



## Member Development Program Positions Organization for Future Success

Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association gives members the tools they need to succeed

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

It is only by preparing members to be effective that the future success of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) and industry will be realized.

Under that premise, the WPVGA plans and runs a Member Development Program every two years, except during the pandemic in 2021, to give young and future leaders the tools they need to succeed.

On March 16, 2022, 13 graduates of the 2021-'22 Member Development Program attended their last session and enjoyed a nice celebratory social hour and dinner with a short graduation ceremony and photo opportunity.

The purpose of this program is to

provide members of the WPVGA, WPVGA Associate Division and Wisconsin Potato Growers Auxiliary with the opportunity to learn about and actively participate in the various facets of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry.

The Member Development Program exposes participants to relevant information, resources, activities, and networking opportunities.

Designed as a five-month program, one session is held each month between November and March, and this year participants could choose whether to attend in-person or virtually.

Participants are expected to attend all five sessions, with each being approximately five to seven hours in

length and focusing on a particular topic, skill, or issue relevant to the potato and vegetable growing industry.

Preparatory material is provided prior to each session to enhance the value of the meeting and/or associated relevant experience.

**Above:** Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Executive Director Tamas Houlihan poses with graduates of the 2021-'22 Member Development Program. They are, in the front row, left to right, Ann Hoffman, Misti Ward, Curtis Meister, Morgan Forbush and Nicola Carey; second row, left to right, Samantha Konkol, Donald Maum and Houlihan; third row, left to right, Josh Johnson, John Bustamante and Dan Walsch; and top row, left to right, Beau Hartline, Mike Johnson and Jared Suchon.



The November 2021 program curriculum included a WPVGA overview, program orientation and welcome at the Heartland Farms' Farm Operations, Technology & Training Center in Hancock, Wisconsin.

### BOARD STRUCTURES

It included an explanation by WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan of board structures, missions, and functions; a farm tour given by Jeremie Pavelski of Heartland Farms; and a presentation titled "Communicating Assertively: Discovering the Win-Win Scenario," by Andy Marris, a certified professional in talent development (CPTD) from the MRA employer association.

The December "Research & Technology" session took place at the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Storage Research Facility (SRF) and Hancock Agricultural Research Station (HARS).



As part of the March 2022 "Strategic Planning, Media Training and Graduation" session, program participant Nicola Carey (left), business and agronomy analyst for Wysocki Produce Company, takes part in a mock media interview with Brian Knox (right), public relations executive for Laughlin Constable.

The objective of the meeting was for participants to gain a better understanding of issues and problems facing production agriculture and learn how the industry is working to improve all aspects of potato and vegetable production while emphasizing

environmental stewardship.

Troy Fishler, HARS superintendent, and Amber Walker, SRF manager, outlined the storage research projects and their relevance to the WPVGA.

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Taking part in a potato chip taste test are, from left to right, Don Maum of Alsum Farms, Jared Suchon of Bushman's Riverside Ranch, Mike Johnson of McCain Foods, Nicola Carey of Wysocki Family of Companies, and Curtis Meister of Reabe Spraying Service.

The session included a tour of the Storage Research Facility, a potato tasting panel, a roundtable made up of University of Wisconsin potato researchers and professors, a seed certification overview, and a breakdown of Healthy Grown by Deana Knuteson, program director.

For the January 2022 "Governmental

Affairs" session, program participants traveled to DeWitt, LLP Law Firm, and the State Capitol in Madison.

The purpose was to gain an understanding of the legislative process; become familiar with key legislators; learn about issues critical to the success of the potato and vegetable industry, and agriculture



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in general; and become effective at communicating industry viewpoints.

WPVGA attorneys and lobbyists Jordan Lamb of Dewitt, Ross LLP, and Rob Marchant, Michael Best Strategies, discussed state and federal government, legislators and Congress, and their roles relevant to the WPVGA.

That was followed by a presentation by Lamb, Marchant, Mike Carter of Bushmans' Inc. and Steve Diercks, Coloma Farms, on effective advocacy techniques and current WPVGA legislative issues.

### NATIONAL ISSUES

Houlihan and Larry Alsum of Alsum Farms & Produce also discussed current National Potato Council legislative issues.

At the State Capitol, participants met with Sen. Patrick Testin and toured the Senate floor; Speaker Robin Vos, including a tour of the Assembly floor; and with Gov. Tony Evers' staff and a tour of the Governor's Conference Room.

Springville Sports Grill hosted the February "Promotions and Marketing" session, with the objective of members becoming



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Donald Maum (left) and Curtis Meister cook up potato-based fudge as part of a Wisconsin potatoes cooking challenge hosted by Rockman's Catering.

familiar with current trends in agriculture employment, labor, economics, and markets, all of which are critical to the future success of the industry.

Further objectives included



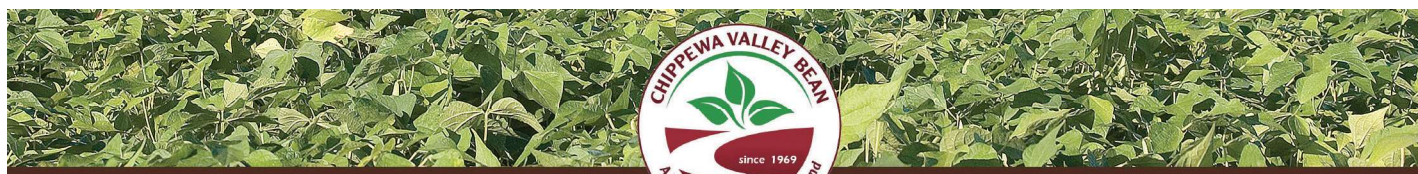
Jeremie Pavelski (second from right, facing gathered crowd) gives a tour of Heartland Farms to Member Development Program participants

understanding Wisconsin's strengths in the potato industry and how to capitalize on them through promotional and marketing campaigns, and to demonstrate teamwork and camaraderie through a

cooking challenge while having great fun.

Dana Rady, WPVGA director of promotions and consumer education, and Brian Lee, chairman of the

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WPVGA Promotions Committee, outlined current programming.

Fred Steinmann, assistant research professor, The College of Business, University of Nevada, Reno, gave a presentation on "Economic, Employment and Labor Trends."

A panel discussion on market forces and trends included representatives from Alsum Farms & Produce, Bushmans' Inc., Coloma Farms and

Okray Family Farms.

The group activity of the day was a Wisconsin potatoes cooking challenge hosted by Rockman's Catering, in which participants made potato-based fudge and potato donuts.

The final March 2022 "Strategic Planning, Media Training and Graduation" session took place at Swartzendruber's Supper Club in Antigo.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

The objective was to provide participants with an opportunity to tie together what they learned by weaving it into a bigger picture, identify strategic priorities for industry leadership, and recognize roles they can take in moving the industry forward.

It was also to provide participants with critical media training and key principles of effective public relations.

Public relations experts from the firm Laughlin Constable of Milwaukee provided media training and conducted mock interviews with program participants, which were recorded and made available to all for review.

Dinner and a graduation reception followed.

Participants are selected by the WPVGA from submitted applications on the basis of their potential as active members and future leaders in the potato and vegetable growing industry.

Candidates represent one or more of the following segments of the industry: chip grower, seed grower, process grower, fresh grower/ marketer, vegetable division grower, farm office worker, or any facet of the WPVGA Associate Division categories or the Auxiliary.

Chosen candidates exhibit a willingness to commit time and effort to prepare for sessions and actively participate in all aspects of the program.

Program participants pay a nominal fee of \$250 and are expected to make their own personal arrangements to attend sessions and related activities (including transportation, meals outside of the sessions, and lodging if necessary).

Costs associated with conducting the program are borne by the WPVGA with support provided by the Associate Division in keeping with its mission to support the growth and development of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry. **BCT**

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