



INTERVIEW

JACALYNN GUMZ, Precision Ag and Potato Production Specialist, Gumz Farms

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, Badger Common'Tater

NAME: Jacalynn Gumz

TITLE: Precision Ag and Potato Production Specialist

COMPANY: Gumz Farms LLC

LOCATION: Endeavor, WI

HOMETOWN: Endeavor

YEARS IN PRESENT POSITION: Five

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Corteva Agriscience in Johnston, Iowa, and Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida

SCHOOLING: Bachelor of Science Degree in Agriculture Education from Iowa State University

ACTIVITIES/ORGANIZATIONS: Potatoes USA Board of Directors, Vice President of Portage Curling Club Board of Directors, U.S. Women's Curling Association representative, and USA Curling Level II official

FAMILY: Parents, Richard and Linda Gumz, and fiancé, Unal Karabulut

HOBBIES: Curling, raising backyard chickens, tropical plants, and planning a wedding

"On any given day, you can find Jacalynn Gumz out in the potato, onion, carrot and mint fields at Gumz Farms LLC, in Endeavor, Wisconsin, and the quiet community, located on Buffalo Lake in Marquette County, is not such a bad place to be!

When Jacalynn's great-grandfather started farming, he expanded his own father's farm in northern Indiana into Wisconsin, in the 1940's. In the late 1950's, Jacalynn's grandfather began managing the main farm in Indiana, and since there were management opportunities in Wisconsin, her dad, Richard, and uncle, Rod, moved to the state.

Gumz Farms LLC grows, stores, and packs red and yellow potatoes and yellow onions for retail, carrots for processing, field corn, soybeans, and mint. The Gumz family has been raising mint in Indiana and

Wisconsin for over 100 years.

And while Gumz Farms LLC has grown in both size and as a vertical business, the family has also grown alongside it.

Jacalynn was recently elected as a new member of the Potatoes USA Board of Directors, which guides the

Above: Precision Ag and Potato Production Specialist Jacalynn Gumz is part of the fifth generation at Gumz Farms LLC, which grows, stores, and packs red and yellow potatoes and yellow onions for retail, carrots for processing, field corn, soybeans, and mint in Endeavor, Wisconsin.



organization's efforts to promote and support the potato industry. The Board sets strategic objectives for the organization and allocates resources to marketing, research, and education initiatives.

Jacalynn, what generation do you represent at Gumz Farms, LLC, and what is your role on the farm?

I represent the fifth generation at Gumz Farms. My father, Richard, and my uncle, Rod, are the owners of Gumz Farms. My cousins, Jason and Alex, are also fifth generation with me back at the farm.

My role is primarily outside in the fields working with our potatoes, onions, carrots and mint. I get involved in a little bit of everything.

I am heavily involved with potato production, from sourcing seed to the day-to-day operations of planting and harvesting and then to scouting, internal research, sampling, and quality control. I'm also our precision agriculture person.

I'm in charge of our 20 Ag Leader-guided tractors that primarily work with potatoes and onions, and one John Deere guidance system for corn planting. All guidance we use is RTK

(Real-Time Kinematic positioning) with sub-inch accuracy. I really enjoy the problem-solving aspect of working with precision agriculture.

Did you always know that you wanted to work on the farm, or what was your path getting to where you are today? I always knew I wanted to be in agriculture and thought that I would become an agriculture teacher and FFA advisor.

Above: Gumz Farms LLC raises around 1,100 acres of fresh market red and yellow potatoes, dividing acreage into about 60% for red and 40% yellow.

I loved my time in FFA and wanted to be involved in creating that positive experience for other young adults.

Towards the end of college, I did an internship that steered me more

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towards horticulture, so I ended up taking more classes and completed a minor.

After college, I worked for Corteva Agriscience in their research greenhouses in Johnston, Iowa. I was part of the breeding program for corn, wheat, canola, and cotton.

After four years, during corporate mergers, I took an offer to leave and return to the farm. I appreciated my time away, but I am very grateful

to be back in beautiful Wisconsin.

What do you most take pride in regarding the family business, started in 1892 and expanding into Wisconsin in the 1940's? My family has been growing mint for over 100 years. That's amazing to think about. The whole reason we are in Wisconsin is because of mint and verticillium wilt (in Indiana).

The original farm is in North Judson, Indiana, and my great grandpa had

an opportunity to purchase new land in Wisconsin that had never grown mint.

In addition to mint, how many acres of potatoes does Gumz Farms, LLC, grow, store and pack, and how about yellow onions? And is it all for the retail market? Yes, all the potatoes and onions are for retail. We grow around 1,100 acres of fresh market red and yellow potatoes, allotting the acreage to about 60% red and 40% yellow.

We purposely space out planting in the spring from mid-April to mid-June so that we can harvest as we pack for the highest quality tuber. Most of our



Above: Gumz Farms has four long-term and six short-term potato storage buildings, all connected through flumes. Fresh produce is pictured ready to leave the packaging facility. The onions are being stored in totes to later be packaged into 3-pound bags. The operation packages two-thirds of the onions grown in Wisconsin.

Left: The good-looking family of farmers includes, from left to right, Richard and Linda Gumz; Rod and Michelle Gumz, and their son, Jason, between them; and Richard and Linda's daughter, Jacalynn, this issue's interviewee. Not shown is Rod and Michelle's daughter, Alex.



Jacalynn Gumz (second from right) is vice president of the Portage Curling Club Board of Directors, a U.S. Women's Curling Association representative, and a USA Curling Level II official. Jacalynn's fiancé, Unal Karabulut, is second from left in the photo.

potatoes are shipped shortly after harvesting, with harvest lasting from mid-August through mid-October.

We can store about 240,000 cwt. (hundredweight) of potatoes, but plan to have all our own shipped by February.

We package two-thirds of the onions grown in Wisconsin. We grow primarily yellow but also have some red onions. The onions are grown on 72-inch center beds and harvested mid-August through September.

We store onions in climate-controlled bulk storage. The buildings have a special removable false floor to promote air circulation.

Is the farm still raising carrots for processing, field corn, soybeans, and over 1,000 acres of mint?

Unfortunately, we have had to cut back on acres of mint due to low demand for USA-grown mint oil. Currently, we have around 700 acres of peppermint and spearmint. We would like to grow more if there were contracts available.

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"In everyday life, I try to be an ambassador for agriculture, talking to friends, family, and strangers about potato and vegetable production."

– Jacalynn Gumz



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And, yes, we also grow carrots, field corn, and soybeans. The “slicer and dicer” carrots we raise are for processing and are shipped directly off the farm. Field corn and soybeans are used for rotation and grown on more marginal fields.

We became an official Beck’s seed dealer in 2024 and really appreciate the family farm quality of their company.

How many full- and part-time employees does the operation have? Are many of them long-term employees? We mostly have year-round employment due to our pack

shed running all year. We have some H2A workers over the summer for our onions and a few seasonal employees for harvest. We have many multi-generation families that work and have worked on the farm.

What advantage does Gumz Farms LLC have in terms of planting and harvesting in muck soil? Are there disadvantages? Growing on muck has a lot of benefits and some unique challenges. We see benefits in terms of high organic matter and getting a beautiful red color on potatoes.

Unlike this growing season, most years we are trying to take water

Above: A new piece of equipment purchased in the spring of this year, a Carbon Robotics G2 Laser Weeder is used to kill weeds in an onion field at Gumz Farms. Jacalynn Gumz says, using the laser weeder, the farming operation has experienced healthier onions that are maturing slightly quicker due to reduced dings from herbicides.

Below: Potatoes are ripped for drainage at Gumz Farms LLC in Endeavor, Wisconsin. It’s the first step after planting, which is then followed by hilling.

off the field. Because of muck’s high water-holding capacity, when it gets wet, it’s heavy and it is difficult to run equipment in the field. Muck is also incredibly prone to wind erosion



when dry, so we use a lot of cover crops to prevent this.

All our muck fields are tiled at a minimum of every 50 feet, and some down to as narrow as 20-foot spacing.

Congratulations on recently being elected to the Potatoes USA Board of Directors. Why did you decide to run for the Board? I really wanted to get more involved in the industry and meet other growers from across the country.

One of the main reasons for running was to gain perspective on U.S. potatoes. I want to learn as much as possible to bring back to the farm. Hopefully this knowledge will help advance our farm and put us in the best possible position.

And I think you just had your first Potatoes USA Board Meeting. How did it go? I wasn't quite sure what to expect from the first meeting, but I met a lot of very knowledgeable and



Currently, Gumz Farms LLC raises 700 acres of peppermint and spearmint and would like to grow more if there were contracts available.

passionate producers from across the country.

I learned how Potatoes USA drives demand internationally for USA-grown potatoes, all the research being done for processing chips and

fries, and how the team works with end-users to develop new menu items for restaurants.

I'm excited to do what I can to help promote the potato industry.

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You are also a graduate of the WPVGA Member Development Program. Why was it important for you to take the Association's leadership training, and what did you gain from it? Yes, I did the Membership Development Program in 2023-'24. I was still very new to the industry, so it was a great way for me

to learn about the WPVGA, see other operations, and connect with people in the industry.

What's your favorite part of working on the farm? I really enjoy following the crop from planting to harvest. It's especially rewarding during harvest to see the fruits of everyone's hard

labor that went into producing the crop.

I also enjoy spending time with my family. I love being able to work with and learn from my father.

This is our storage and marketing issue. How long does Gumz Farms LLC store potatoes each year? And onions and/or carrots? We have four long-term and six short-term potato storages at our farm, and all storage buildings are connected through flumes.

Short-term storage is used to get the crop off the field, cooled, packaged, and shipped. Long-term storages are filled toward the end of harvest and used to extend our crop shipping season.

However, long-term storage is only until about February because potatoes coming off the muck soil have a high-water content and don't store as well.

Above and Left: Gumz Farms LLC primarily raises yellow onions and some reds. The onions are grown on 72-inch center beds and harvested from mid-August through September. The onions are stored in climate-controlled bulk storage, with each building having a special removable false floor to promote air circulation.



We can store onions for quite a bit longer. We have several storages spread out across our farms and typically store until the end of June.

The dry-down process is a crucial step in onion storage. When the onions are first put into storage, they are subjected to heat to cure them, and then we gradually lower the temperature for longer storage.

We are constantly testing varieties for storability. One of our internal research projects that I help the onion team with is raising test plots. We take 1/1000th of an acre for test plots and storage, keeping them with our bulk storage, and then grade them, usually in March. We do not store carrots.

What does Gumz Farms do well in marketing its brands? How can you, yourself, help market Gumz Farms LLC? We try to get our name out there as much as we can, but most of our business is done on a relationship basis. We like to focus



on customer service, creating those relations and producing quality work in a timely fashion.

Our advantage is location, which allows for quick delivery throughout the Midwest. Our sales team is also going to many trade shows like the National Onion Association meetings and produce expos like the Southeast Produce Council's "Southern Exposure."

Above: Raising crops on muck soil with high organic matter is a benefit in getting a beautiful red color on potatoes.

I do my part by attending Potato Expo and representing Wisconsin on the Potatoes USA Board. In everyday life, I try to be an ambassador for agriculture, talking to friends, family, and strangers about potato and vegetable production.

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The operation also has a state-of-the-art sorting, grading, and packing facility. Has there been a lot of development in that area since your time on the farm, and if so, in what areas?

Yes, we are consistently improving what we do and have just finished installing an Ellips USA grading system. The Ellips is a fully automated lane grader that uses AI (artificial intelligence) to grade and sort potatoes.

We hope for labor savings by reducing the number of people hand grading and to have consistent, high-quality, and uniform packages. Most

of our product leaves the farm in retail-size packages of 3-pound (lb.) onion and 5- and 10-lb. potato bags that are then placed in larger bulk bags for ease of stacking.

The 50-lb. bulk bags are made and filled by heat-seaming a bag from roll-stock netting and then counting the appropriate number of small bags. The 50-lb. bags are automatically stacked on a pallet by a Verbruggen palletizer made in the Netherlands.

Over the years, we've tried to reduce labor, become more efficient, and source product from across the

Above: Beautiful, healthy fields of potatoes are grown in the muck soils of Gumz Farms in Endeavor, Wisconsin.

United States to keep our customers' shelves stocked 24/7.

Any other new farm tractors, machinery, or technologies you want to mention?

We purchased an Ecorobotix ARA sprayer last year and a Carbon Robotics Laser Weeder this spring. Both utilize AI. We use them together to reduce hand weeding and crop protection costs.

Our laser weeder is set up with a fully



Recent upgrades to the Gumz Farms grading, sorting, and packing facility include an Ellips fully automated lane grader that uses AI to grade and sort potatoes (left), and a Verbruggen palletizer, made in the Netherlands, that automatically stacks 50-lb. bags of potatoes onto pallets (right).



autonomous kit. We ran the laser weeder 24/7 with stops only for fuel and maintenance. We mostly had our own operators in the cab from about 6 a.m.-9 p.m., and then from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., we turned the laser weeder over to remote operators. It was a little nerve racking the first night when it was running autonomously.

The laser weeder does an amazing job at killing weeds, and we've seen healthier onions that are maturing slightly quicker due to the reduced dings from herbicides. Its main limitation is speed, with our average for the whole season being 1.5 acres an hour. We couldn't cover all our acreage due to this limitation, so we focused on around 300 acres.

Speaking of which, how is the growing season going as far as weather, health of crops, and projected yield? Well, we've had a very polarizing season this year. April was the wettest April in Wisconsin's history and May was one of the driest. We had a lot of wind, hail, and even a tornado this spring.

The tornado destroyed one of our equipment storage sheds, but thankfully most of the equipment wasn't heavily damaged.

Overall, our potato crop looks great. I've been pulling field samples, and



they are a great size with smooth skin. I'm excited to start harvesting.

We lost some stand in our onions this spring because of dry conditions and wind. We even replanted some onions, which is very unusual. Hopefully the thinner stand will produce larger onions.

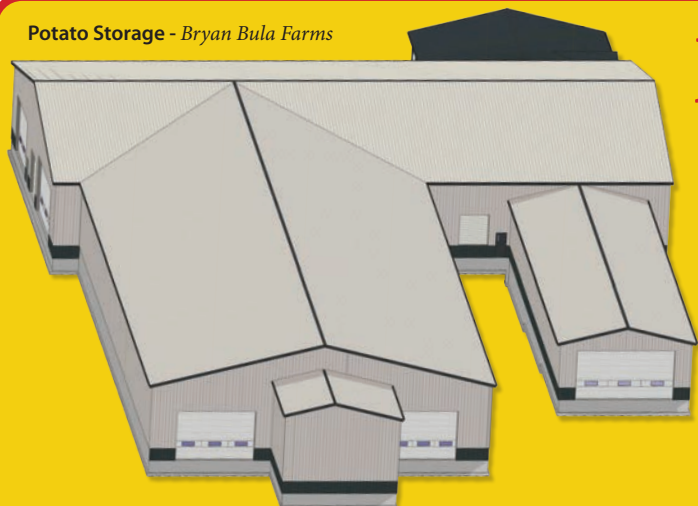
What do you hope for the family business in general? The farm has advanced a lot even in the short time I've been back. I've seen how the Ag Leader-guided tractors have improved our systems, as well as the

Above: Potatoes are put into storage at Gumz Farms LLC in Endeavor, Wisconsin.

addition of AI with the Ecorobotix ARA, Carbon Robotics G2 Laser Weeder, and the Ellipse grader.

It will be exciting to see how technology advances, but it's difficult to envision what farming will be like in 50 years. I hope, with all the advancements in technology, that we continue to improve our efficiency and quality so that we can produce the best product possible. **BC'T**

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