

INTERVIEW



GALLENBERG FARMS INC.

ROY GALLENBERG,

vice president/co-owner, Gallenberg Farms, Inc.

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



NAME: Roy Gallenberg

TITLE: Vice president/co-owner

COMPANY: Gallenberg Farms, Inc.

LOCATION: Antigo, WI

HOMETOWN: Antigo

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: Thirty-six years as vice president, and 43 years in farming as a whole

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: n/a

SCHOOLING: Antigo High School and Northcentral Technical College

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Faith United Church of Christ

FAMILY: Wife, Missy, four children and four grandchildren

HOBBIES: Hunting, volleyball, and kayaking

Roy Gallenberg grew up being a part of the farm, from helping with harvest and driving tractor as a kid, to becoming a partner at the age of 25.

In all, Gallenberg Farms, Inc., of Antigo, Wisconsin, has been in operation for 112 years. In 1910, Albert Gallenberg started a dairy farm where he grew 20 acres of potatoes, a specialty crop that the workers would dig by hand and ship from the field in fall.

Forty-five years later, Albert's son, Robert, took over the farm with his brother, Tony. They sold the dairy part of the operation so they could focus solely on seed potatoes,

eventually buying more land and converting the dairy barn into a potato storage facility.

The brothers farmed 70 acres of potatoes, and created Gallenberg Equipment, a company that specifically manufactured potato equipment.

Above: Roy Gallenberg is the vice-president and co-owner (along with his brother, John) of Gallenberg Farms, Inc., a multi-generational certified seed potato growing operation in Antigo, Wisconsin.

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The farm grew along with their newly created business, which ultimately allowed Tony to take over Gallenberg Equipment and Robert to continue to farm.

About 30 years later, Robert retired, leaving the farm to his sons, the current owners/operators, Roy and John Gallenberg.

In the late '80s, Roy's and John's brother-in-law, Loren Barske, also joined the farm, which expanded throughout the years to include several hundred acres of potatoes, oats, and in previous years, wheat.

Roy is currently president of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association (WSPIA) Board of Directors.

Do you have a favorite memory of growing up on the farm, Roy? I remember trying to dump wheelbarrows of dirt and rocks during harvest and how difficult it was to balance them when you're a kid. I remember the satisfaction of being successful at it after a few tries! Also, being pretty young and getting to drive tractor for simple jobs.

When did you go full-time, and how have your own duties evolved, with you now running the certified seed potato operation with your brother, John, correct? Basically, when I

graduated from high school, my duties increased gradually as I gained experience. John and I took over all responsibilities after my dad retired in 1995.

Are there other family members involved on the farm, and if so, who and in what capacities? My brother-in-law, Loren, is our mechanic and harvester operator. He has worked for us for 35 years and is a great asset to the farm.

My wife does the office bookkeeping and I have a cousin that works on the

Above: Cut seed potatoes are loaded into a Harriston planter while John Gallenberg supervises from above.

grading line. We are blessed to have an extraordinary crew, some of whom have been with us for many years.

How many acres of certified and foundation seed potatoes do you grow on the farm, and what varieties? This year, we grew 240 acres. Our main varieties are Dark Red Norland, Red Prairie, Oneida Gold, Superior, and Goldrush.

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Do you work closely with the Lelah Starks Elite Foundation Seed Potato Farm in Rhinelander?

The (WSPIA) Seed Board has tried to help and advise the staff in Rhinelander on making some changes that we feel would be beneficial. We have made several trips there to look at their equipment to optimize their efficiency.

With seed potatoes, cleanliness and the meeting of strict regulations are paramount. Can you describe what must be done in those respects to put out a healthy certified seed potato crop?

All our equipment and storage areas are cleaned and disinfected before harvest and again before planting in the spring. We also follow GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) guidelines.

I imagine there's a lot of cleaning between lots for different seed varieties, and cleaning of



Tony (left) and Robert "Bob" Gallenberg show off harvested seed potatoes in this 1970s photo. Two decades later, Bob retired, leaving the farm to his sons, the current owners/operators, Roy and John Gallenberg.

implements? When planting, we clean and disinfect our cutter between varieties. In the fall, we mostly make sure there are no remnants left on the machines and remove as much debris as possible.



The view from the throne (in this case a John Deere tractor) is good of a Gallenberg Farms potato field.

Do you also grow fresh potatoes, and who are your customers? All our potatoes are seed potatoes, but about 25% end up on the fresh market. We usually sell through local brokers, and the potatoes end up at



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re-packers around the country.

Do you grow other crops/vegetables, and on what type of rotation? This year, we grew green beans and sweet corn, as well as winter wheat and oats. We are usually on a three-year rotation, but some fields have been as high as five years.

Do you work closely with potato growers in Wisconsin for seed potato sales, and do you enjoy that aspect of the operation? We have many Wisconsin growers who buy our seed, from small organic growers to very larger commercial growers. We also sell a small amount to farm market growers.

I really enjoy the diversity of our customers and the relationships formed over the years.

Wisconsin has a solid reputation for clean, disease-free seed. To what do you attribute that reputation? There are many reasons. It all starts with UW Madison and the State Farm and their dedication to producing quality, early generation seed for Wisconsin seed growers to propagate.

It also comes down to our overall commitment in the industry to not cut corners and allow problems to snowball.

You are the president of the WSPIA Board. Why is such involvement important to you, Roy? WSPIA is our voice in the industry. We have more influence as a group than we do as individual growers.

It's important to get our association's issues heard and benefits to the potato industry known. WSPIA and the WPVGA are great assets to our industry.

Do you feel in some ways that you and the other seed growers in your area are stewards of food supply and safety? Seed growers are at the beginning of the potato food chain. Many seed potato growers have GAP and other food safety certifications.

We have, as an industry, changed

practices to improve the food quality and safety of our products. We've made changes to equipment and buildings to improve the potatoes as we harvest and store them.

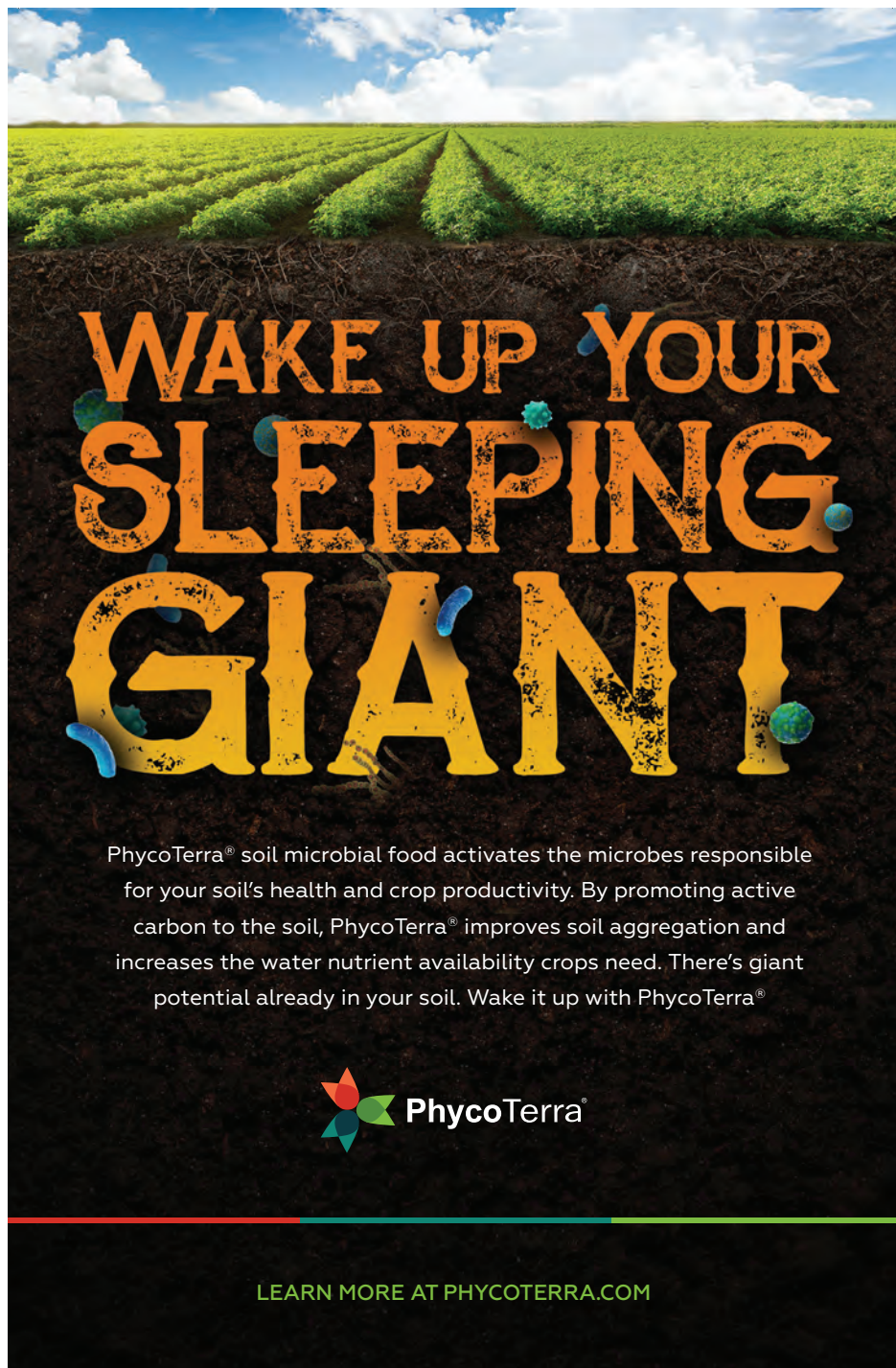
How has providing certified seed potatoes changed in your time?

The size of farms in our industry has gotten larger on average. The industry has changed significantly on how we supply our product to our

customers, from using 100-pound burlap bags to bulk shipments and totes, as well as changes in varieties for both disease control and customer satisfaction.


Has technology evolved the industry, and if so, how? Technology has dramatically changed many aspects of our industry. Many farms now use GPS guidance on machinery to be

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“I really enjoy the diversity of our customers and the relationships formed over the years.”

– Roy Gallenberg

Right: Roy Gallenberg says the 2022 potato harvest went extraordinarily smooth for Gallenberg Farms with few weather events or other problems. Here, he holds freshly dug Superior certified seed potatoes.



more efficient and lessen the stress during planting and harvesting.

GPS on tractors makes life a lot easier, allowing operators to focus

more attention on what is happening behind the machine and evaluate operations rather than keeping rows straight ahead.

Inline grading machines and scales have helped with personnel issues and shipping accuracy. Even

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Is there a fourth generation that is ready to take over Gallenberg Farms in Antigo? Unfortunately, no, there will not be a fourth generation for Gallenberg Farms. All children of the

operation are grown and involved in other careers.

What do you hope for the future of the operation? We are hoping to transition out of potatoes in the coming years and either operate as a process crop and grain farm or lease land to other seed potato growers and farmers.

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Above: A longtime supporter of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association and current president of the Board, Roy Gallenberg and his family take part in the Spud Seed Classic golf tournament fundraiser each year. The first image shows his 2020 team, who are, from left to right, Jack Ramuta, John Kryka, Roy, and John Birno. The second photo features, from left to right, Jeremy Weber, Roy's daughters, Katy Weber and Kimberly Roesler, and Willy Roesler at the 2022 Spud Seed Classic.

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What do you hope for the future of the WSPIA? I hope that WSPIA can help guide the industry forward over the coming years. Change is happening fast. I've noticed that since being on the Board, and thankfully, the young men and women are up to the challenges of the future!

The other current board members

are very dedicated to the industry as a whole, and more particularly, the seed potato sector.

Anything I've missed, Roy, that you'd like to add? The only thing I would add is that there are many players in our industry that have a vital part in the success of seed growers. From the WPVGA staff to input or fertilizer

Above: Superior certified seed potatoes are windrowed and harvested on September 22, 2022, at Gallenberg Farms. On that day, roughly 200 acres had been harvested with 40 left to go.

and crop protection product dealers, packaging providers and haulers. They all deserve much credit for our success. **BC'T**

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