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Bushmans' expects solid potato season

By

Keith Loria

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It was 114 years ago when Joseph L. Bushman started his own potato growing operation in Wisconsin, taking advantage of the dark, rich Wisconsin soils.

Today, his legacy lives on as [Bushmans' Inc.](#), a farmer-owned potato producer and the longest continuing potato growing company in the state, dealing in reds, whites, yellows and russets, including norkotahs, silvertons, gold rush and caribou.

“2023 has been a fine year for the company; produce in general has been good and potatoes have been something that’s filling people’s stomachs in the midst of tough economic times,” said Mike Carter, CEO of the Rosholt, WI-based company. “Fresh potatoes just thrive in poor economic conditions. You can see a definite increase in demand.”

The quality of the upcoming season is looking good so far, as is the size, but Carter noted nobody does a celebration dance until everything is under roof.

“We’re right in the thick of harvest right now, with yield slightly above average, the size profile is excellent and now we just need to get through the next few weeks,” Carter said. “So, we’re pretty pleased with how we’re looking.”

This follows a 2022 potato season that was super strong, with good pricing due to lower product being available.

“There were a few weather challenges last season that cut into volume,” Carter said. “Our challenge was making sure we had enough for everybody, and we were able to do that.”

Having been in the potato industry for so long, Bushmans’ understands the keys to success, and Carter noted that begins with providing a quality product at a fair price.

“Jerry Bushman [who started Bushman’s in 1974] always had a phrase that has served us well, he said, ‘Our mission is to line up the right potato with the right buyer,’ and I think that’s exactly right,” he said. “There are a lot of different types of potatoes and a lot of different varieties, so our mission is to ensure the buyer gets exactly what they are looking for.”

Working in Wisconsin has provided a boom for the potatoes, with one big advantage being proximity to market.

“Our growing season is just as strong as anyone else, the varieties we grow are the same as anywhere in the country, but where we excel is in distribution and being able to get product to market quicker and for a lower price,” Carter said. “That being said, the other growing areas do a fine job as

well.”

One of the things that Bushmans’ has seen over the last several years is an increase in sales of yellow potatoes, and there’s more yellows consumed now than red potatoes.

“The rise in popularity there is definitely an opportunity because of the strong growth,” Carter said. “I think that specialty potatoes will also continue to increase and be an opportunity as well. Smaller packaging at the retail level is another area of growth we are seeing and value-added is doing well.”

For instance, the company provides smaller potatoes in a No. 5 paper bag under the Country Boy label, and Bushmans’ has partnered with Tony Chachere’s Spice company to create salt potatoes, Louisiana crawfish boil potatoes and spicy cajun potatoes.

Bushmans’ customer base has remained stable through the years, with the same large retailers for a long time, and some small retailers and wholesalers as well.

“We value those relationships,” Carter said. “People have this myth in their heads that potatoes are bad for you, but they’re not, and this is a good business to be in for sure.”

Bushmans’ has also been selling cranberries for about 10 years under its Wisconsin Red Pearls label.

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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