



INTERVIEW

BRYAN HENNINGER,

president and chief executive officer (CEO),
Ag World Support Systems LLC

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



NAME: Bryan Henninger

TITLE: President & CEO

COMPANY: Ag World Support Systems LLC

LOCATION: Moses Lake, WA

HOMETOWN: Moses Lake

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: 19

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: East Gates International

SCHOOLING: Bachelor of Arts in business/economics with a minor in Chinese studies from Wheaton College

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Elder at Moses Lake Presbyterian church; REACT Services Board treasurer; and C12 founding member of the Inland Northwest Group

AWARDS/HONORS: Served as student body president at Wheaton College

FAMILY: Married for 26 years to Nancy (high school sweetheart); five children, ages 9-21; one chocolate Labrador Retriever (Dakota); and usually at least one or more cats

HOBBIES: Basketball, travel, spending time with family, and real estate

"My grandfather was a potato farmer in Pennsylvania. My father was a potato man at the core. I was more of a businessman," relates Bryan Henninger, president and CEO of Ag World Support Systems of Moses Lake, Washington.

Family owned since 1997, Ag World Support Systems was founded by Bryan's dad, Warren Henninger, to meet an industry need for an independent, third-party inspection company.

"The inspection services provided by the state or processor would sometimes be inconsistent," Bryan explains, "and they couldn't adapt quickly to customer needs."

"This company could represent the grower and processor and treat both sides fairly," he adds. "Not burdened by bureaucracy, Ag World Support Systems could pivot and do things in a quick manner."

Focused on agricultural commodity inspections, sampling and analysis, Ag World Support Systems works with growers and processors to ensure a fair exchange based on the grower/processor contract.

Warren's entire life and career were spent working in the potato industry,

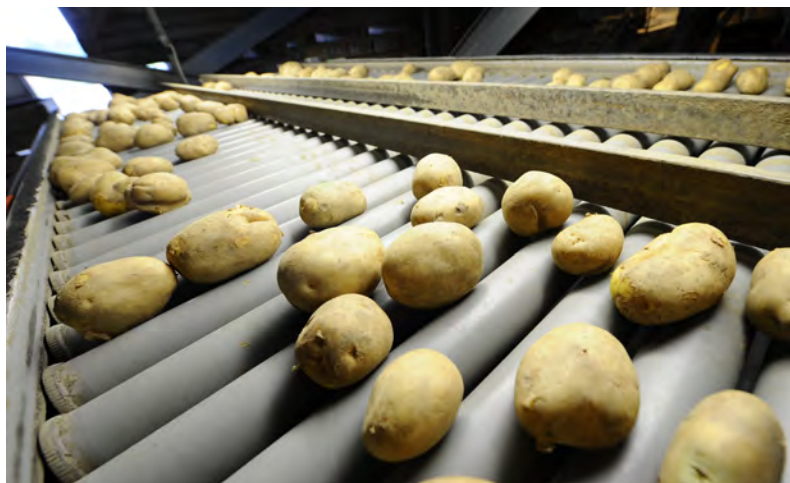
in Idaho and Oregon before moving to Washington.

After graduate school, he went to work as a county agent for onions and potatoes, then was hired by Simplot and later Carnation, where he eventually became a regional manager. Carnation was bought out by Nestle, then Simplot.

MCDONALD'S FRENCH FRIES

One of Warren's career highlights was taking the first seed potatoes to China for McDonald's French fries.

Above: Ag World Support Systems President and CEO Bryan Henninger, shown in his office, says that the family-owned business was founded by his dad, Warren Henninger, to meet an industry need for an independent, third-party agricultural inspection company. Bryan's mom, Judy, pictured at center in the second photo with a young Bryan (left) and Warren (right), helped start Ag World and continues to be involved in the company, currently serving as ambassador and chaplain.



Bryan, meanwhile, spent time in Hong Kong doing an internship with McDonald's, in 1994, then went on to study in China for a semester in Changsha.

"I was able to visit the Simplot China manufacturing plant with my father back in 1994," he says. "I came to work for Ag World Support Systems full time in January of 1999."

"My mom, Judy, helped Dad start Ag World and continues to be involved in the company, currently serving as ambassador and chaplain," he says. "Just like a chaplain in the Senate or military branches, Mom serves as a resource to support our employees spiritually, mentally, and emotionally."

"It's hard to believe we've been in business 25 years," Bryan observes, "and these last few years have been a super challenging period."

"Not only have we dealt with COVID and all the issues related to that, but we also experienced a gaping hole in our family and business with Dad's sudden passing in May 2020," he states.

Tell me a bit about your dad's history in the potato industry. Dad grew up on a potato farm in Pennsylvania. He absolutely loved everything about potatoes and growing them.

He did his undergraduate studies at Penn State in agronomy and went on to graduate school at Oregon State University.

Dad would have gone back to work on the family farm, but his father said there was not a future in potato farming in Pennsylvania and encouraged him to go out West where the future of potatoes seemed to be growing.

This was especially true with the addition of irrigation and great hot days and cool nights, which are perfect conditions for growing potatoes.

My dad's position was being eliminated and he was given the choice of relocation into a new job outside of Moses Lake or to take

Above: Driven by the grower/processor contract, Ag World inspection services analyzes internal defects of potato, such as hollow heart and brown center, and external defects like greening and soft rot, as well as qualities like size and specific gravity. A customer-driven business, the company generates a Request For Inspection (RFI) that is derived from the grower/processor contract and clearly outlines what qualities and defects customers want Ag World inspection services to analyze.

early retirement. He opted for early retirement and then began Ag World Support Systems LLC.

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Dad realized from the very beginning that getting a good team together was crucial to the success of this new venture.

What is your own background and history working for Ag World Support Systems?

Being native to Washington State, I graduated from Wheaton College with a major in business/economics and a minor in Chinese studies, in 1996.

My first job at Ag World was sample supervisor during the first harvest in 1998. Having joined Ag World as corporate coordinator, I became president in 2003 and assumed the additional role of CEO in 2007.

Now a global company, Ag World provides third-party inspection services in 21 locations, seven states/provinces, and three countries.

Why was there a need for an independent third-party agricultural inspection company, particularly in the potato industry? While working as a regional manager for Carnation/Nestle/Simplot, Dad observed that often there was inconsistency in the grade and an inability to adapt quickly to customer needs.



He mentioned for several years how someone should privatize the industry and provide third-party inspection services. He then started Ag World Support Systems to do just that.

The company came to provide clarity between growers and processors, a higher level of service, willingness to listen, and transparency in the grade.

Ag World's vision is to continue expanding around the world, assisting customers, both growers and processors, by providing the

best possible inspection information for grower payment and optimal processing performance.

What specific services do you provide? Inspections for payment for processed potatoes and vegetables, and additional inspections for harvestability, storability, and processability. We also provide raw lab services.

What other vegetables do services include? We provide inspections at many vegetable plants in Washington and Oregon that process corn, carrots, peas, onions, and many other vegetables.

Ag World Support Systems has inspection stations set up at processing plants, including at McCain Foods in Plover, Wisconsin. How many locations and where are the stations? We are in 21 locations, including Caldwell, Idaho; Easton, Maine; Jamestown and Grand Forks,



Above & Left: Company founder Warren Henninger is never far out of sight or mind for his wife and children. In the first image, son Bryan Henninger stands next to a tribute wall dedicated to his dad. In the second photo, from left to right, Bryan poses with Warren's son-in-law and daughter, Adam and Melanie Finch, and wife, Judy, behind a poster board remembering and honoring the founder of Ag World Support Systems and the Ag World Golf Classic.

North Dakota; Albany and Brooks, Oregon; Moses Lake, Pasco, Quincy, and Winchester, Washington; Plover, Wisconsin; Carberry and Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada; and Yinchuan, China, some with two locations each.

What types of qualities and internal or external defects are you looking for in potatoes?

We inspect to the grower/processor agreed-upon contract. Internal defects such as hollow heart, brown center and external defects such as green and rot are some of the attributes we look for in our inspection.

Do you consider fry quality and color, and specific gravity?

Driven by the grower/processor contract, we analyze potatoes for sugar content using everything from the Munsell Fry Color Chart to AgTron and Photovolt machines—whatever our customers request.

We generate a Request For Inspection (RFI) that is derived from the grower/processor contract and clearly outlines what our customers want us to do.

We are a customer-driven business representing both parties. We only make changes to what we are doing when both parties agree to such a change.

Are you doing hand and machine inspections?

Both—we do manual inspections and use technology to provide our inspection services, whatever our customers want us to do.

Do you work mostly with processing potatoes or also fresh?

Right now, all our inspections are for processed potatoes and vegetables.

Do you also check size and quality?

Yes, we check size pursuant to the grower/processor contract and RFI. The inspections we perform vary from plant to plant across North America, because each processing facility has a unique contract with their grower group.

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*“We must remain unbiased.
That is our job. We do it right
the first time.”*

– Bryan Henninger



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Do you have to follow U.S. Department of Agriculture standards? The USDA standards are a basis for a lot of contracts across North America (and around the world). We follow the direction of our customers (the growers and processors) and what is agreed upon in their contract.

Do you consider the company to be

a bridge between the growers and processors? Yes, we are a bridge between the growers and processors. We try to ensure both sides know what is in their contracts and how it affects payment.

We provide education sessions for both growers and processors to participate in and encourage our customers to come and view the

Above: Company founder Warren Henninger is shown in the first vintage photo with his own father, Harold, who is driving the tractor during potato harvest. Warren, whose entire life and career were spent working in the potato industry, kneels in a potato field in the second image.

inspection process in person.

Do most growers have incentives in their contracts for quality, and thus, get paid more for quality? Yes, the agreed-to contract between the grower and processor specifies how the payment will be made based on quality.

Most contracts have incentive and deceptive clauses based upon certain quality attributes; this leads to growers being paid more or less for their product.

Our job is to make sure inspections are done correctly in coordination with their contract and ensure proper payment is made.

We also help educate both sides as to how their agreement works and what growers could do to improve their results and deliver a product the processor most desires.



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Is it difficult to remain unbiased? No, the agreed-to contract really drives the payment, and our job is to be consistent and accurate in our grade to provide the best service to both parties.

We strive to do it right the first time and our rigorous quality assurance program helps keep us between the lines.

“If we mess up, we fess up”—this is something Dad always said. We must

remain unbiased. That is our job.

How many customers are you serving? We are serving five processor customers and eight grower organizations in the U.S., Canada, and China.

We are looking to expand into other markets as customers request our service. Our vision has always been to follow the major potato processing customers around the world, servicing both their and

Above: The Ag World Support Systems management team poses for a photo in 2019.

their growers’ needs.

Your father was community minded and philanthropic. Is Ag World Support Systems carrying on that tradition, and how? Yes, Ag World continues to carry on my father’s heart to give back through the Ag World Golf Classic benefiting the Ronald McDonald House Charities Inland Northwest.

It will be our 10th annual tournament next year with a total giving of \$749,254 since its beginning in 2014. It’s truly amazing how God has blessed that event. My goal is to exceed the \$1,000,000 mark raised during those 10 years and donated to the Ronald McDonald House.

We also give back in our location communities through various charities. At the end of every year, we offer a charity match to our employees.

We also have a “Go and Serve” program for management that encourages them to go and serve in

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their community or on mission trips anywhere in the world, providing for one week of company paid time off for every five years of service.

We are grateful for the opportunities to give back. One of our core values is to serve. We do this as a way of








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Above: Ag World Support Systems provides education sessions for potato growers and processors and encourages customers to come and view the inspection process in person. The company also helps educate both sides as to how their agreement works and what potato growers could do to improve their results and deliver a product the processor most desires.



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Warren Henninger and his son, Bryan, pose in front of the Simplot company truck in this 1977 photo. After graduate school, Warren went to work as a county agent for onions and potatoes, then was hired by Simplot and later Carnation, where he eventually became a regional manager. Carnation was bought out by Nestle, then Simplot.



Judy and Warren Henninger visited the Wisconsin Dells, in 2019, for the National Potato Council Annual Meeting.



Ag World Support Systems President and CEO Bryan Henninger poses with his wife, Nancy (left), and their five children.

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giving back to the communities of which we are a part.

Why is it important to you? We not only want to carry on Dad's legacy, but to bless others as we have been blessed. God has provided in so many ways through the years and we want to be able to pass some of those blessings on.

Work is about more than just dollars and cents. It's about how you serve people, serve communities, and make a difference. In honoring God, we are trying to honor others also.

Are there other services the company provides that I've missed?

We also provide database services to our customers trying to help them

manage their inspection results.

Is there anything else you'd like to add, Bryan? I'm thankful, as most of us are, to be getting beyond the COVID pandemic, going to trade shows and working on business development.

Ag World was blessed to continue growing through new business development during COVID and we look forward to that continued growth as we serve the needs of our current and future customers.

COVID in 2020 was very hard, especially with the loss of my father. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have built Ag World with my dad and be able to carry on his legacy. **BC'T**



Driven by the grower/processor contract, Ag World Support Systems analyzes potatoes for sugar content using everything from the Munsell Fry Color Chart to AgTron and Photovolt machines, whatever French fry customers request.

Above: Shown with his wife, Judy, and Ronald McDonald in these images, Warren Henninger served on the Board of the Ronald McDonald House Charities Inland Northwest and founded the Ag World Golf Classic benefitting the Ronald McDonald House. Over the past nine years, since its beginning in 2014, the golf outing has raised \$749,254 for the Ronald McDonald House. Warren's daughter, Melanie Finch, chief strategy and marketing officer for Ag World, now serves on the Ronald McDonald House Board representing the company.