



NAME: Rod Beggs

TITLE: Owner/manager

COMPANY: Midwestern Potatoes, LLC

LOCATION: Plainfield, WI

HOMETOWN: Plainfield

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: 10

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: "I began working at Midwestern, in 1989, and worked my way up to assistant manager," Rod Beggs relates. "In 2001, I moved to Janesville and started a painting business. Ten years later, I moved back to Plainfield and began rebuilding Midwestern. In 2013, Bob Berard and I bought out all other shareholders and formed Midwestern Potatoes, Inc. In 2015, Bushmans' Inc. bought in, and in 2017, I bought out Berard."

SCHOOLING: Tri-County High School, Plainfield, and U.S. Army Reserves

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association

FAMILY: Wife, Candy; children, Mason (Melissa), Makayla, and Jackson; and granddaughter, Penelope

HOBBIES: Spending time in the Northwoods relaxing and boating

INTERVIEW

ROD BEGGS,

owner/manager, Midwestern Potatoes, LLC

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

Rod Beggs didn't know his future was already mapped out for him. His dad, Denzel Beggs, was plant manager of Midwestern Farms in Plainfield, Wisconsin, for 35 years.

Although Rod joined the U.S. Army Reserves right out of high school, in 1988, and owned his own painting business in Janesville for close to a decade, he has held just about every job there is at Midwestern Potatoes, LLC.

Primarily a packing shed when it was established by a group of Central

Wisconsin potato growers, in 1977, the storied Midwestern Farms served many potato farmers and investors over the years.

"It started back in 1966 when Godfrey and Maybelle Erickson first owned it," Rod qualifies, "up until 1977, when there was a fire and it burned down. Then, they presented



Rod Beggs, owner/manager of Midwestern Potatoes, LLC, in Plainfield, Wisconsin, says the company primarily focuses on grading, sorting, packaging and storing russet potatoes.



the opportunity for several growers to buy into the company that became Midwestern Farms.”

Denzel, Dave Beggs, Jay Erickson and Bob Berard of Paramount Farms owned and ran Midwestern until Rod and Berard bought out all other shareholders and transferred the operation to their names in October 2013. Then, Bushmans’ Inc. of Rosholt purchased one-third of the operation.

“The operation of Midwestern Farms ran up until 2015, when Bushmans’ Inc. and I formed Midwestern Potatoes, LLC,” Rod explains.

Rod, who bought out Berard in 2017, says, today, Midwestern Potatoes focuses primarily on fresh market russets.

Are you doing all the bagging and packaging of fresh market russet potatoes for Bushmans’ Inc., and how does the partnership work?

I manage all operations here at the packaging facility and Bushmans’ manages all the sales and marketing, as well as transportation/shipping from Midwestern Farms.

The two management teams at Bushmans’ and Midwestern are always in constant communication with each other, from top to bottom, from capital investment discussions on down to order needs and the day-to-day operation. It has been a great

relationship and partnership.

Is Midwestern Potatoes still packing for several growers a year, and what are your projections in that regard for this year?

Yes, and looking at the current crop, I feel we are going to have a good year both in quality and quantity. As always, our goal here is to create strong returns for the grower group and provide a top-quality product for the consumer to enjoy.

Are you adding growers to the mix, and what varieties of potatoes do you bag and pack?

Currently, we

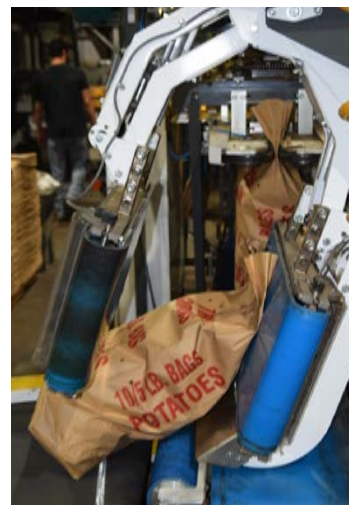
Above: Midwestern Potatoes, LLC has the capacity to store 450,000 hundredweight (cwt.) of potatoes and tries to keep a year-round supply. The company can pack up to 10,000 cwt. of potatoes a day, which equates to 18 or 19 semi-loads or roughly 10,000 bags.

are working with several growers and adding new ones every year.

We are running all russet varieties and all pack sizes. We also try to run as close to year-round as possible.

This year, we were only down for two weeks during the summer.

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How many different brands and labels to you bag and pack for? We pack several different brands, but most retailers want their own labels. Therefore, we accommodate their requests.

Our main carton label is the iconic

Potato World Brand, also known as PW Brand.

What type of bagging and packaging machines do you have? We utilize Volmpacks for all our consumer brands and a five-lane Hagen with X-rays for all carton sizes.

Above: Automation such as this Volmpack Auto-Baler saves Midwestern Potatoes time, labor and money.

We also just added a custom-built bin filler codesigned with Chris Anderson of Thunderstruck Farms, in Plainfield. This filler allows us to fill the bins



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Rod Beggs (left) and Bushmans' Inc. Chief Operating Officer (COO) John Hopfensperger (right) pose by a box of Vanguard Russet potatoes. The main carton label for Midwestern Potatoes is the iconic Potato World Brand.

as fast as one every 1 minute, 20 seconds, which will help during the holiday rushes.

Anderson designed and fabricated a new bin-filling line for us meeting Wal-Mart's new packaging requirements and box specifications. Now we're the envy of a lot of people, and I just sold the prototype to the Soiks.

Anderson is also building a box stacker and pallet feed now, and currently making upgrades to the filler line with a few more efficiencies.

Do you pack in bulk bins, bales, or what are your smallest bags/packages? We pack nearly all consumer sizes with a few off-grade bulk loads for processors. We're going to start packing 40-pound bales for Wal-Mart as part of our new Midwest Fresh bin program.

Do you work with specialty packs of potatoes, and if so, in what sizes? Currently, we are not packing any specialty packs. With our large cooler space, we utilize other facilities and cross-dock the items here for distribution to our customers.

Are you the sales/marketing end of it to retail or wholesale, or do you simply do the bagging and packaging and not sales? I manage all aspects of the operation here at the facility. I leave the sales and marketing to Bushmans', Inc.

What is Midwestern Potatoes' potato storage capacity, and how

long do you typically store potatoes? Midwestern has the capacity to store 450,000 hundredweight (cwt.) of potatoes, and we try to keep a year-round supply.

This year, we stored to the end of June and then ran outside potatoes to finish off the rest of the year.

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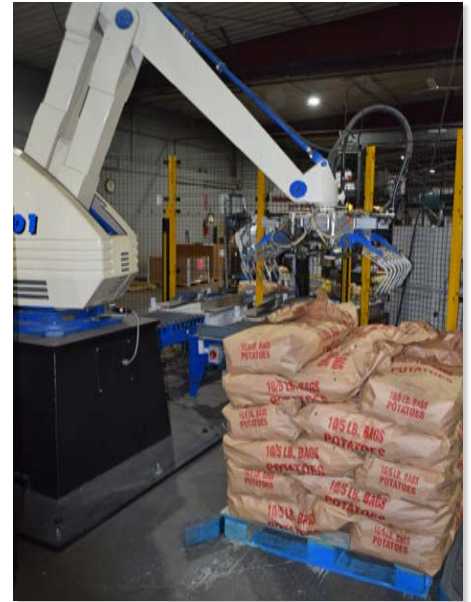
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“Palletizing is hard work, and it makes it much easier to hire and retain employees when that is not part of the job description.”

– Rod Beggs, Midwestern Potatoes, LLC

Above: “It’s not so much the time as it is labor savings,” says Rod Beggs regarding the necessity for such machines as the Fuji-Ace EC201 robotic stacker. “Palletizing is hard work, and it makes it much easier to hire and retain employees when that is not part of the job description.”

Do you have a shipping arm of the operation? We don’t have any trucks. Bushmans’ arranges all the transportation for truck loading out of Midwestern and we utilize many local carriers. Some are sourced truck broker relationships.

Do you have any new bagging/packaging machines using the latest technology? Palletizers? We just added a custom-built bin filler, and we also ordered a new A5 Tomra optical auto grader. We expect that installation to be complete before the end of the year.

How about X-ray capability, and what are you trying to detect with the machines? We currently have three X-ray machines looking for hollow heart in the potatoes.

How much time do you think automated palletizers and bagging/packaging machines save you? It’s not so much the time as it is labor savings. Palletizing is hard work,



Rod Beggs’ son, Mason (left), works for Midwestern Potatoes as Rod’s right-hand man. “I kind of pulled him through the system like my dad pulled me through,” Rod says.



and it makes it much easier to hire and retain employees when that is not part of the job description.

As far as bagging, is there a push for you to use more eco-friendly

packaging, and if so, how are you handling that? We pack whatever the retailer is demanding, and we will adjust as they do. However, all the cardboard we use is made from some percentage of recycled material.

Above: The Lockwood VACS Mobile potato handling and cleaning system takes a lot of manual labor out of the equation for Midwestern Potatoes and ensures rocks and debris stay outside of the packing facility.

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You said you'll be busy from now (late August) straight through to December because of harvest and potatoes coming in. What is your daily production capacity? We can run up to 10,000 cwt. a day, which equates to 18 or 19 semi-loads or roughly 10,000 bags.

I enjoy the challenge and like being busy. I'd rather have 11 orders going out the door than three. I can tell you

Above: Chris Anderson of Thunderstruck Farms, in Plainfield, fabricated a bin-filling line for Midwestern Potatoes that meets Wal-Mart's new packaging requirements for boxing 5-pound bags of potatoes. Octagonal-shaped boxes allow them to be triple-stacked without being crushed from the weight above.



that in all honesty.

What technologies or changes do you see on the horizon for Midwestern Potatoes and other plants like yours? Automation is the number one technology we see coming down the pipe, as well as

better storage techniques to allow for long-term quality storage.

What do you hope for the future of Midwestern Potatoes? I plan to continue expanding the company with top-tier growers, those who raise quality potatoes. My son,

Above: While Bushmans' Inc. Chief Executive Officer Mike Carter (left) looks on, John Hopfensperger, COO of Bushmans', inspects Vanguard Russets at Midwestern Potatoes, LLC.

Mason, works for us as my right-hand man. I kind of pulled him through the system like my dad pulled me through. **BCT**

Contact: Jim or John

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