



NAME: Dan Rine

TITLE: Owner and president

COMPANY: Rine Ridge Farms Inc.

LOCATION: Bryant, WI

HOMETOWN: Bryant

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION:

One year, “because I just bought out my dad [Ken] as owner of the farm. Otherwise, I was president and co-owner for 12 years prior to that.”

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: “In 1988 and ’89, I fought forest fires in Montana for the U.S. Forest Service. Otherwise, I’ve been on the farm my whole life.”

SCHOOLING: Antigo High School

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Grower member of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, and previously sat on the SpudPro Committee

AWARDS/HONORS: FS Farm Bureau (Servco FS) “Young Farmer of the Year,” and “Father of the Year” for Langlade County in 2019

FAMILY: Wife, Sheila, married for 30 years; two daughters, Rachel (28) and Lauren (23); and granddaughter, Ava, who will be 3 years old in November and another grandchild due in April

HOBBIES: Snowmobiling, hunting, and going on trips with my wife

INTERVIEW

DAN RINE,

owner and president, Rine Ridge Farms Inc.

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

With a reputation for growing and promoting new chip varieties of certified and foundation seed potatoes, Rine Ridge Farms of Bryant, Wisconsin, has a storied, multi-generational history dating back to the 1920’s.

“My great-grandpa, Adolph Rine, started the farm in the 1920’s. It was a dairy farm until 1946,” explains Dan Rine, president and owner of Rine Ridge Farms Inc. “Back then, he grew hay, oats, and corn. That was Dad’s grandpa, so I represent the fourth generation on the farm.”

“Vern was my grandfather, a carpenter by trade, but he also

farmed the land,” he remarks.

“Looking out my window here,” Dan says, “I’m reminded that we were in the maple syrup business from my great-grandfather’s time all the way up until 1988.”

“The farm was incorporated in 1972,” he relates. “We grew chip stock, but we a hard a hard time finding customers and selling potatoes off

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the field—we had no storage at that time—so my dad, grandpa and uncle started moving into the seed business.”

In 2011, Dan purchased his uncle Gary’s shares of the farm, and this last year, bought out his dad, Ken.

“Dad is supposed to be looking at retirement,” Dan relates, “but he’s here. He was here all morning. Dad likes to golf, though, and has other hobbies that he enjoys.”

Are you strictly a certified seed potato grower or also a chip grower?

Our certified and foundation seed potatoes are chipping varieties, so we sell to chip growers.

What varieties are you currently growing?

We’re raising Lady Liberty, Mackinaw, Lamoka and Bliss, the latter a brand-new variety this year. We’re known for growing new chip varieties of seed potatoes, and this year, all of them are round, white chippers.

Where is your customer base located?

We’re selling to New York, Michigan, Canada—those are our

Above: Pictured holding freshly harvested Mackinaw certified seed potatoes, Dan Rine represents the fourth generation of Rine Ridge Farms in Bryant, Wisconsin.

three biggest potato markets, and we send some spuds to Colorado.

We don’t do any trucking. Our customers at the other end send trucks out to us.

At one point, you were shipping seed to Brazil. Do you still have customers in South America? No, we haven’t done business there in quite a few years. We were trying to get involved

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Interview . . .

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in exports and sent some potatoes to Egypt and Brazil.

Peter Joyce, a consultant for Potatoes USA, was trying to get trade going, and my dad and Peter got along well. When Brazil first expressed interest in importing potatoes, we had just finished harvesting.

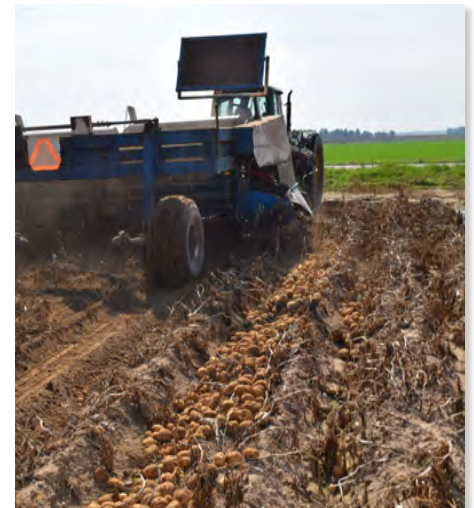
They wanted them packaged in burlap bags, and there's no telling what happens to potatoes on a cargo ship for two months in the heat. In fact, I just recently saw a map of all kinds of cargo ships stuck in Panama, with some sitting for two months already, waiting to get through locks and the canal.

How did you get to be experts in seed potatoes for the chip market?

By studying new varieties that chip and yield well. We start varieties by buying mini tubers. It may take up to four years before we have them to sell to our customers. Some turn out and some don't.

Dad and Uncle Gary switched over to seed potatoes, and we always try to dabble in the newest varieties. We were one of the very first to grow Lamoka, as well as Pike, and now Lady Liberty (NY152). Now we're one of the first ones offering Bliss.

We're always looking for the better variety. It's like fishing, if you wait to



hear that the fish are biting, you're already too late. You need to be there catching them.

How many acres does the farm encompass?

We are farming 800 acres total, with 200 in potatoes, 200 acres of snap beans, 300 planted in corn, 50 acres of peas and 50 in sugar beets.

We grow vegetables for processing, including snap beans for Seneca Foods, and we harvest peas for the old Bonduelle Americas, which changed its name to Nortera.

Our corn goes to Spring Breeze Dairy here in Bryant for silage, and sugar beets also go to dairy farmers.

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Above: Ken Rine pulls a WR 420 CamCo windrower using a John Deere 7230 tractor during potato harvest on Rine Ridge Farms in Bryant, Wisconsin.

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I don't remember how many acres the farm started with, but we went from growing 120 acres of potatoes to 320 acres. Now we've backed the potatoes off to 200 acres.

What rotation are you on for potatoes and processing vegetables?

We work on a three-year rotation with vegetables, so corn, then potatoes, and snap beans and peas

come on top of the potato ground. We grow 200 acres of corn in back-to-back years, and sugar beets come in wherever land is available.

How about row spacing? Some guys use 36-inch spacing, and some 34. We used to space our rows 34 inches apart, and now moved down to 32 inches to get more seeds per acre.

How has the harvest been for you this year? Harvest was great for us. We happened to get out before the rain hit this last week, on the 23rd of September, and we finished up the previous day. A lot of guys digging now are having a hard time. It doesn't seem like the ground likes to dry up here anymore.

This is the best yield we've had, and probably the highest we'll ever see—just under 600 bags an acre for one variety. The way we worked this summer, we deserve it. Without rain, we spent a lot of time irrigating.

We called a neighbor before we started digging potatoes and told him we'd have an extra bin for storage if he wanted to use it. Before we were

Above: Dan Rine (left) says, even though his father, Ken (right), is looking toward retirement, he still regularly shows up to lend an experienced hand on the farm.

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Chad Glaze
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done harvesting, I had to call him back and tell him we already filled it. The yield was that high.

What are your biggest challenges on the farm and some of the lessons you've learned from the land?

Employees—labor is our biggest issue. As far as learning the land, you find out where your low spots are, and try to dig those potatoes first when they're ready to go. You harvest the good spots last.

You also learn what parts of the field are most fertile and change your spacing with less spacing where you have real fertile ground, and thus more seed in the ground there rather than on dry corners or in sandy spots.

Is Bryant a hotbed for seed potatoes?

Bryant's silt loam, or Antigo silt loam to be exact, is good soil, and we have cooler weather here versus further south in the state, so we can grow our potatoes, dig them out and put them into storage without having to have refrigeration. If it's 5-10 degrees cooler here than south of us, it makes a difference.

We have storage capacity for 120,000 bags of potatoes.

We have rocks, though. We can't say we don't have plenty of rocks up here.

What have you personally gotten better at in your years of farming?

Managing people and putting them in key positions where I think they can handle the job.

I'm also better at talking to our clientele. I never used to have to do that years ago. I don't mind talking to clientele, or people in general.

You need communication skills to be successful. I don't know what's going to happen with this next generation who are walking next to each other or sitting in a vehicle texting.

I also learned enough in my time to design our potato storage. I told the contractors how I wanted the storage

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"We're always looking for the better seed potato variety. It's like fishing, if you wait to hear that the fish are biting, you're already too late. You need to be there catching them."

– Dan Rine, Rine Ridge Farms, Inc.



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laid out, how to design it, and then they built it.

We start storing potatoes in September, and the last load will be shipped out at the end of May

or first part of June.

How has technology or machinery progressed in your time on the farm?

Because of updated equipment, we can plant potatoes and grade them

Above: Dan Rine runs the 65-inch Lenco during the last day of the 2023 potato harvest on Rine Ridge Farms.

out so much faster than we used to, and not only updated but bigger equipment.

We went from, years ago, a portable grader that was 12 inches wide and had to be pushed up to a pile of potatoes, and then you'd push it up to the next pile. Now, we have a permanent grader that is 4 feet wide and runs with a skid steer. It has holding tanks, so you don't have to stop if you don't want.

I can remember when there were cows here on the farm, and just old Farmall H's and M's that sufficed as high-horsepower tractors. Nowadays, equipment is so many times bigger.

When my dad and Gary were farming, they were hauling bags out to the field and people were picking potatoes by hand. They used a one-

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row digger that picked them up and laid them back down on the ground. Where would you find labor to do that nowadays, right?

Now, we're using a 65-inch Lenco harvester. We harvest 12 rows using a four-row Lenco and two four-row windrowers. We've gone from tractors and wagons to tandem-axle trucks hauling stuff off the field.

We use a six-row Lockwood Air Cup potato planter, mostly for the accuracy of it. I believe it is the best out there. One year, some of our clients came to visit. We picked up the back of planter for them, held a seed piece up there, and they said, "You're getting like 99 to 100 percent accuracy."

It's probably not the fastest planter out there, nor the newest by any means, but it's accurate.

What do you like most about growing seed potatoes? I like farming. I don't know what I would do if I wasn't farming.

Assuming each day is different, is there a favorite part of your day—something you enjoy doing—or a favorite spot on the farm?

I like standing here on the farm in the fall of the year, looking north at our hardwood ridge, especially now that the leaves are turning.

I like farming because I have the freedom to take time off when I want



to, assuming it's not the busy season, versus having a job where you have to be there all the time.

I like planting in the springtime and, two weeks later, watching the crops grow. You can see little shoots coming up, and then you wait all season long, monitoring the plants, hoping for a good crop and that Mother Nature will leave you alone.

Hopefully you see the rewards of a good crop, which makes it all worthwhile.

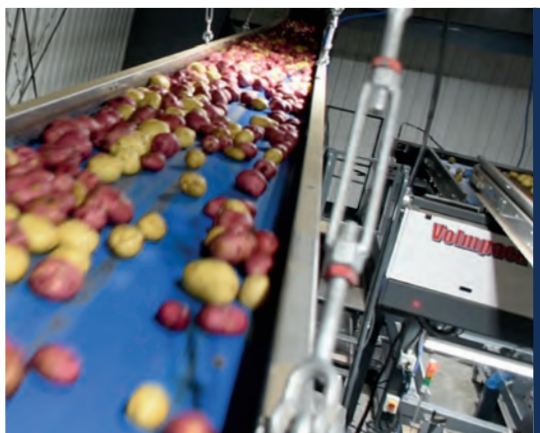
Do you have many long-term employees? Besides my dad, Rich has been here 12 years. Right now, I have three full-time employees besides

Above: Dan and Sheila Rine stand by the Rine Ridge Farms sign, with the snow on the trees, bushes and ground making for an idyllic setting.

myself and my dad. During planting season, I'll have four or six seasonal employees, and come digging season, 12 part-time employees.

It's getting harder to find help. I keep putting ads in the paper, but most come to me through word of mouth. Some of my parttime employees do a better job of hiring than anybody. They tell their friends that we're pretty good people to work for here.

What are your plans for the farm in the future? I don't have anyone to



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leave the farm to, but I'd like to retire by the time I reach age 65.

Anything on your wish list for the farm? I hope someone takes it over and can make it prosper for themselves.

Anything I've missed that you'd like to add? I want to give one last shout out to my dad, Ken, and Uncle Gary. They taught me a lot about farming. As I was growing up, my grandpa, Vern, showed me how to do things.

That's how I ended up where I am.

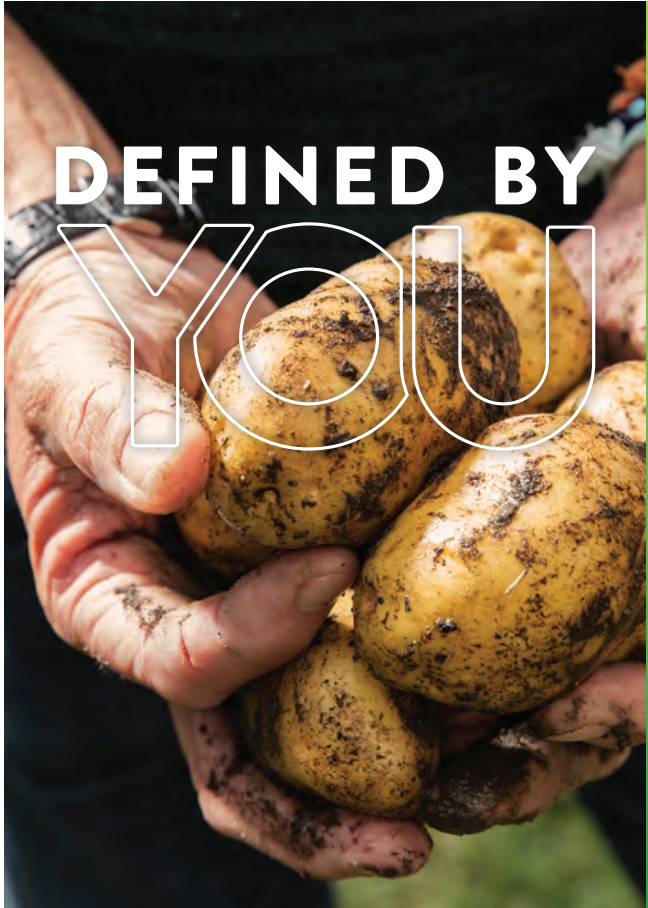
In high school, when I was done with my classes at the end of the day, I came home and worked. Pretty much everything I have, I worked for. I don't know what's going to happen with this younger generation. I can't see into the future.

People keep complaining that prices are so high, but if you're forced to pay so much for workers, it's a vicious circle.

Above: Rine Ridge Farms has grown and evolved since the first picture was taken in the late 1940's or early '50s up until 2016, with the latter image representing the operation much as it is today.

We sold potatoes in the '70s for more per pound than we do now. We have a bigger yield now, though. Back in the 70's, if you had 200 bags an acre, you were doing well. But now, with the one variety I mentioned earlier, we got almost 600 bags an

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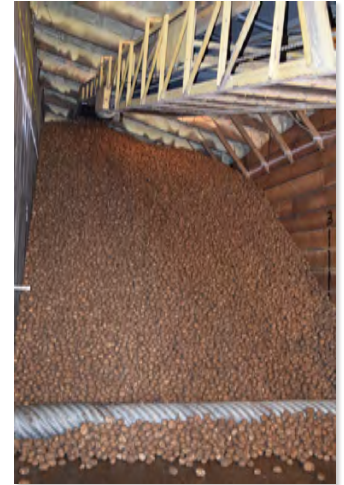
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acre this year. We've been known for experimenting with new varieties.

What about the farm makes you most proud? I am proud that we can start these new seed potato varieties. Hopefully they take off. We've been known for that.

My dad has always taught me to say what you mean and then do it, have that type of attitude. Don't beat around the bush. You don't need to lie to customers. All that does is come back to bite you.

You need to have integrity in this business.

Above: Mackinaw certified seed potatoes are sorted and stored at Rine Ridge Farms, in Bryant.

It's a great family-oriented industry. My wife was on the potato Auxiliary Board, she is co-leader for one of the associated volunteer groups selling baked potatoes at the Wisconsin

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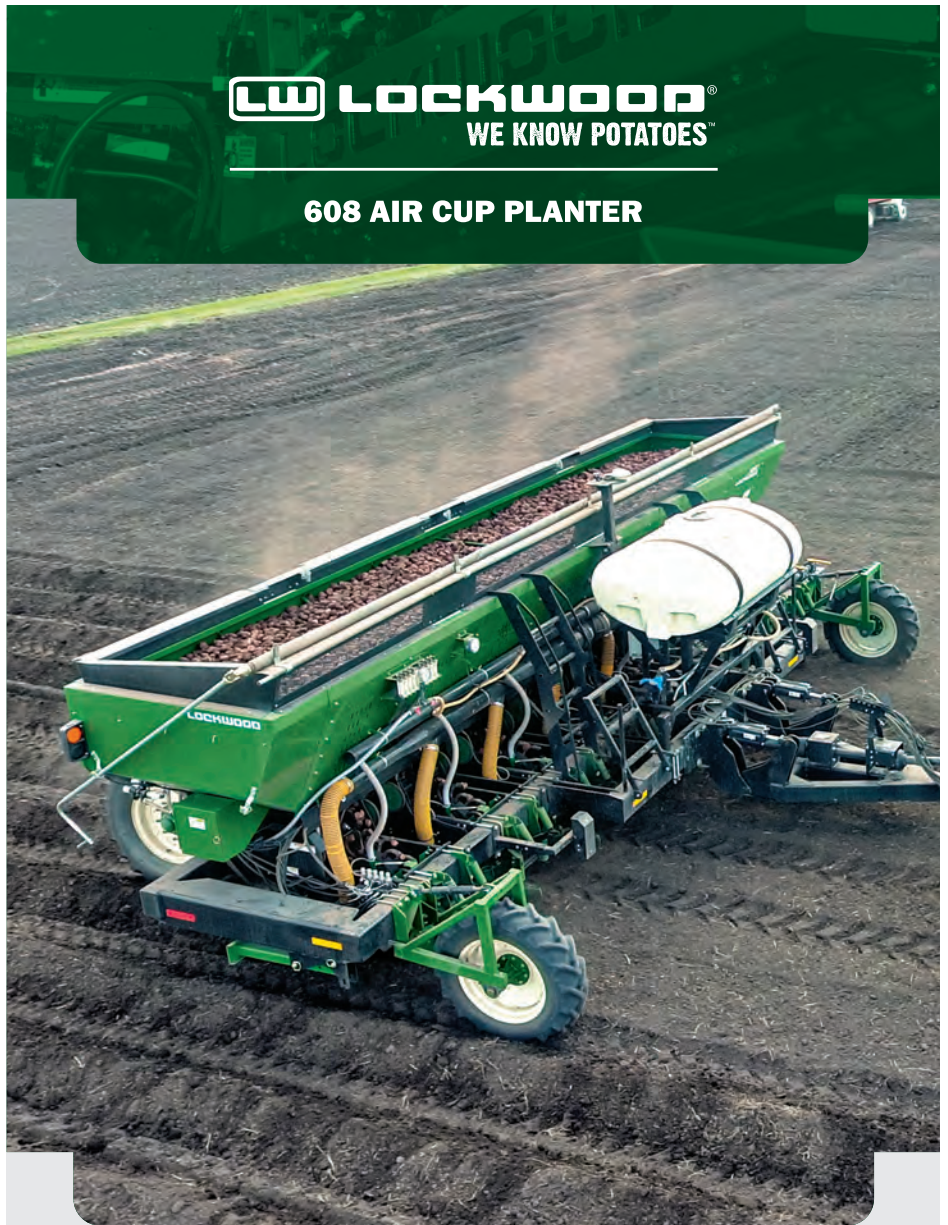


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State Fair, and both my daughters have helped there over the years, as well. My girls were also Ms. Tater Tots and are pictured in the Spudmobile. **BCT**

Below: Dan Rine says he enjoys looking north from the farmstead at the hardwood tree line during the fall of the year when the colors change, and there's no denying the beauty as another harvest comes to an end at Rine Ridge Farms.



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