



Wisconsin Stands Up for Potatoes at Washington Summit

WPVGA grower members, staff, and PILI participants engage in a week of D.C. advocacy

By the National Potato Council and Joe Kertzman

During the 2023 Washington Summit, February 27-March 3, U.S. potato growers and allied partners from across the country united as an industry to fulfill the National Potato Council's (NPC's) mission of "Standing Up for Potatoes on Capitol Hill."

Flying to Washington, D.C. to advocate for issues vital to the success of Wisconsin potato growers were Larry Alsum and Wendy Alsum-Dykstra from Alsum Farms & Produce; Eric Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms; Mark Finnessy, Okray Family Farms; Jim Wysocki from Wysocki Family of Companies; and Tamas Houlihan and Joe Kertzman of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable

Growers Association (WPVGA).

The WPVGA grower members and staff met with all 10 of Wisconsin's members of Congress and their staffs to discuss issues affecting potato and vegetable farmers and advocate on their behalf.

Additionally, Luke Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms and Nicola Carey, Wysocki Family of Companies, took part in the 2023 Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI) class, and later joined the Washington Summit group for Congressional visits and advocacy.

The 10-day PILI program, February 22-March 3, put on by the Potato

Leadership, Education, and Advancement Foundation (Potato LEAF) provides an overview of the local and national potato industry, including challenges and issues beyond the production sector.

The PILI class enjoyed tours of local agriculture businesses while traveling through New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.

The Washington Summit provided a forum for potato industry members to discuss, define, and advocate for the policy priorities impacting their businesses and protecting their ability to farm.

Above: Representing Wisconsin in "Standing up for Potatoes on Capitol Hill" are, from left to right, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Executive Director Tamas Houlihan; Wendy Alsum-Dykstra of Alsum Farms & Produce; Jim Wysocki from Wysocki Family of Companies; Larry Alsum, Alsum Farms & Produce; Luke and Eric Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms; Nicola Carey, Wysocki Family of Companies; and Mark Finnessy, Okray Family Farms.

The six NPC issue paper subjects that Washington Summit attendees discussed with Congressional leaders and staff included the U.S. Potato Industry Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill; Immigration Reform; Government Over-Regulation; Proactive Trade Policies; the Nutritional Value of Potatoes; and Investing in U.S. Potato Industry Research.

Day one, on February 27, kicked off with NPC's first-ever virtual media roundtable, during which NPC CEO Kam Quarles, Immediate Past President of the Board Jared Balcom, and Incoming President R.J. Andrus shared the news of the Council's groundbreaking report "Measuring the Economic Impact of the U.S. Potato Industry."

\$100.9 BILLION IMPACT

A dozen industry news editors and reporters were provided with



In U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's address to the industry, he praised potato growers for their significant contribution in providing America with nutritious, delicious potatoes, while supporting rural communities and the entire economy. *Image courtesy of National Potato Council/Bill Schaefer Photography*

highlights of the comprehensive analysis of the potato industry's \$100.9 billion economic contribution to the U.S. economy.

That evening at the Annual Meeting

of Voting Delegates and Awards Dinner, 2022 NPC President Balcom passed the gavel to incoming President Andrus.

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Balcom also presented the annual President’s Awards to Washington state grower and former NPC President Ed Schneider; Chris Voigt and Matt Harris of the Washington State Potato Commission; and Balcom’s wife, Kellee Balcom.

Matt Lantz, vice president for global access at Bryant Christie, Inc., received the Golden Potato Award for his decades-long effort to open foreign markets for U.S. potatoes.

The Packer’s Amy Sowder presented Maine potato grower and former NPC President Dominic LaJoie with

the magazine’s 2023 Potato Person of the Year Award, which honors a potato industry member who has shown extraordinary leadership and commitment to the industry.

Throughout the next day, February 28, members of the NPC Finance, Legislative Affairs, Environmental Affairs, Grower Outreach, Industry Research, and Trade Affairs committees met to report on and discuss the status of issues facing the potato industry.

During lunch, Washington Summit attendees were briefed by Bill

Left: From left to right, Joe Kertzman, Larry Alsum, U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman from Wisconsin’s 6th Congressional District, and Wendy Alsum-Dykstra pose outside of Rep. Grothman’s office after meeting with him to discuss issues important to the state’s growers.

Right: In meeting with U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden (right) of Wisconsin’s 3rd Congressional District in his office, he had each of the potato industry representatives pose with a pen at his desk as if signing a bill in to law. Larry Alsum (left) of Alsum Farms & Produce was happy to oblige.

Knudson, product marketing economist at the Michigan State University Product Center, on a

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As part of the 2023 Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI), Nicola Carey of Wysocki Family of Companies in Bancroft, Wisconsin, participates in “Presentation Skills: Putting them to Work” with Laurie Richards. PILI participants each picked a topic from the six National Potato Council priority papers distributed before the Washington Summit and took turns presenting to the group. This gave PILI participants feedback on their presentation styles and practice for when they would “Stand Up for Potatoes on Capitol Hill” in the following days. Carey presented on reforming immigration programs and policy. *Image courtesy of National Potato Council/ Bill Schaefer Photography*

report his team conducted on behalf of NPC to measure the \$100.9 billion economic impact of the potato industry on the U.S. economy.

On Wednesday morning, March 1, business began earlier than expected with the arrival of Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, who praised potato growers for their significant contribution in providing America with nutritious, delicious potatoes, while supporting rural communities and the entire U.S. economy.

Prior to Vilsack’s remarks, Balcom presented the Secretary with a Golden Potato Award to thank him for his leadership over two administrations in helping open the full Mexican market to fresh U.S. potatoes, a victory decades in the making.

INDUSTRY MESSAGING

The Wednesday morning sessions also included a live Eye on Potatoes podcast recording with host Lane Nordlund, Washington State Potato

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– Daniel Webster, 1840



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Commission Executive Director Chris Voigt, and Phil Gusmano, vice president of Better Made Snack Foods in Detroit, Michigan, on the topic of communicating the potato industry's message to urban Members of Congress.

During the general sessions, Randy Russell, president of the Russell

Group, and NPC CEO Quarles discussed "Potato Leadership in the 2023 Farm Bill Process."

Senate Agriculture Committee senior professional staff member, Katherine Thomas, presented "Navigating the Complex World of Nutrition Regulation."

Charlie Cook, renowned political analyst and founder of the Cook Political Report, gave the keynote lunch address, sponsored by Syngenta.

Cook provided attendees with his unique analysis of the issues, trends, and events that are shaping today's political environment, specifically

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U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden was so enthusiastic about meeting with Washington Summit attendees from Wisconsin that he took them on an impromptu tour of the Capitol Building and had them pose under his favorite agricultural saying by Daniel Webster. Painted over the door of Room H130 is an 1840 quote by Webster, "When Tillage Begins, Other Acts Follow. The Farmers Therefore are the Founders of Human Civilization." Gathered below the saying are, from left to right, Joe Kertzman and Tamas Houlihan of the WPVGA; Nicola Carey, Wysocki Family of Companies; Wendy Alsum-Dykstra from Alsum Farms & Produce; Luke Schroeder, Schroeder Brothers Farms; Larry Alsum of Alsum Farms & Produce; Mark Finnessy, Okray Family Farms; Eric Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms; and Jim Wysocki of Wysocki Family of Companies.



emphasizing past and upcoming presidential elections.

On Wednesday afternoon at the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Members of Congress joined the group to address their priorities and hear from Washington Summit attendees on their policy concerns.

Speakers included Rep. Dan Kildee (D-Mich.); Parish Braden, Republican staff director of the House Agriculture Committee; Sen. John Boozman (R-Ark.), ranking member of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and

Left: From left to right, Luke Radford (Rupert, Idaho); Luke Schroeder of Schroeder Brothers Farms, Antigo, Wisconsin; Danny Deprey (Mars Hill, Maine); and Ben De Jonge (Manhattan, Montana) take part in the Insta Pot Challenge during which 2023 Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI) participants showed off their cooking skills. *Image courtesy of National Potato Council/Bill Schaefer Photography*

Right: With power in numbers, WPVGA staff and grower members "Standing Up for Potatoes on Capitol Hill" during the Washington Summit included, from left to right, Joe Kertzman, Jim Wysocki, Nicola Carey, Larry Alsum, Tamas Houlihan, Wendy Alsum-Dykstra, and Mark Finnessy. *Image courtesy of National Potato Council/Bill Schaefer Photography*

Forestry Committee; and Sen. Angus King (I-Maine).

On Wednesday and Thursday, Washington Summit attendees from Wisconsin and all major potato

producing states took to Capitol Hill to meet with dozens of Congressional Members and staff to advocate for the potato industry's policy priorities. Meetings ended by noon on Friday. **BCT**

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