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Potato season on-time and looking strong for Dublin Farms

By

Keith Loria

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As a fifth-generation farmer at Horntown, VA-based Dublin Farms, David Hickman understands all that the Eastern Shore offers.

Working with his brother, Matthew, and his cousin, Philip, they combined to run the farm, following in the legacy of growing potatoes, which has been done by the family since the late 1800s.

“There have been potatoes on the farm ever since 1886,” Hickman said. “It’s a family legacy that we are all very proud to still be carrying on.”

Dublin Farms feels very fortunate for how business has been in 2024 so far, seeing that some others on the East Coast have been met with challenges.

“We’ve been able to get in the field and started planting right on time in early March,” Hickman said. “We were stopped by rain for about two weeks, but then we got the rest of the crop in the first part of April. Once we did that, we’ve really been in good shape. We’ve had rains when we needed them and haven’t had any loss other than a few spots here and there.”

At last glance, the potatoes were starting to put on a little bit of size, with some of the biggest ones around “baseball size” according to Hickman.

“That’s right about on schedule for us to harvest around June 27,” he said. “Right now, it’s too early to tell about crop yield or quality, but both look good. We have a short season (until Aug. 10) to get our crop out and we are expecting good demand.”

From what he’s hearing from other growers, Florida is expected to wrap up a little early and other states south of Virginia are similarly expected to end early, so that’s good news for growers on the Eastern Shore.

Dublin Farms has some exciting news for 2025, as it's building a new packing facility, to help automate as much as its line as possible.

"Labor is getting to be a big issue for us; just finding enough people who want to work the hours is difficult," Hickman said. "We've been very happy with the crew that we had, last year marked 30 years with the same crew leader, but it's getting harder and harder to find new people with the wages going up. Looking at a snapshot of the last few years, we decided that what we needed to do is automate the process if we still want to be here in 100 years doing this."

At the same time, the new facility will help increase Dublin Farms' packing capacity, with more volume, as well as increase the consumer pack side of the business.

"The demand for the consumer pack is growing every year," Hickman said.

Staying successful for as long as the company has takes moves like this, but also relies on hard work and know-how.

"Resiliency is a key to success," Hickman said. "You have to keep rolling with the punches. Every year is different. Some years, the weather is perfect and the crop is perfect, but then the margins are bad; some years the weather is terrible and you scrape the best crop out of the ground you can, and they beat the door down for every one you've got. Between the market and Mother Nature, it's a constant struggle, so you just have to do the best you can and the next day, do it all over again."

In January, Phil Hickman died and the company wants to pay tribute to his 50 years of making Dublin Farms into the powerhouse it is today, working alongside his brother, David.

"The goal has always been to keep this a family farm and keep it growing. He was happy to see that's what was going on," Hickman said. "The two of them grew the business tremendously; that was what they had worked all their lives for."

Photo: Mark Hickman, Matt Hickman and Phillip Hickman

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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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