity to conduct business, forge relationships and discuss relevant issues affecting the industry.

Above: Implement dealers brought out the big equipment for the 2022 Grower Education Conference & Industry Show, February 8-10, at the Holiday Inn & Convention Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Booth holders representing a variety of companies welcomed the networking opportunity with growers and researchers, and the chance to show off their latest products, technologies, services and portfolios.

In all, 300 people pre-registered and hundreds more attended to take full advantage of researcher presentations and informative sessions on topics directly affecting agriculture during the Grower Education Conference.

With supply chain issues as well as trucking and shipping disruptions, it is more imperative than ever to meet face-to-face with fellow growers and associated businesses and forge a path to a successful future.

The WPVGA and UW Extension take their responsibility of putting the right people together seriously.

Growers and the agriculture companies serving them have historically persevered and triumphed through weather events, governmental regulations, farm consolidation and public apathy to emerge stronger each time.



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On full display during the Industry Show were technically advanced equipment and systems to help potato and vegetable growers become more efficient farmers who use less water, fewer inputs and more environmentally friendly practices as the stewards of the land and food providers.

Through the efforts of the WPVGA Association Division Board and staff members such as Executive Assistant Julie Braun and Financial Officer Karen Rasmussen, attendees picked up their badges and show packets, hit the floor running and enjoyed the educational presentations.

New and longtime booth holders represented implement manufacturers and dealers; irrigation companies; banks and credit unions; insurance agencies; the technology sector; fertilizer plants; chemical and biochemical companies; nutrient providers; parts dealers; building



Dale Nelson (left) of Nelson's Vegetable Storage Systems talks shop with Kyle Zarda (right, holding a ThorPack-sponsored show bag) from Wirz Inc., a seed potato farm in Antigo, Wisconsin.

contractors; seed suppliers; crop consultants; and more.

Dr. Russell L. Groves, with the help of the WPVGA Grower Education Planning Committee, pieced together a timely, topical and informative

lineup of research presentations.

On day one alone, topics ranged from soil microbiomes to the economics of nitrogen in the Central Sands, and from neonicotinoid concentrations

continued on pg. 20



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TOPICAL PRESENTATIONS

Adam Freihofer, water use section chief, and Aaron Pruitt,

hydrogeologist, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, gave their "Findings and Recommendations from the Central Sands Lake Study."

Potato production under hot conditions, white mold, herbicide injury, storage diseases, insect resistance, remote imaging, early blight management, nitrogen uptake and new crop management tools were all given equal billing during the Grower Education Conference.

To access a complete index of



Left: Always the consummate host, Chris Brooks (right) of Central Door Solutions welcomes Eugene Mancl (left) from Ron's Refrigeration into the booth for a visit.

Right: On display annually during the Grower Ed Conference & Industry Show are potato varieties and chips from the Wisconsin Potato Variety & Advanced Selection Evaluation Trial.

the 2022 Grower Ed Conference proceedings, watch presentations and see poster sessions, as well as those of previous years, visit <http://wpvga.conferencespot.org/>.



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Dr. Paul Mitchell, UW-Madison Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, and director of the Renk Agribusiness Institute, discusses the economics of nitrogen in the Central Sands as part of Tuesday's Grower Education Conference.



Jordan Lamb of DeWitt LLP, attorney for the WPVGA, gave a legislative update to Tuesday's lunch guests.

In its sixth year, the WPVGA Associate Division's "Bringing Value to Agriculture" session, Wednesday, February 9, consisted of five 10-minute presentations given by select exhibitors.

Exhibitors apply for the opportunity to discuss new technologies, tools, services and approaches their



At lunch on Tuesday during the Industry Show, WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan (right) presented a plaque to outgoing WPVGA Board of Directors member Wes Meddaugh in recognition of his service to the industry

companies offer in agricultural management of potato and vegetable production systems.

On Tuesday evening, the Wisconsin

Seed Potato Improvement Association and WPVGA Associate Division held their annual reception

continued on pg. 22

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continued from pg. 21



Robert Zimpel (left) and Steve Rosenthal of T H Agri-Chemicals, Inc. celebrated the company's 40th year in business at the Industry Show, and they've been booth holders for most of those years, too!



Left to right, Charlie and Jim Mattek of J.W. Mattek & Sons seed potato farm are in deep conversation with John T. Schroeder of Schroeder Bros. Farms, Antigo, during the Industry Show.

on the show floor, including appetizers and refreshments.

The WPVGA and Associate Division banquet, Wednesday night, has become the premier social event in the Wisconsin potato industry, including a nice social hour, dinner, awards and entertainment.

In addition to the annual Industry Awards, there were drawings for cash prizes, with \$1,500 given away, including more than 10 individual cash prizes and a \$500 grand prize winner. Banquet attendees were treated to a nice mix of popular songs by The Drovers after the

awards ceremony.

Our sincere thanks to all sponsors who made the 2022 UW Extension & WPVGA Grower Education Conference & Industry Show possible! Please see the ad thanking sponsors on page 71.

continued on pg. 24



Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Board members, from left to right, Jeff Suchon, Charlie Husnick and Roy Gallenberg give a card to Clover Spacek (right) in recognition of her work as a field inspector for the Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification Program. Spacek recently accepted the general farm manager position with Eagle River Seed Farm and will be departing the program after years of service.



UW Extension and College of Natural Resources groundwater specialist, Kevin Mesarik, gives an "Evaluation of Interplanting to Reduce Nitrate Leaching Below Potato" presentation during Tuesday's Grower Education Conference.



Ray Grabanski (left) of ProgressiveAg Risk Management Specialists talks shop with John E. Bushman of Bushman & Associates during the Industry Show.



From left to right, Jay Warner of Warner & Warner, Inc. welcomed a visit to his booth from Jon Bushman of Bushman & Associates and John Hopfensperger of Bushmans' Inc.



Dr. Amanda Gevens, chair, professor and extension specialist, UW-Madison Department of Plant Pathology, discusses remote imaging tools for early disease detection in potato during the Grower Education Conference.



National Potato Council Chief Executive Officer Kam Quarles summarized some of the federal legislative, regulatory and trade work the organization has been doing in Washington, D.C. on behalf of growers.



New crop management tools and approaches to enhance IRM (Insect Resistance Management) were topics of discussion for Dr. Russell L. Groves, UW-Madison Department of Entomology, during the Grower Education Conference.

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WPVGA Presents Industry Awards

Deserving leaders recognized during well-attended 2022 banquet

After a year on hiatus resulting from the COVID pandemic, the WPVGA and Associate Division Awards Banquet was a greatly appreciated in-person event this year, and the perfect way to cap off the Industry Show.

A nice complement to the Grower Education Conference researcher presentations and Industry Show, the Awards Banquet is a way to recognize those who go above and beyond in furthering the causes of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable growing industry.

Held the evening of February 9, a social hour with beverages and hors d'oeuvres sponsored by BioGro, GLC Minerals and McCain Foods was followed by a nice meal, the Industry Awards and Hall of Fame induction.

An impressive lineup of awards recipients gratefully accepted their honors.

J.D. Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms, Antigo, Wisconsin, was named the WPVGA Volunteer of the Year. One of the largest Frito-Lay seed potato producers in the country, Schroeder Brothers Farms raises 2,250 acres of certified seed potatoes.

Schroeder graduated from Antigo High School in 2004, and then attended the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison, graduating in 2008 with a double major in agricultural business management and political science. He received a law degree in 2011 from the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota.



J.D. Schroeder

He returned to work on the family farm seven years ago.

Schroeder currently serves as a director on the WPVGA Board, and just completed a five-year term on the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association Board, including service as president in 2021.

He serves on the United Potato Growers of Wisconsin Board and has served on the United Potato Growers of America Board. He also serves on the WPVGA Water Task Force, and the Governmental Affairs, SpudPro and Research committees.

He currently serves as the vice president of the Unified School District of Antigo, treasurer of the Antigo branch of the UW-Madison Alumni Club and is a Community Health Foundation Board member.

This year's WPVGA Young Grower of the Year Award went to **Wendy Alsum-Dykstra**, chief operating officer for Alsum Farms & Produce, Inc., located in Friesland, Wisconsin, which raises 2,800 acres of Healthy



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Dykstra, who has served in her present position for 11 years, followed in her father Larry's footsteps, going to school for accounting and earning Bachelor of Business Administration and Master of Professional Accountancy degrees from UW-Whitewater.

Dykstra serves on the WPGVA Board of Directors and is a member of the Promotions Committee. She also serves on the Board of Potatoes USA and has served on the National Potato Council Finance & Trade Affairs Committee since 2020.

She was a Potato Industry Leadership Institute graduate in 2019. Dykstra was a Produce Business 40 under 40 Award recipient in 2019 and received the WPGVA President's Award in 2015.

The WPGVA Researcher of the Year Award went to **Amber Walker**. A



Wendy Alsum-Dykstra

2008 graduate of UW-Oshkosh, Walker is the Storage Research Facility (SRF) manager at the Hancock Agricultural Research Station.

In her current position, she facilitates research and assists station users with field and storage projects, provides oversight of laboratory testing services, makes observations



Amber Walker

and conducts daily maintenance of the SRF.

She is an integral part of research for the potato industry as well as for UW faculty. Walker is responsible for potato quality testing, which includes checking samples for sugar levels.

continued on pg. 26



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She is also an unbiased evaluator for diseased or otherwise compromised potatoes.

Walker is passionate about combating hunger in the community, which is especially critical during this time of widespread food insecurity brought on by the COVID pandemic.

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Rich Wilcox

As current chair of the Food Connections Committee, she often works nights and weekends at local food pantries making sure people have access to adequate nutritious food.

The WPVGA Associate Division Business Person of the Year Award was presented to **Rich Wilcox**, vice president of agriculture and a business banking officer for the First State Bank branch in Stevens Point. Having joined First State Bank in 2020, Wilcox says he specializes in “all things ag related.”

“Ag seems to be what I know and what has held my interest,” Wilcox says. “I like working with farmers of all kinds, but it was potato growers who I first started working with many years back and that still hold a special place in my heart.”

Wilcox has been an outstanding volunteer for the WPVGA Associate Division Board of Directors, serving as treasurer for the past four years. He also serves on the Spud Bowl Committee and helped with fundraising as well as organizing and coordinating the annual Spud Bowl event in Stevens Point.

Dan Mahoney received the Agri-Communicator Award for excellence in communication and dedicated



Dan Mahoney

service in presenting a positive message about the agricultural industry.

Mahoney grew up in Menasha, Wisconsin, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in 1981 with degrees in biology and education. From 1998 to 1999, he was the administrator for the Village of Plover, a role he returned to in 2003.

For the past several years, he has worked tirelessly in leading the Little Plover River Watershed Enhancement Project, which has proven to be an outstanding asset to the community in and around Plover as well as for all of agriculture.

Mahoney has done a tremendous job of bringing diverse stakeholders to the table and fostering a spirit of collaboration that has produced positive results for everyone involved.

Mahoney retired as the Village of Plover administrator on February 4, 2022.

Though he was unable to attend the banquet, 2021 WPVGA Board President **Bill Guenther** of Guenther Farms Inc., Antigo, presented the President’s Award to his wife, **Jolene Guenther**, for her faithful support, guidance and love.



Bill and Jolene Guenther

Special WPVGA Industry Appreciation Awards were presented to UW Department of Plant Pathology Professors **Ann MacGuidwin** and **Doug Rouse**, each of whom has provided invaluable research, findings, advice and results for WPVGA growers over the years.

A third Industry Appreciation Award went WPVGA Director of Promotions, Communication and Consumer Education **Dana Rady**, who is celebrating 10 years of service in 2022.

Her main duties include promotional program and communication activities, as well as serving as the liaison for the Vegetable and Chip

Committees.

Along with Rady's role at WPVGA, she also serves as the director of the United Potato Growers Cooperative of Wisconsin, a sister organization to WPVGA that collects and distributes potato production data to its members based on market supply and demand.

WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan presented Rady with the Industry Appreciation Award in recognition of 10 years of service and outstanding contributions to the Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry.

Following dinner and the awards ceremony, local band The Drovers



Dana Rady

providing a popular mix of songs to entertain the crowd. Cash prizes were awarded attendees lucky enough to have their names drawn during the banquet.

continued on pg. 28

2022 INDUSTRY AWARDS RECIPIENTS

Associate Division Business Person of the Year: **Rich Wilcox**

WPVGA Volunteer of the Year: **J.D. Schroeder**

WPVGA Young Grower of the Year: **Wendy Alsum-Dykstra**

WPVGA Researcher of the Year: **Amber Walker**

WPVGA Board President's Award: **Jolene Guenther**

WPVGA Industry Appreciation Awards: **Ann MacGuidwin, Dana Rady and Doug Rouse**

Agri-Communicator Award: **Dan Mahoney**

Recognition of out-going WPVGA Associate Division Board Members: **Chris Brooks, Rich Wilcox and Justin Yach**

Recognition of out-going WPVGA Board Member: **Wes Meddaugh**

WPVGA Hall of Fame Induction: **Paul Miller**



Ann MacGuidwin



Doug Rouse

Paul Miller Inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame

In the 1960's and '70s, Hancock, Wisconsin, and the surrounding farmland was the largest bean production area for Green Giant. Many high school and college students worked for Green Giant during the summers in the production plant, shop and as novice mechanics. Paul Miller was no different.

In fact, when Paul graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, in 1965, he went back to work for Green Giant in his hometown of Beaver Dam.

Paul had grown up on his own family's farm, started by his great-great-grandparents in the 1850s, in Beaver Dam. There, he vividly remembers plowing a field at the age of 8.

Fresh out of college, Paul moved to

Fort Smith, Arkansas, working for Green Giant as a field man in the production areas there and in the great state of Oklahoma.

"Then I moved to Hancock," he says, "and worked at what was called Foster Farm at the time. That's a mile straight west of where I am now."

Where Paul is now is Paul Miller Farms, Inc., of Hancock, and some 70 years after plowing those fields in Beaver Dam at the age of 8, he's still farming.

As president of the farming operation, Paul works with his son, Todd, daughter, Michelle, and grandsons, Jordan and Ian, raising 2,800 acres of vegetables, including potatoes, sweet corn, snap beans and peas, and growing 525 acres of carrots for Bird's Eye Foods and Del Monte.



Paul Miller was inducted into the WPVGA Hall of Fame, February 9, for his lifelong commitment to the Wisconsin potato industry.

Paul Miller Farms is also the U.S. dealer selling ASA-LIFT vegetable harvester parts, which is based in Denmark in Europe.



Paul Miller's family came out in full force to help him celebrate his induction into the WPVGA Hall of Fame. They are, from left to right, Jordan Miller, Raiven Breseman, Jennifer Breseman, Jaiya Breseman, Linda Breseman, Paul, Kayte Miller, Ian Miller, Makenzie Conley, Austin Conley, Nancy Miller, Todd Miller, Michelle Miller-Patterson and Bill Patterson.

FAMILY FARM

Todd is the vice president of Paul Miller Farms and performs various farming duties. He supervises potato seed cutting, runs the anhydrous operation and helps manage Gramma Miller's Farm Market (a fresh produce and flower retail store). Todd also manages the parts department for the ASA-LIFT vegetable harvester dealership.

Michelle is the farm's secretary/treasurer and serves as office manager, handling administrative, marketing, bookkeeping and other financial needs for the farm's operations. She also helps in the management of Gramma Miller's Market.

Michelle's son, Jordan, and Todd's son, Ian, help with other farm responsibilities.

Paul Miller's decision, in 1967, to leave Green Giant and become the farm manager for Badger Growers, a 1,000-acre green bean and sweet corn operation located in Hancock, was a turning point.

In addition to raising snap beans and sweet corn, Paul grew potatoes for American Potato (which later became Basic American Foods). In 1990, he and his two children bought all the assets of Badger Growers and formed Paul Miller Farms, Inc. an 1,100-acre irrigated potato and vegetable operation.

The farm has continued to grow over the years. Today, including rented land, the Millers farm 2,800 acres of potatoes and vegetables in Waushara County, all under irrigation.

In addition to processing vegetable production, Gramma Miller's Farm Market is open from May 1 through October 31, selling fresh produce in season, flowers, canned goods, meats, honey and maple syrup, as well as locally grown and produced wines.

A three-acre field is dedicated to specialty crops for the farm market,

such as tomatoes, squash, peppers, cucumbers, pumpkins, Brussels sprouts, eggplant, melons, gourds and Indian corn.

All potatoes are of the Burbank variety, with at least 90 percent going to McCain Foods for processing. In 2021, the other 10 percent were sold for the fresh market.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Paul is the long-time chairman of the township of Hancock, a past-president of the Hancock Lion's Club and the chairman of the Hancock Cemetery Association.

For 54 years, he was a WIAA boys and girls basketball referee, and is a

continued on pg. 30

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proud supporter of Ice Hawks hockey, having had a grandson on the team. Paul is a member and supporter of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Plainfield and a major contributor to the Waushara County Food Bank for many years.

Paul was named the Waushara County Citizen of the Year in 2010. He was honored with the Beaver Dam High School Wall of Fame in 2007 and received an Honorary State FFA Degree in 2003.

Paul's family includes longtime friend, Linda; his son, Todd; daughters Michelle and Jennifer; grandchildren, Ian, Jordan, Makenzie, Austin, Raiven and Jaiya; and four great-grandchildren, Blake, Joslyn, Sutton and Allie Jo.

"My kids and their kids have worked together since they were very small to help build this operation into the successful organization that it is today," Paul says. "While sometimes challenging, there is nothing more rewarding and bonding for a family than knowing that everyone's efforts have contributed significantly."

Stating one of his hobbies as "NASCAR," Paul and his grandson, Jordan, managed to find time to work on the fuel crew for the Sunoco Oil Company automobile racing team.

"There have been times when being a potato and vegetable grower has been challenging," Paul admits. "I had neighbors in the area when we started growing for American Potato, and nine of us went in together, forming sort of a coop."

"It was like old-time farming when they thrashed grain," he says. "When it was time for potato harvest, five of us had trucks and there were two potato harvesters, and we'd go from farm to farm, neighbor to neighbor, harvesting potatoes. That's where it started."

"It's a major honor, obviously, to be named a WPVGA Hall of Fame member after all these years," Paul concludes.

Congratulations, Paul, on your induction into the WPVGA Hall of Fame. **BCT**



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Complete List of WPVGA Hall of Fame Members and Years Inducted

1990

Joseph L. Bushman
Ben H. Diercks
Myron Mommsen
Edward J. Okray
John Okray
W. James Prosser
Lelah Starks
James D. Swan
Barron G. West
Felix Zeloski

1991

Henry M. Darling
Robert H. Diercks
Melvin E. Luther
Albert M. Pavelski
Henry L. Woodward

1992

Lawrence Krogwold
Michael Patrykus
John A. Schoenemann
Clarence Worzella
Louis E. Wysocki

1993

Champ Bean Tanner
Ernest Bushman
Melvin Hugo Rominsky
Lawrence (Larry) Lapcinski
Wayne Brittenham

1994

James Burns, Sr.
Myron D. Groskopp
James Wencel
(J.W.) Mattek
Hal Roberts

1995

A.F. (Bill) Hoeft
Bennett Katz
Eugene Katz
Donn "Hokey" West

1996

Charles M. Creuziger
Alois (Al) Okray
Joseph Jacob Okray
Stanley J. Peloquin

1997

Anton (Tony) Gallenberg
Howard F. Chilewski

1998

Dave Curwen
Francis Gilson
Emil Perzinski

1999

John J. Bushman
James G. Milward

2000

Dean Kincaid
Henry V. Sowinski

2001

(Presented in Feb. 2002)
James J. Mattek
Francis X. Wysocki

2002

(Presented in Feb. 2003)
Robert Hougas
Gerri Okray

2003

(Presented in Jan. 2004)
Larry Binning
Peter Wallendal

2004

(Presented in Feb. 2005)
Jerome Bushman
Harold Sargent

2005

(Presented in Feb. 2006)
Ed Wade
Dennis Zeloski

2006

(Presented in Feb. 2007)
Don Kichefski

2007

(Presented in Feb. 2008)
Walt Stevenson

2008

(Presented in Feb. 2009)
Victor Anthony
Jeffrey Wyman

2009

(Presented in Feb. 2010)
John Landa
Robert Stodola

2010

(Presented in Feb. 2011)
John H. Schroeder
August Winkler

2011

(Presented in Feb. 2012)
Fred and Kathryn Meyer
Howard "Skip" Tenpas

2012

(Presented in Feb. 2013)
Steve Diercks
Mike Finnessy

2013

(Presented in Feb. 2014)
Myron Soik

2014

(Presented in Feb. 2015)
Robert Helbach

2015

(Presented in Feb. 2016)
Charles Cofer
Robert Guentchner

2016

(Presented in Feb. 2017)
Donald Hamerski
Richard Pavelski

2017

(Presented in Feb. 2018)
Nick Somers

2018

(Presented in Feb. 2019)
Dr. Keith Kelling

2019

(Presented in Feb. 2020)
Larry Alsum
Dick Okray

2020

(Presented in Feb. 2021)
Marv Worzella
Norm Worzella

2021

(Presented in Feb. 2022)
Paul Miller