



Three major Mexican produce companies and the Mexico City central market represented

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

The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA), grower members, Hancock Agricultural Research Station (HARS),

and the Food + Farm Exploration Center hosted Mexican produce buyers from NaturaSol, Kronchis, and the Central de Abasto-Mexico

City (CEDA) wholesale market for a Reverse Trade Mission, September 30-October 4.

The purpose of the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission was to promote the sale of Wisconsin potatoes for export to Mexico, gain more knowledge of the Mexican markets, and meet with potential table stock and chip stock importers.

Attendees included Rubén Ríos of CEDA, Mexico City's largest wholesale market; Juan Carlos Díaz and Omar Arch of Kronchis (pronounced Crunchies), a snack producer

Above: One of several tour stops along the way on the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission was Coloma Farms during potato harvest. Shown from left to right are Rubén Ríos of CEDA (Mexico City's wholesale market); Peter Joyce, a consultant for the WPVGA; Reynaldo Santamaría, Enrique Martínez and Brenda Reyes of NaturaSol; Joe Kertzman, *Badger Common'Tater*; and Juan Carlos Díaz and Omar Arch from Kronchis.

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interested in importing Wisconsin chip stock; and Brenda Reyes, Enrique Martínez and Reynaldo Santamaría of NaturaSol, which purchases roughly 15 loads of chip stock from the United States weekly and anticipates importing 30 loads per week in 2025.

Also in attendance were Peter Joyce, a consultant and multi-lingual interpreter contracted by the WPVGA, Joe Kertzman, managing editor of the Badger Common Tater, and WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan.

Over the course of three full days, the group enjoyed tours and visits to the Alsum Farms & Produce grading, packing and storage facility, and an Alsum Farms potato field in Grand Marsh; Heartland Farms and the Top Tier Ingredients potato flake and flour plant; Okray Family Farms; the Food + Farm Exploration Center; Hyland Lakes Spuds; Coloma Farms; HARS and the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Storage Research Facility



(SRF); and Gary Bula Farms.

POTATO HARVEST

Potato harvest was in full swing during their journey from Alsum's in Friesland and Grand Marsh to Heartland Farms of Hancock, Okray Family Farms in Plover, Hyland Lakes Spuds of Antigo, Coloma Farms, and Gary Bula Farms in Oxford.

Above: Juan Carlos Díaz (left) of Kronchis and Reynaldo Santamaría from NaturaSol took the opportunity to ride along in the tractor during potato harvest at the Alsum Farms & Produce north farm in Grand Marsh.

Attendees witnessed firsthand how potatoes and vegetables are harvested in a sustainable, efficient manner by some of the world's

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most respected growing operations. Some visitors even rode along in the harvesters, dug potatoes by hand, tasted them directly in the field, and experienced high-tech presentations and museum-quality exhibits.

They were impressed with the type of research and facilities that Wisconsin growers conduct and build to evaluate and improve their production quality.

During the Reverse Trade Mission, Mexican visitors were introduced to the Wisconsin Healthy Grown® program by Program Coordinator Deana Knuteson and given a tour of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable SRF by Facility Manager Amber Walker and HARS Superintendent Troy Fishler.

The Wisconsin potato industry is known as a national leader in

sustainable production and has developed the Healthy Grown program, allowing growers to compete in an international marketplace increasingly demanding food grown using ecologically friendly practices.

VALUE OF HEALTHY GROWN

After Knuteson’s presentation on the Healthy Grown program, one Mexican produce buyer indicated that, since he sells potato chips and table stock to Walmart and Costco, it could be useful to have the Healthy Grown seal on fresh bags, and that he’d take the information back to his team in Mexico to discuss how they could make that happen.

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Left: Mexican produce buyers were duly impressed by the Top Tier Ingredients potato flake and flour plant in Hancock, Wisconsin. From left to right are Josh Knights, Heartland Farms; Enrique Martínez and Reynaldo Santamaría of NaturaSol; Omar Arch, Kronchis; Jeremie Pavelski, Heartland Farms; Juan Carlos Díaz, Kronchis; Brenda Reyes, NaturaSol; Peter Joyce, WPVGA consultant; and Rubén Ríos, CEDA.

Right: Enrique Martínez (left) and Brenda Reyes of NaturaSol consult with Peter Joyce (right) about potatoes displayed at Festival Foods, in Stevens Point, during a retail visit as part of the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission.

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Wisconsin Hosts Reverse Trade Mission . . .

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It is estimated that 50% of potatoes in Mexico are sold through 64 different wholesale markets, while the other 50% are purchased through supermarkets that have their own distribution channels. Mexico has roughly 750,000 street markets that buy at wholesale compared to about 3,000 Walmart grocery stores.

The WPVGA is fully utilizing funds from an Export Expansion Grant awarded by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (WDATCP) to cover expenses for the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission.

The WPVGA and grower members

Above: Reynaldo Santamaría (left), NaturaSol, and Omar Arch, Kronchis, take pictures of a four-pack of potatoes packaged at the Okray Family Farms grading and packing facility, in Plover.

Right: Technology exhibits at the Food + Farm Exploration Center were a highlight of the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission.

also took advantage of previous WDATCP Export Expansion Grants to attend the 2023 Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) Convention and Trade Show in Toronto, Canada. The Association exhibited a second time at the CPMA Show, April 23-25, 2024, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In March 2024, WPVGA representatives and grower members attended Expo ANTAD in Guadalajara, Mexico. At a meeting in conjunction with Expo ANTAD, the WPVGA met representatives from CEDA, NaturaSol and Kronchis who expressed interest in buying Wisconsin potatoes.

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Above: Reverse Trade Mission attendees pose with Keith Wolter (fourth from left) in a Hyland Lakes Spuds storage shed. From left to right are Reynaldo Santamaría, Peter Joyce, Brenda Reyes, Keith, Juan Carlos Díaz, Omar Arch, Enrique Martínez and Rubén Ríos.



Left: Produce buyers from Mexico got an up-close look at Coloma Farms potato harvest. In the first image, Enrique Martínez (left) and Rubén Ríos hold red potatoes grown for the Little Potato Company. In the second photo, from left to right on the harvester, are Omar Arch, Enrique Martínez, Juan Carlos Díaz, Rubén Ríos, and Brenda Reyes.

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Left to right: Sid, John, Jonathan, Carl, Nick and Cliff.

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Above: Potatoes are separated into crates at the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Research Storage Facility. From left to right are Brenda Reyes, Enrique Martínez, Reynaldo Santamaría, Rubén Ríos, HARS Superintendent Troy Fishler, Peter Joyce, Juan Carlos Díaz, and Omar Arch.

Left: Tamra “Tammy” Bula-Garz (center) and Peter Joyce show potatoes grown at Gary Bula Farms for the Little Potato Company to attendees of the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission.

Right: Joe Huber (right) of Alsum Farms cut a potato in half so he could show it to, from left to right, Reynaldo Santamaría, Juan Carlos Díaz, Omar Arch, Brenda Reyes, and Enrique Martínez.



Top: Brian Lee (left) and Javier Cipriano (second from left) give Mexican produce buyers a firsthand look at potatoes going into storage at Okray Family Farms.

Middle: Andy Diercks (center) of Coloma Farms plays host to attendees of the Mexican Reverse Trade Mission. From left to right are Reynaldo Santamaría, WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan, Omar Arch, Juan Carlos Díaz, Andy, Rubén Ríos, Peter Joyce, Brenda Reyes, and Enrique Martínez.

Bottom: Posing in front of the Gary Bula Farms sign are, from left to right, Omar Arch, Juan Carlos Díaz, Reynaldo Santamaría, Tammy Bula-Garz, Gary Bula, Brenda Reyes, Enrique Martínez, Rubén Ríos and Peter Joyce. **BCT**



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