



2022 IN REVIEW: ANOTHER GOOD YEAR FOR THE WISCONSIN POTATO INDUSTRY

The state had an outstanding harvest season with great conditions in September and October

By Tamas Houlihan, Executive Director, WPVGA

Crop Report: Late Start, Great Finish

The Wisconsin potato crop report can be summed up in four words: Late Start, Great Finish! The 2022 Wisconsin potato crop got off to a late start due to cold and wet weather in April. Planting was delayed and the crop was about two weeks behind schedule throughout much of the growing season.

Mostly dry conditions persisted throughout the summer, although there were a few timely rainfalls. With the extensive use of irrigation, the crop turned out very well. Pest pressure was not severe, and there was no late blight in Wisconsin in 2022.

Wisconsin had an outstanding harvest season, with close to ideal conditions throughout September and October in most of the state's primary growing regions.

Yields were average and quality was excellent. Statewide yields averaged about 425 cwt. (hundredweight)/acre on 63,000 acres of potatoes. This puts the state's production at 26.775 million cwt., a decrease of 525,000 cwt., or 2% compared to last year.

Total planted acres are down from last year, which was reported to be approximately 65,000. This year, the estimate is 63,000 planted acres. The decline in production is primarily due to the decrease in acreage. Yields are up approximately 5 cwt./acre over last year.



A planter is filled with seed potatoes at Heartland Farms, Inc., Hancock. Despite a late start to the planting season, the Wisconsin potato crop turned out to be an excellent one due in large part to an outstanding harvest season.

New Law Makes Grants Available to Farmers to Improve Water Quality

In the spring 2022, Wisconsin signed into law Wisconsin Act 223, which creates a Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Grant Program and a Cover Crop Insurance Premium Rebate Program.

The nitrogen optimization grant program is designed to incentivize farmer-led water quality improvements. The WPVGA and other Wisconsin farmers strongly support the farmer-led nitrate reduction initiatives contained in Wis. Act 223.

In accordance with the Act, the Joint Committee on Finance appropriated \$1.6 million in FY (fiscal year) 2023 to establish the nitrogen pilot grant program at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

Farmers will work in collaboration with a University of Wisconsin (UW) system campus to optimize the use of commercial nitrogen through projects funded with grants of up to \$50,000.

The collaborating UW institution is eligible for 20% of the total grant award for each project. Several WPVGA-member farms are currently working on applying for multiple grants through this program.

Additionally, funds are available for another key provision of Wis. Act 223, a cover crop insurance premium rebate of \$5 per acre to help offset the costs to plant cover crops.

This is funded at \$800,000 in FY 2023. Based on similar programs in other states, we know that incentives to encourage planting cover crops work to reduce agricultural runoff and improve water quality.

WPVGA Farms Participate in Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

Seven WPVGA-member farms in Central Wisconsin are working together on a Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant project to protect the watershed that includes the Little Plover River and a portion of the Wisconsin River.

This group includes lead farm Plover River Farms, along with Feltz Family Farms, Firkus Farms, Hamerski Farms, Myron Soik & Sons, Okray Family Farms and Worzella & Sons.

With matching funds from the WPVGA and working closely with UW Extension and the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, the group was successful in securing a third grant from the WDATCP following successful conservation work in 2022.

Gagas Farms will be the eighth WPVGA member joining this Producer-Led group in 2023.



Dietician Sarah Agena (left) works with the WPVGA on potato promotions. She is shown here doing a cooking demonstration on Channel 7 WSAW-TV.

Conservation practices employed by the group include the extensive use of cover crops, prairie and pollinator plantings, and no-till/minimum till practices. There were also extensive wetlands restoration practices employed in this watershed.

An additional Producer-Led group was formed in 2022 in the Central

Sands: Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri.

Farmers of the Roche-A-Cri has group members representing Coloma Farms, Signature Farms, ZanBria Artisan Farms, Heartland Farms, Horizon Cranberry Farms, Nathan Bula Farms LLC, Sterling Farms and Flyte Family Farms.

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The WPVGA is proud to see more member farms participating in the Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant program.

13 Members Graduate from Leadership Training Program

After being postponed in 2020, the WPVGA Member Development Program returned in 2021-'22. This has proven to be one of the most valuable leadership training and networking programs offered by the Association, with 25 members graduating from the 2018-'19 class, many of whom are now serving on various industry boards and committees.

The 2021-'22 program took place over five months with 13 members graduating from the course in March 2022.

The participants learned about the core programs of the WPVGA, including research, education,



WPVGA Member Development Program participants toured the State Capitol in a session focused on governmental action. Pictured are, from left to right, Curtis Meister, Jared Suchon, Dan Walsch, Morgan Smolarek, Ann Hoffman, Don Maum, Joshua Johnson, Beau Hartline, Samantha Hoffman-Konkol, and Mike Johnson. Also assisting with the program in Madison are, from left to right, Mike Carter, Andy Diercks, and Jordan Lamb.

governmental action, and promotion, as well as receiving effective communication skills and media training.

I look forward to great things from this outstanding group of future industry leaders in the years to come.

WPVGA Receives Two Export Expansion Grants

In spring 2022, the WPVGA was excited to learn that we had received a \$45,000 export expansion grant from WDATCP. Grant funds will be used to explore export expansion into Mexico and Canada for seed, fresh

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and processed potatoes.

The WPVGA Promotions Committee will work to establish awareness of Wisconsin potatoes as a brand, gauge consumer trends and needs, and determine viability of transportation for exports.

This fall, a second export expansion grant was received by the WPVGA for \$49,500. This export expansion exploration will have significant impacts in terms of educating growers on markets and creating sales and marketing materials fit for specific Canadian and Mexican markets.

We will also identify key contacts and leaders in both international markets that could help foster sales. The plan is to invite buyers and other market partners to visit Wisconsin for field and sales tours to consider trade options.

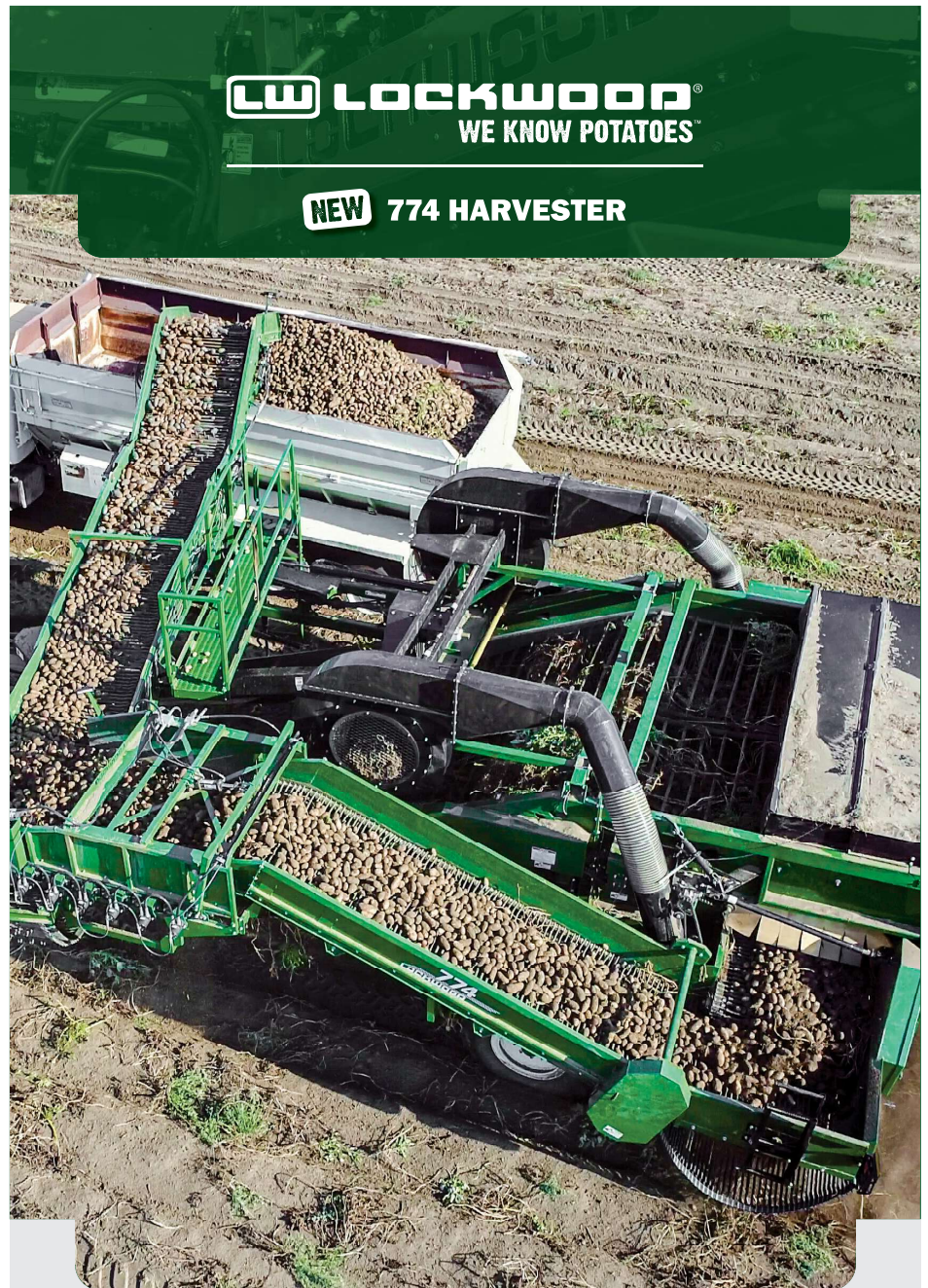
WPVGA staff and growers will also have the opportunity to attend trade shows in both countries with a goal of connecting with prospective buyers. This is a great opportunity that has the potential to expand markets and provide significant returns for Wisconsin growers.

Successful Research Summit Held in August

The WPVGA continues to support a robust applied research program, with base funding for UW researchers in the areas of insect, weed and disease management, as well as soil science/fertility, potato breeding, seed certification and general potato production. Base funding is also provided to the Langlade Agricultural Research Station.

In August 2022, the WPVGA Research Committee held a Research Summit based on a survey of research priorities completed by growers. The Summit allowed growers and researchers to discuss topics with the greatest need for more work, and to help guide and direct the research program for the next 5-10 years.

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Farming for the Future Foundation Breaks Ground

An exciting new venture founded by the Pavelski family, Farming for the Future Foundation (FFTF) broke ground on its Exploration Center in late April 2022, in Plover.

The FFTF is dedicated to helping families understand and appreciate their food and the people who grow it. The Food and Farm Exploration Center will be a place for education, unforgettable family experiences and great, wholesome food.

A tremendous resource for teachers and schools, it will be an excellent destination for families and agritourists as well as school groups. It will offer a unique way to learn about careers in agriculture and help generate the future workforce for the entire industry.

In keeping with its mission, the Foundation will also continue



Paul Miller's family came out in full force to help him celebrate his induction into the WPVGA Hall of Fame in February of 2022. They are, from left to right, Jordan Miller, Raiven Breseman, Jennifer Breseman, Jaiya Breseman, Linda Breseman, Paul Miller, Kayte Miller, Ian Miller, Makenzie Conley, Austin Conley, Nancy Miller, Todd Miller, Michelle Miller-Patterson, and Bill Patterson.

the creation of plans to increase agricultural literacy in Wisconsin classrooms.

With most children being raised without a direct connection to agriculture, training the next generation workforce is a critical challenge that demands focused

solutions. The FFTF education team will ensure the Center's programs can be experienced both on site and in classrooms.

The Center will explore the intersections of agriculture, science and technology, engineering, math, and healthy attitudes.



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The process of educating young people about where their food really comes from will serve a dual purpose. The Center will make this process interesting and exciting and thereby recruit young people to join the workforce in ag related businesses. Businesses just like yours.

The Exploration Center will serve as a hands-on educational learning facility with interactive exhibits focused on various areas of crop production and cutting-edge technology used in agriculture.

Fundraising efforts are in full swing, and plans are to open the facility in 2023.

Piling on With Promotions, Associate Division and Auxiliary

The WPVGA Promotions Committee made a concerted effort to reach the next generation of potato consumers by working with the creative marketing and sales team at Midwest Family Madison on a social media/video campaign featuring Chairman Brian Lee of Okray Family Farms and Spudly, the WPVGA's studly potato mascot.

The humorous videos are posted on multiple social media platforms and reach a large target audience with consistent messaging.

The Promotions Committee also continued its usual programming, which includes: the Healthy Grown program and grower outreach; sponsoring Powered by Potatoes athletic events; working with Mad Dog & Merrill on their Midwest Grill'n television show; advertising on billboards along interstate highways; and sponsoring Gabe Sommers auto racing as well as the Kids from Wisconsin.

The Spudmobile was actively promoting Wisconsin potatoes through July, but it went to the repair shop in the fall, and plans are to get it back on the road again in 2023.

The Promotions Committee also contracts with Registered Dietician Sarah Agena on numerous cooking

demonstrations, both live and on television.

The Associate Division continues to award grants to potato-related organizations and held very successful golf outing and sporting clay shooting events. They also joined forces with the Auxiliary to award multiple scholarships to students whose families are members of the WPVGA.

The Auxiliary continues to promote Wisconsin potatoes and raise funds for its other programs by selling and serving delicious baked potatoes at the Wisconsin State Fair.

They continued a newly successful program called Potatoes in the Classroom. This is a grant program that offers financial support to high school family and consumer science class/ag teachers who use Wisconsin potatoes in their classroom.

They also continue to offer the Kids Dig Wisconsin Potatoes Program that instructs teachers how to grow potatoes in their classrooms with students.

Still Growing After All These Years

2023 marks the 75th Anniversary of the WPVGA (see feature article in this issue)! The organization was formed in 1948, and we are still growing and going strong.

The mission statement has been tweaked a few times over the years, but the focus remains the same: to advance the interests of WPVGA members through education, information, environmentally sound research, promotion, governmental action, and involvement.

In closing, I would like to thank all the members of the WPVGA, along with our outstanding Board of Directors led by 2022 President Alex Okray.

Special thanks go out to the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board as well as the Associate Division, Auxiliary and Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association boards. I am proud of how we all work together to meet the challenges that

arise each and every year.

I also want to thank our excellent, efficient, and experienced WPVGA staff. Between myself, Karen Rasmussen, Julie Braun, Dana Rady, Joe Kertzman, and Jane Guillen, we have over 100 years of experience working for the WPVGA! And as Albert Einstein said, "The only source of knowledge is experience." **BCT**

Sincerely,

Tamas Houlihan

Executive Director, WPVGA

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