



INTERVIEW

LARRY ADAMS,

president and working manager, Adams Farms, Inc.

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

They've been farming the fertile ground in the town of Stockton, Wisconsin, since 1910. Adams Farms, Inc. has been in existence since William W. Adams (originally Adamczak) purchased 65 acres of land, 113 years ago, near 2nd Street just outside of Plover.

NAME: Larry Adams

TITLE: President and working manager

COMPANY: Adams Farms, Inc.

LOCATION: Plover, WI

HOMETOWN: Plover

TIME IN PRESENT POSITION: Ten years

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Vice president of Adams Farms from 1991-2003. First jobs at 8 years old were cutting grass, picking rocks, and bagging 5- and 10-pound bags of potatoes on the farm.

SCHOOLING: Mid-State Technical College, Marshfield, and Farm/Industry Short Course at the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Supporter of market animal sales, and 4H and FFA programs

AWARDS/HONORS: Wisconsin Century Farm Award for 2016, Larry and Lisa Adams

FAMILY: Wife, Lisa; sons Shane (29) and Wyatt (26); daughter, Bailey (22); and grandson, Leroy (3 months)

HOBBIES: Ice fishing, snowmobiling, hunting, traveling, and skiing

William was married to Agnes (Fabisiak), in 1897, and had nine children. By the 1930's, William and Agnes's sons, Peter and Henry, were working with their parents on the farm.

Henry married Evelyn (Shulfer), in 1935, and had a son, Gerald. By the 1950's, Henry farmed about 300 acres and milked 15-20 cows. The farm's crops back then included 20-40 acres of potatoes, hay, oats, rye, field corn, and a large pickle patch.

Gerald married Janie (Kobishop), in 1957, and had two sons, Tom and Larry. In 1979, Gerald and Henry incorporated the farm, and more land was purchased and rented.

Farming practices changed during the 1980's and '90s, and machinery and buildings were added to the farm. Gerald and his son, Larry, who is this issue's interviewee, increased acres as potatoes were grown for chips



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Larry married Lisa (Simkowski), in 1992, and they have three children, Shane, Wyatt and Bailey.

Today, the farm continues to expand and diversify and is managed by Larry and Lisa. Between 1,000 and 1,300 irrigated acres are farmed each year in Stockton, with cash crops including

Above: Larry Adams grew up on the farm that's been in his family since 1910. Adams Farms, Inc., in the town of Stockton a few miles outside of Plover, Wisconsin, continues to expand and diversify and is managed by Larry and Lisa.



potatoes, green beans, sweet corn, peas, and dryland oats, rye, and soybeans.

Were you a Frito-Lay grower, and if so, for how many years? Yes, we were a Frito-Lay grower for 34 years. My grandpa, Hank (Henry), along with another farmer got a chip contract with Red Dot in the late 1960's.

Red Dot was bought out by Frito-Lay in the early 1970's. All through the '70s, '80s and '90s, we grew for Frito-Lay along with many other chip companies.

Tell me about your history as sort of a cooperative grower, as I understand it, with Don Faldet Farms and the Gundersons. We set up a wash line, in 1989, and washed chip stock for 10 years. The last four years, Frito-Lay combined three smaller contracts into one large-volume contract that included Faldet Farms, Adams Farms, and Gunderson Farms.

Did you also grow fresh potatoes, and how many acres of each? Yes, we raised 80 acres of fresh potatoes, 80 acres of Burbanks, and 240 acres of chip stock.

Did you grow up on the farm, and do you have any favorite memories or anecdotes from those days? Yes, I grew up on the farm and learned to drive potato truck at the age of 10. I would ride along with my grandma delivering potatoes to local stores in

5- and 10-pound bags. She'd drive to Marshfield, Wausau, Appleton, Oshkosh, Milwaukee and all points in between.

I believe you're currently growing 300 acres of potatoes for the fresh market as well as under contract with Del Monte off the field, is that correct? Yes, 100 acres are early varieties for Seneca and Del

Left: Cut seed potatoes are loaded into a Grimme six-row planter at Adams Farms, Inc., Plover, Wisconsin.

Right: In 2020, Adams Farms purchased a new Massey Ferguson 8730S tractor, here set up for hilling potatoes and side-dressing fertilizer.

Monte, and 200 acres are russets for local packing sheds. They end up at Walmart and other grocery stores.

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What other vegetables are you growing, and how many acres? We grow 370 acres of green beans, 400 acres in sweet corn, 66 acres of peas, and 40 acres of dryland oats, rye, or soybeans. We have 200-300 acres in custom tillage a year.

What kind of rotation are you on? We're on a four-year rotation.

Where exactly is the farm—and how far does it stretch? We're located about 3 miles east of Del Monte. Our furthest field is only 7-8 miles from

the farm. We farm north and south of Arnott, mainly off Highway J.

We've also rented land from neighbors for 40 consecutive years.

We are lucky to have flat, sandy fields with center pivots, operating 12 high-capacity wells and 27 center pivots.

Are you preparing now for the growing season, and in what ways?

Yes, we're planning crops, looking at vegetable contracts, purchasing inputs and seed, and upgrading equipment. My sons are repairing

and fabricating tillage and planting equipment, and Lisa is working on end-of-year bookkeeping and managing the office work.

Has planting gotten later in recent years? No, we start planting potatoes around April 10-15 and finish planting beans around July 4. We're planting crops in every month from April to July.

As far as technology, what are the main ways potato and vegetable growing in Plover has changed over the years? GPS guidance with sub-inch accuracy has changed farming. Overall, equipment has gotten larger and more precise.

Technology has also sped things up. What used to take a day to answer can now be answered in minutes if you Google it—that really improves efficiency.

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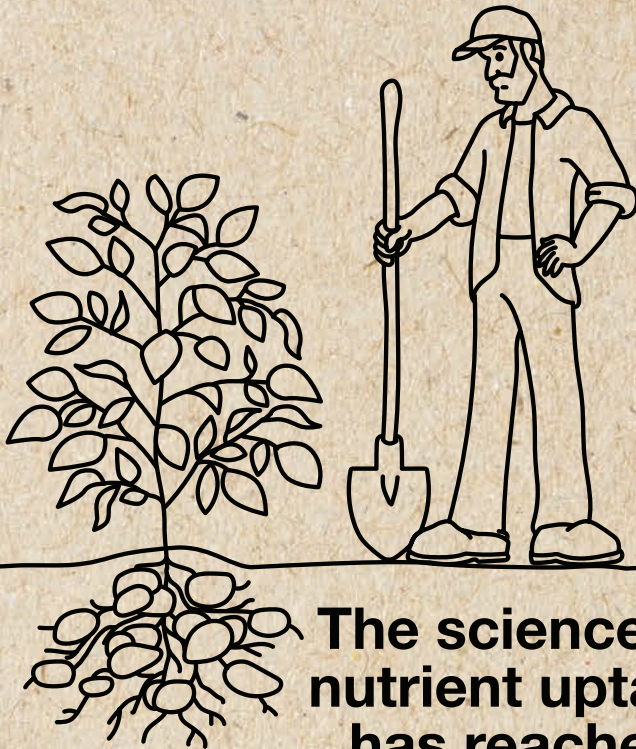
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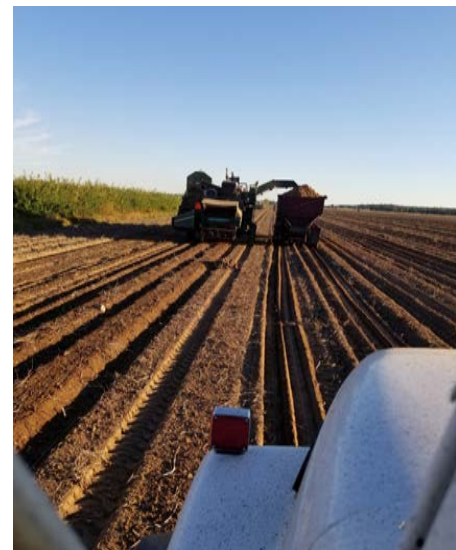
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Interview . . .

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We're starting to use biologicals, which means adding beneficial microbes back into the soil. We had our best crop ever in 2022, but a lot of growers did. It wasn't all because of biologicals. Mother Nature was nice with the weather patterns in our area.

We don't fumigate, but I think there's a place for fumigation. This is unlike fumigation. We're using biologicals to help better utilize the fertilizer we

already have out there and build up the good microbes in the soil profile.

We're adding biologicals to our input program, and not replacing fertilizer. It takes fertilizer to grow a healthy crop, but maybe biologicals can help the plant use fertilizer more efficiently.

Where you cut back is in not overapplying fertilizer in the first place. We apply what the crop needs

Above: Potato harvest is pictured from near and far on Adams Farms in Plover.

when the crop needs it. Timing is very important.

We've been contracting with the same companies for a lot of years—particularly Seneca and Del Monte for 40 years. We're doing the best we can, and we must be doing an OK job. We place value in relationships when doing business.

What are your main duties on the farm? I contract the crops, purchase equipment, and work with the companies we're in business with. I like to be hands-on and oversee all aspects of the farm.

What do you most like handling in the farming operation? I enjoy being out in the field, operating equipment, and the challenges of bringing a crop to market, from seeing the new crop emerge all the way to harvest. Every year tends to be a little different from the previous year.

Who else in your family works on the farm and in what positions? My son, Shane, took the agriculture short course at UW-Madison, and Wyatt went to Fox Valley Technical College for diesel mechanics and agriculture power equipment. Both use their skills on the farm and are the fifth



Part of the history of Adams Farms includes having worked at one time with broker Glenn Risdon to get potatoes into stores in Chicago. Larry Adams' grandpa, Hank, along with another farmer also got a chip contract with Red Dot in the late 1960's.



Though this isn't the actual tractor, the photo shows a vintage Rumley at an antique implement show that is identical to the first model used on Adams Farms, Inc.

generation to make a living farming the first field purchased in 1910.

Shane is an equipment operator, including the planter, sprayer and harvester, and a mechanic, irrigation and GPS tech, and truck driver.

"I've been fortunate to work alongside a generation that worked the land with horses, another generation that worked off the farm and came back, and to be currently working alongside a generation that has all the information at their fingertips with cellphone technology and precision agriculture."

- Larry Adams,
Adams Farms, Inc.

Wyatt is a tillage operator, engine rebuilder, fabricator, aluminum welder, irrigation tech, truck driver, and can do anything mechanical.

As secretary and treasurer, Lisa handles all administrative duties and runs equipment when needed. She organizes the farm so that it runs smoothly.

We all grade potatoes, pick rocks, cut seed and do repairs when needed. We do what it takes to get the crop from seed to market.

In addition to Lisa, Shane, Wyatt, and myself, we have friends and family who help during harvest, neighbors who have helped with electrical

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CONVEYOR LINE

WEB BELT SIZER

UNLOADING CONVEYOR

SURGE HOPPER

BARREL WASHER

Mayo



Interview . . .

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and other projects throughout the years, and landlords who keep an eye on the property and let us know if anything needs attention.

Does Adams Farms have trucking or storage arms of the business? Yes, we have three semis and live-bottom trailers to get the crop to a local grading shed at harvesttime.

We have 60,000 hundredweight of storage capacity on the farm, which is rented to other producers in the fall. Adams Farms uses the storage in the spring to suberize seed and store it.

Is all your seed bought, and will you be doing anything different in 2023 than in past years? As of this interview (in late January/early February), I am working on seed, finalizing volume and changing some tillage practices to go more toward spoon-feeding fertilizers.

We're trying more biological products and improving our water management.

Any new machines or implements you're excited about? We have two new center pivots for 2023, a new

Above: The box of an Adams Farms truck is loaded with seed potatoes in the first photo, and Larry Adams' son, Shane, fills a planter with seed in the second image captioned "Plant them taters."

Kubota skid loader, and have made some electrical upgrades.

In 2020, we bought a Massey Ferguson 8730S tractor, and in 2021, built an 80 x 155-foot machinery shed. In 2022, we went to a different potato harvester and bought some potato trucks and boxes.



Potatoes are graded and loaded off the field into a semi-trailer on Adams Farms.



Sweet corn is picked, in 2022, at Adams Farms as part of its Seneca contract.



Is there anything I've missed or that you'd like to add? I've been fortunate to work alongside a generation that worked the land with horses, and then another generation that worked off the farm and came back.

I'm currently working alongside a generation that has all the information at their fingertips with cellphone technology and precision agriculture.

Above: Larry Adams' sons, Shane and Wyatt, fill a potato planter in 2021.

It's really impressive when you look back at where we came from and where we're going. **BCT**

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