



NAME: John Bustamante

TITLE: General manager of Wysocki Produce Farm

COMPANY: Wysocki Family Farms

LOCATION: Bancroft, WI

HOMETOWN: Dearborn, MI

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: Two

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Research engineer at Mainstream Engineering, and taught evening classes at Florida Institute of Technology and Mid-State Technical College

SCHOOLING: Ph.D. in mechanical engineering, Georgia Institute of Technology, and a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering from Marquette University

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Current president of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPGVA) Board of Directors, board member of the Portage County Drainage District, and volunteered with FIRST LEGO League robotics competition and as a science fair judge

AWARDS/HONORS: Presidential Fellowship, ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers) Graduate Award, published 11 times, and holds five patents

FAMILY: Wife, Emily, and three children, Autumn, Oliver, and Tobin

HOBBIES: Strategy games, reading, movies, and woodworking or house projects

INTERVIEW

JOHN BUSTAMANTE,

general manager, Wysocki Produce Farm

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

Wysocki Family Farms of Bancroft, Wisconsin, is an example of successfully navigating the succession process of passing down a burgeoning business to the next generation, including setting up the new owners for success and allowing them to make informed decisions.

It's one of the most difficult transitions a family-owned business faces, especially one that has been in business for over 70 years and has grown into one of the nation's premier potato and vegetable operations.

The story began when brothers Louis, Francis and Greg Wysocki partnered with their father on his small dairy farm and converted the operation into a potato growing business. At that moment in the 1950s, the Wysocki farming operation was born.

The farm began to expand its Central Wisconsin operation when it started taking shipments of potatoes to market in Chicago. There, the brothers learned new and innovative ways to store and pack potatoes.

Crucial partnerships were formed over the years with Nick and Dianne

Somers of Plover River Farms and Jeff Sommers, who worked alongside the owners to propel the farm into a nationally renowned operation.

Now the fourth generation is following in the footsteps of their forefathers. The farm's operations have expanded to include growing regions across Wisconsin, and yet, the core principles that guided the company seven decades ago still drive it today.

How and when were you brought into the fold of the multi-

Above: John Bustamante, general manager of Wysocki Produce Farm and president of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPGVA) Board of Directors, stands in a potato field with his wife, Emily, and two of their children, Oliver (left) and Autumn. The picture was taken in June 2021 before the newest arrival in the Bustamante family, Tobin, was born.



generational Wysocki Family Farms, John, and in what position? I didn't grow up in agriculture, so I was fortunate enough to learn about the industry from my wife, Emily, and her extended family.

After years of discussions, I joined the company in 2018 to work in potato storage. I had worked in specialized thermal systems for the past decade, which is essentially what a potato storage is, so there was a surprising fit.

What was your background before that? I studied mechanical engineering and received my doctorate degree specializing in thermal systems from Georgia Tech. During that time, I worked at a variety of places, including Caterpillar, Sandia National Laboratories, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

When I graduated, I joined a private company in Florida where I led research projects developing thermal-fluid systems, including novel heat exchangers, phase change material energy storage devices, thermal management systems for

high-energy lasers, battery cooling systems, and brain cooling devices for medical treatments.

How have you progressed in the company, and did anyone take you under their wing so to speak? Is there a system in place to bring people into the fold? After an initial role, our business has potential

Above: The aerial photo provides a beautiful bird's-eye view of Wysocki Produce Farm, in Bancroft.

partners go through a rotational development program with roles in all areas of the business.

I began working in storage and

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irrigation, then rotated through roles including finance, human resources, sales, and the packaging shed. Coming out of that program, I moved back into farm operations as the assistant general manager.

My first mentor was my father-in-law, Kirk Wille, and, more recently, Jeff Sommers has been a key teacher, but a full answer to this question would list many people through the company and industry. Everyone has been incredibly generous in sharing their time and experience.

You are general manager of Wysocki

Produce Farm. What are some of the larger tasks the position entails being charged with daily? The most important part of any business is the people, so I spend the most time focused on the team and how I can support them. Together, we're continuously working on how to grow great crops and be a great partner to our customers.

Does it help to have good people in place? Absolutely – it's essential. They say that a company is only as good as the people, and our company is blessed with an outstanding, dedicated team.

Above: Potato planting at Wysocki Produce Farm can sometimes run from morning until dusk (the latter with a beautiful sky in the background).

How many people are employed in Bancroft, Wisconsin, and seasonally?

The Wysocki Family Farms companies all work together and collectively employ 200 full-time team members. Wysocki Produce Farm has around 100 employees, a number that doubles during harvest season.

Are you using H-2A and other seasonal workers, and has filling positions been a problem in



John Bustamante (right) is part of the 4th generation of Wysocki Family Farms, which also includes, from left to right, Kevin Schleicher, Zack Wysocki (top), Nicola Carey (front), and Lucas Wysocki (second from top).



John Bustamante's kids, Autumn (left) and Oliver, watch and reenact the plane planting cover crops.

a low-population area such as Bancroft? While our dedicated full-time team is the foundation of our success, yes, during the busy seasons, it's a challenge to hire all the seasonal roles needed, so we supplement our local seasonal hires with the H-2A program. We're fortunate that many of our H2A and seasonal team members return each year.

How many acres of potatoes are you growing, on what rotation, and with what rotational crops? We grow 8,000-8,500 acres of potatoes, typically on a three-year rotation with grain corn, soybeans, peas, green beans, and sweet corn.

What percentage are chipping potatoes versus fresh, and what varieties is Wysocki Produce Farm growing? It varies depending on the needs of our customers, but we typically grow 40% chips, 35%

"We're very fortunate to still be able to directly discuss the roots and history of the organization with some of the founders."

— John Bustamante

process, and 25% fresh potatoes. Our biggest varieties are Frito-Lay chipping potatoes, and Russet Burbanks and Umatillas for McCain Foods.

I believe storage is a big part of the operation—how many hundredweight of potatoes can Wysocki Produce Farm store and for how many months? What are the goals? We can store over 4.5 million cwt. (hundredweight) of potatoes each year and will store some through July. Our goal is always

to focus on high recovery and quality.

Do you have long-standing customers, and if so, what does it take to maintain a consistent customer base? Yes, our fresh sales partner, RPE, Inc., was formerly part of the business and has been a customer since its founding.

Regardless of market class, our approach to customer partnerships remains the same. Building and maintaining lasting relationships

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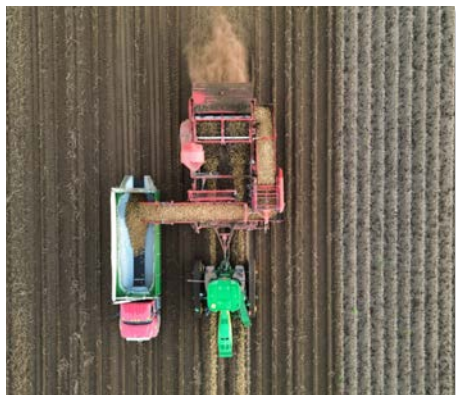

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requires trust, communication, and reliability. We focus on understanding our customers' needs, delivering quality products, and adapting as those needs evolve.

A family business since the 1950's but having grown exponentially, does it still feel like a family operation, John? If so, in what ways? It definitely feels like a family

business to me. There are quite a few family members working in the business, but also many long-term team members that are part of the family, too.

I think the history, approachability, and long-term relationships create that family feel.

How has the youngest generation kept the operation focused and true to its roots? The current ownership



Above: Pierce Johnson took these three images of the 2025 potato harvest at Wysocki Produce Farm, including an aerial view.

is part of the fourth generation. Our farm was founded by Louis, Francis, and Greg Wysocki with their father in the 1950s. We joke that we can't decide which generation we are – when someone starts a farm with their father, are they both first

generation, or are they first and second?

We're very fortunate to still be able to directly discuss the roots and history of the organization with

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Potato harvest looked a little bit different when Francis Wysocki Sr. and Jr. worked with a crew in the 1950s.

12 BC'T December



The mid-season potato crop was looking gorgeous when this photo was taken in July 2020.

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some of the founders. To quote an interview with Louis, “Our organization was built on honesty, hard work, and trust.” Those words still ring true today.

Do the current owners meet regularly to discuss goals or business models and philosophies?

Yes, but these discussions are not limited to the current owners. Many of our leaders, including our CEO, are not owners in the business.

How was the 2025 growing season, and what has your focus now shifted to?

It was definitely an improvement

over 2024. Overall, it was relatively average in terms of crop productivity, but performance varied quite a bit by area and timing for the canning vegetables, in particular.

Our focus has now shifted to shipping our potato crop and preparing for the next growing season.

Tell me about technologies that are helping make Wysocki Produce Farm be an efficient, sustainable operation.

The amount of ongoing innovation in agriculture is fascinating. We continue to test and utilize a wide variety of technologies,

Top Left: Wysocki Family Farms business mentor and partner, Kirk Wille, practices some hands-on learning with his granddaughters, who might just represent generation 5 someday, Autumn (John Bustamante’s daughter, left), and Elanor and Cordelia (John’s nieces).

Top Right: Jim, Louis and Russell Wysocki are pictured along with their marketing team in the 1990’s. The Mr. Tasty brand showcased in this picture was an original Wysocki family brand.

including new planting and harvest equipment, drone sprayers, and AI (Artificial Intelligence) scouting and sorting systems.

This exploration also extends to agronomic areas, testing new varieties and products.

This past year, one of our biggest projects was being McCain’s Innovation Hub for Wisconsin (see the related story in this issue). This research focuses on commercial testing of regenerative agriculture practices. The ideas are proposed by growers, and the results are shared with the grower group.

Is there also a philosophy regarding caring for the land and sustainability?

Yes, caring for the land and operating sustainably are central to our farming philosophy. We are responsible for maintaining the land’s health and productivity



Three generations are pictured, in 2021, at Wysocki Family Farms. In the front row, from left to right, are Gary Wysocki, Louis Wysocki, Greg Wysocki, Kevin Schleicher, Lucas Wysocki, Nicola Carey, Zack Wysocki, and John Bustamante; and in the back row, ascending from left to right, Kirk Wille, Jeff Sommers, Russell Wysocki, Bill Wysocki, and Jim Wysocki.

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Above: An aerial view shows the Wysocki Produce Farm team in August 2025.

Left: Potato storage at Wysocki Produce Farm is shown from a couple different angles, with the overhead shot courtesy of photographer Pierce Johnson.

for future generations.

Some of our practices include cover crops usage, following the best agronomic practices to manage full crop rotations, and pursuing

innovation and research to continue improving.

How does the operation give back to the community? We believe in making a positive difference in

the community where we all live. Through monetary and potato donations, we are honored to support local schools, FFA and 4-H groups, community emergency services, food banks, and numerous

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other community organizations.

We also enjoy hosting students and other groups for tours, conducting 45 tours this past year. But the greatest contributions to the community are by all our team members who are involved in causes they are passionate about.

Do you have a favorite part of the job, John? Nothing beats seeing the satisfaction and pride of someone on the team having succeeded at a tough job, whether it's fixing equipment, growing a great crop, or any other area.

What do you hope the coming years bring for you and your fellow employees or employee owners?

I hope we continue having a positive impact on our team members and community, now and for future generations. We are proud of the vital role farms play in feeding the world.

Is there anything I've missed that you'd like to add? Thank you for continuing to do these interviews. I really enjoy hearing someone's story every month. **BCT**

Above Left: Corn harvest is shown "times four," including combines and grain carts, at Wysocki Produce Farm.

Above Right: Dawn breaks over an irrigated potato field at Wysocki Produce Farm.



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