



## EVEN POTATO EXPO IS BIGGER IN TEXAS

More than 30 countries were represented  
at the 18th Annual Potato Expo in Dallas

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

As the largest conference and trade show for the potato industry in North America, Potato Expo 2026,

January 6-8 at the Gaylord Texan, in Dallas, brought together growers, manufacturers, suppliers, value

chain partners, and industry leaders from the United States and 30 other countries.

More than 2,100 attendees visited the booths of 196 exhibitors, placing Potato Expo 2026, organized by the National Potato Council, in the top three largest such events in the show's history.

Many potato associations and organizations support the show and take advantage of the business opportunities it presents, with Potatoes USA holding its Winter Meeting for three days leading

**Above & Left:** With more than 2,100 attendees and 196 exhibitors, Potato Expo 2026 in Dallas was proof positive that everything really is bigger in Texas, including the oversize cowboy at the Potatoes USA booth.



up to Potato Expo, this year in the Gaylord Texan.

Affiliated organizational gatherings include the United Potato Growers of Canada Board meeting, Potato Sustainability Alliance General Meeting and Reception, United Potato Growers of America Board Meeting, the National Potato Council Past Presidents and Executive Committee Dinner, the Annual Meeting of the Potato Leadership, Education, and Advancement Foundation (Potato LEAF), and more.

The Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) teams up with the University of Wisconsin Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association to host a Wisconsin Certified Seed Potatoes booth at Potato Expo.

Providing full Potatoes USA reports during the Winter Meeting were the Consumer; Retail; Market



Development; Culinary; Finance & Policy; Production Research; Foodservice; Communications; and Nutrition & Health committees; as well as the Seed Task Force.

The Potatoes USA Nutrition & Health Committee anticipated the release of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2026-2030) the day after the Winter Meeting, January 7, with the



**Above:** Potatoes USA Director of Nutrition Riley Peterson gives a Nutrition and Health Committee Report at the organization's Winter Meeting, Tuesday, January 6, prior to the start of the Potato Expo trade show, January 7.

guidelines providing science-based advice on meeting nutrient needs, promoting health and preventing disease.

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Fresh potatoes were included in the new guidelines, which prioritize protein and vegetables. At the top of the USDA's new food pyramid are protein, dairy, healthy fats, vegetables and fruits.

### MONITORING MEDIA COVERAGE

The outlook for processed potatoes in the new Dietary Guidelines is less clear, but Potatoes USA is monitoring media coverage and responding to misinformation, stressing that potatoes are a nutrient-rich vegetable.

Aiding in scientific messaging is the Alliance for Potato Research

and Education (APRE), which is dedicated to advancing the scientific understanding of potatoes' role in promoting health. APRE conducts research on potatoes that generally fuels positive media coverage.

APRE supports research in areas such as cardiometabolic health, healthy dietary patterns, and healthy lifestyles, and focuses on the nutritional value of potatoes. The alliance aims to debunk negative stereotypes about potatoes and promote their inclusion in a healthy diet.

Positive messaging from Potatoes



**Left:** WPGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan (second from left) poses with three of Wisconsin's Potatoes USA Board members, from left to right, Wendy Dykstra, Charlie Husnick, and Kevin Schleicher.

**Right:** Lyla Hathaway (center) of the Colorado Certified Potato Growers Association, and WPGA Director of Promotions & Consumer Education Dana Rady (right) scanned barcodes at the door of the Potato Business Summit for which Victoria Stamper (left), general manager of the United Potato Growers of Canada, acted as master of ceremonies.

USA and APRE is working, with one example being that potatoes are now the primary energy source among athletic men.

The Potatoes USA Culinary Committee reported on recent Chef Lab collaborations, Campus Foodservice Takeover events at universities, Teaching Kitchen symposiums, and an International Chef Reverse Trade Mission held in 2025.

International trade is a topical subject, with China and India establishing themselves as big players in the potato processing markets, and India being a volume producer of potatoes destined for processing.

Cedric Porter, Editor of World Potato Market, gave a Global Market Review



Potato Expo Steering Committee members cut the ribbon to open the 18th Annual Potato Expo in Dallas.

during the Winter Meeting, noting that U.S. tariffs are having a negative effect on international potato trade and that overall potato production is historically high, though down slightly for the United States and Canada in 2025.

Potatoes USA Chief Executive Officer Blair Richardson said, "Right now we're in a critical place, not just for potatoes, but all of agriculture. There are so many outside disruptions that we really need to get our head out of today and look to where we need to be in the future."

#### NEW COMPETITORS

"We have new competitors in the global potato industry, shifting alliances, general uncertainty and unpredictable governments. There is a global race for new and improved potato varieties. We are not leading in this area," Richardson emphasized.

"We need to defend the U.S. marketplace and expand our culinary

*"We need to defend the U.S. marketplace and expand our culinary influence, enhance digital media projects, and energize the retail and foodservice sectors. We need better potato varieties faster."*

**– Blair Richardson,**

Potatoes USA CEO

influence, enhance digital media projects, and energize the retail and foodservice sectors. We need better potato varieties faster," he continued.

Richardson unveiled a bold new Potatoes USA vision, "From Seed to Table, a New Path to Potato Innovation," with the organization approving a feasibility study in 2026 to gauge its viability.

The Potato Business Summit, a joint effort between the United Potato Growers of America (UPGA), United Potato Growers of Canada, and Potato Marketing Association of North America (PMANA), takes place annually the morning before the opening of Potato Expo and in the same venue.

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Lucas Wysocki, chairman of the UPGA, welcomed a packed hall for the Summit where representatives from 20 U.S. states, seven Canadian provinces and several European countries gathered.

The Potato Business Summit agenda included an Economic Outlook from Stephen Nicholson of Rabobank, a European Market Update by Porter, a Consumer Market Overview from Kim Breshears of Potatoes USA, a Frozen Market Update by Daniel Metherringham of McCain Foods, "Potato Storage Solutions" from Steve Elfering of 1,4GROUP and NAPSO, and a Fresh Potato Market



From left to right, Oregon State University Plant Pathologist Kenneth Frost; Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification Program (WSPCP) Associate Research Program Director Brooke Babler; UW-Madison Department of Plant Pathology Professor and Extension Specialist Amanda Gevens; and WPVGA Director of Promotions & Consumer Education Dana Rady pose in front of the "Wisconsin Certified Seed Potatoes" booth at Potato Expo.

**Above Left:** Exeter Engineering displayed an Oculus Sorter at Potato Expo, a three-drop sorter with a unique roller design that yields superior sorting and grading results.

**Above Right:** Potatoes USA Culinary Director Chef R.J. Harvey (left) interviews Mike Carter of Bushmans' Inc., Rosholt, Wisconsin, during the "Snack Wars: Little Minis Edition" cooking competition on Wednesday, January 7, at Potato Expo. Sponsored by The Little Potato Company, 2024 and 2025 "Top Spuds" Mike Carter and Shelley Olsen of LJ Olsen Inc., Othello, Washington, defended their title against two other teams. The first was composed of Dean Gibson, Magic Valley Produce, and T.J. Hall, Hall's G4, and the second team included Natalie Nesburg, Potato Sustainability Alliance, and Michael Rainis of Friehe Farms. At the end of a thrilling competition, Gibson and Hall emerged victorious.

20 BC'T February



From left to right, T.J. Kennedy and his sons, Tyler and Marcus, and WPVGA Board member Josh Knights represented Heartland Farms of Hancock, Wisconsin, at Potato Expo.





Outlook given by Mark Klompier, UPGA.

The trade show officially opened at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, and one hour later the “Snack Wars: Little Minis Edition” cooking competition commenced on the Expo Stage, hosted by Potatoes USA Culinary Director Chef R.J. Harvey and Executive Sous Chef Aurora Hollenbeck.

Sponsored by The Little Potato Company, the 2024 and 2025 “Top Spuds” Mike Carter of Bushmans’ Inc., in Rosholt, Wisconsin, and

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**Above Left:** Leading a panel discussion on “Potato Certification: Advancing Direct Tuber Testing” on Wednesday of Potato Expo are, from left to right, moderator Nina Zidack, Ph.D. and former director of Montana Seed Potato Certification; Andrew Houser, Ph.D., manager of the Colorado Potato Certification Service; Brooke Babler, associate research program director for the Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification Program; and Jason Kimm, Montana Potato Improvement Association Board member and owner/operator of Kimm Seed Potatoes.

**Above Right:** Carol Tweet of Bedford Industries shows off the Closelt® “Wisconsin Potatoes” produce bag clips that the company makes for Warner & Warner Inc. and Okray Family Farms, of Plover, among others.



This good-looking group from Wisconsin attending Potato Expo includes, from left to right, Amy Wiernik of the Food + Farm Exploration Center; Mike Carter, Bushmans’ Inc.; Alicia, Charlotte and Jeremie Pavelski, Heartland Farms; John Hopfensperger, Bushmans’ Inc.; and Alexandria Behrend, Food + Farm Exploration Center.

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Shelley Olsen of LJ Olsen Inc., Othello, Washington, defended their title against two other teams.

### OPPOSING TEAMS

The first opposing team was composed of Dean Gibson of Magic Valley Produce, and T.J. Hall from Hall's G4, and the second team included Natalie Nesburg, Potato Sustainability Alliance, and Michael Rainis of Friehe Farms. At the end of



a thrilling competition, Gibson and Hall emerged victorious.

Breakout sessions and Potato Talks touched on subjects such as international opportunities for the U.S. potato industry, management of invasive potato nematodes, using artificial intelligence (AI) for potato production, understanding disruptive weather patterns, mental health, and tracking potato canopy metrics.

**Left:** U.S. Marine Corps Col. (Ret.) Rob Abbott presents "Mental Health—Lessons from the Gettysburg Battlefield" on the Cultivation Stage at Potato Expo. For the past couple of years, the Potato Leadership, Education, and Advancement Foundation (Potato LEAF) has developed a new leadership program titled "Leadership in the Field: From Battlefield to Potato Field."

**Right:** Baginski Farms of Antigo, Wisconsin, was well represented at Potato Expo by, from left to right, Mike Baginski, Mason Mullins, and Charlie Husnick.



Enjoying the WSPIA & Chip Committee Annual Reception are, from left to right, Leigha and Ty Rohloff, Cathy Schommer, Alyssa Perry, John Huss, Ann Urbik, and Dan Kendall.



Apple AirPods were the door prize of choice when Matthew Hartmann of BMO Bank had his name drawn during the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association (WSPIA) & WPVGA Chip Committee Annual Reception, Wednesday evening of Potato Expo.



**Left:** Jared Suchon of Bushman Riverside Ranch won an Apple Watch in a door prize drawing during the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association (WSPIA) & WPVGA Chip Committee Annual Reception, Wednesday evening of Potato Expo.

**Middle and Right:** Katie Hall of Hall's G4 and Larry Alsum, Alsum Farms & Produce, each won a crisp \$100 bill in door prize drawings during the WSPIA and WPVGA Chip Committee Annual Reception. Earlier in the day, T.J. Hall and Dean Gibson, Magic Valley Produce, won the "Snack Wars: Little Minis Edition" cooking competition. Hall's G4 is a fourth-generation family farm in Hoople, North Dakota, with a long history of growing potatoes in the Red River Valley.

Direct tuber testing was discussed as a viable option for seed certification, as were topics such as succession planning, the U.S. ag labor policy, and the AIM Act and its impact on potato storage.

The 2026 Potato Expo included numerous social events and

networking opportunities, including a welcome reception, beer garden, on-site potato-centric lunches, and a Potato LEAF Auction, which raised more than \$200,000 to support leadership development within the U.S. potato industry.

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**Above:** Discussing “The Impact of Bio-Controls and Bio-Stimulants in Potato Production” Thursday afternoon of Potato Expo are, from left to right, Chris Thrasher, vice president of product development and innovation at Meristem, Alex Cochran, chief technology officer for DPH Biologicals, and Jeff Sommers, general manager of Wysocki Farms.

Other social events included a Kick-Off Reception, “Mash-ter Minds Team Trivia,” and an “It’s a Wrap-Up Party” following the closing of Potato Expo on Thursday evening and featuring dueling pianos for an immersive piano bar experience.

The Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association & WPGA Chip Committee held their annual reception at the Gaylord Texan Convention Center following Potato Expo, Wednesday evening, with refreshments, door prizes, appetizers, networking and fun.



On Thursday of Potato Expo, National Potato Council Chief Operating Officer Mike Wenkel (left) moderated a U.S. Agriculture Labor Policy Update panel with Jonathan Sarager (center), senior federal government affairs director for Western Growers, and John Walt Boatright (right), director, government affairs, for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

University of Wisconsin (UW) Professor and Extension Specialist Russell Groves, Department of Entomology, did the honors

of emceeing the event and announcing winners of door prizes.

Potato Expo focuses on innovation, education and networking. The event facilitates collaboration and partnerships, offering opportunities for industry professionals to share insights and explore the latest developments in potato production, processing, and sustainability. **BCT**

*Potato Expo 2027 will be held January 5-7 at the Gaylord Rockies in Aurora, Colorado. More information is available by visiting <https://www.nationalpotatocouncil.org/potato-expo/>.*

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