

# Common'Tater Interview with:



## Rick Beggs



by Tamas Houlihan, Managing Editor



Name: Rick Beggs  
 Farm Name: REB'L Acres  
 Location: Plainfield, WI  
 Crops/Acreage  
   Potatoes- 240 acres  
   Snap Beans- 240 acres  
   Peas- 70 acres  
   Sweet Corn- 60 acres  
   Field Corn- 90 acres  
   Total 700 acres  
 Hometown: Plainfield, WI  
 Current Residence:  
   Plainfield, WI  
 Years Farming: 27  
 Organizations: Current Board  
   Member - WPVGA,  
   Vice-President of Plainfield  
   Snowmobile Club  
 Family: Married for 27 years to  
   wife, Lori. Daughter, Lacey,  
   22 and Son, Tauren, 18  
 Hobbies: Coaching and playing  
   Basketball, Golf

**R**ick Beggs of REB'L Acres, Plainfield, was elected to the WPVGA Board of Directors in February of 2006. Beggs grew up on his family's dairy farm, and milked 40 cows of his own for one year, before deciding that wasn't for him. He grew field corn and hay before getting involved in potato and vegetable production.

Rick's first potato contract was with Basic American Foods in the early 1980s. He later grew processing potatoes for Ore-Ida Foods, Inc., and now is a process grower for McCain Foods, USA, raising 205 acres of Russet Burbanks. He also has 35 fresh acres of Goldrush. Beggs also has processing vegetable contracts, raising 240 acres of snap beans, 70 acres of peas and 60 acres of sweet corn, in addition to 90 acres of field corn.

A 1976 graduate of Plainfield Tri-County High School, Beggs also completed the Ag Shortcourse at UW-Madison. He and Lori, his wife of 27 years, have two children, one of whom (son Tauren) recently received a WPVGA Associate Division Scholarship. In the following interview, Beggs discusses his harvest operation and shares his thoughts on the keys to a successful harvest.

*“I feel the most critical aspect of harvest is finding a quality labor crew.”*

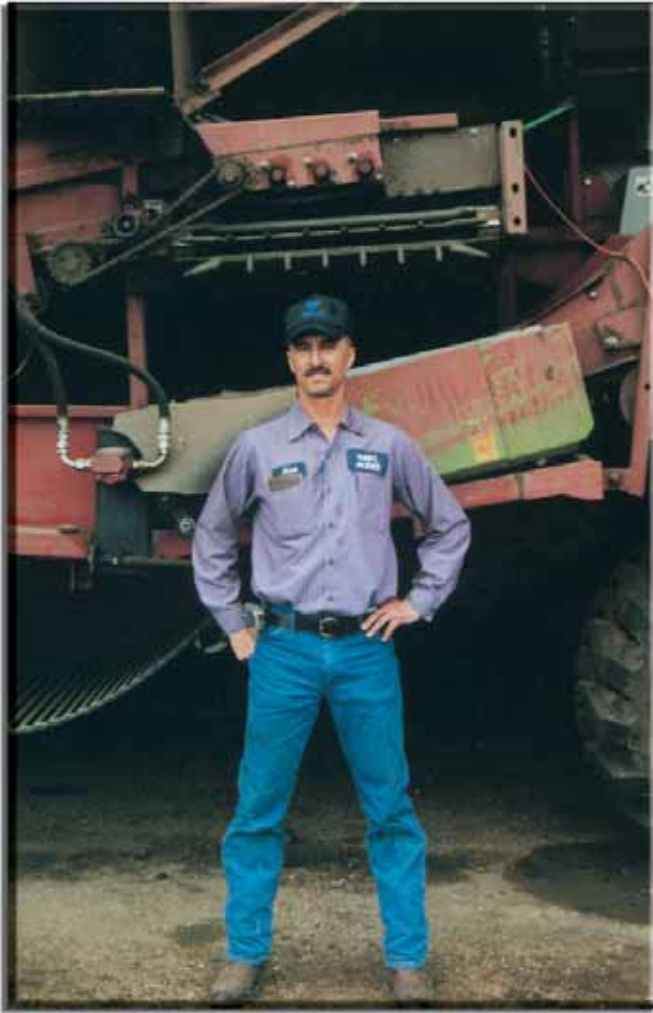
**What steps do you take to prepare for the harvest season?**

Besides general maintenance, we go through the equipment and trucks looking for anything needing repair or replacement to ensure minimal down time during harvest.

**What are the keys to achieving excellent bruise-free readings?**

A combination of proper equipment setup (chain speed, minimized drop lengths, rubber coated links, etc.) keeping all handling machinery full to capacity, and educating operators on the importance of quality, bruise-free potatoes.

*“I invested in a digger that could handle separation of wet dirt, clods, and stones. So when conditions are less than perfect, which is usually the case, we can still dig.”*



**What do you feel is the most critical aspect of your harvest operation?**

I feel the most critical aspect of harvest is finding a quality labor crew. Because I have only one full-time employee, Tony Czapinski, the rest of the harvest people are part-time. While I am in the field running the harvester,

I credit Tony for doing a great job supervising and maintaining the trans-loading crew and machinery. Many of our group have been with us for several years.

**What type of harvester do you use and why?**

The base machine is a Spudnik two-row harvester with an additional air head, star rear cross and coil table inserted in the side elevator. We have several soil types with clods, stones, or both often in the same field. This digger gives us maximum separation in the field, minimizing the amount of trash hauled to the trans-loading site. We also use a four-row windrower so we can pick up six rows at a time.

**Do you do anything differently when harvesting potatoes destined for the frozen market?**

No, not really. Maximizing quality is important for fresh as well as frozen.

**What do you see as the biggest challenge you face each harvest season?**

As I spoke of earlier, different soil types provide us with many challenges. Moisture levels are important. There is a fine line between being too dry, preventing clods from breaking up or too wet, making the heavier soil too sticky to sift out. That is why I invested in a digger that could handle separation of wet dirt, clods, and stones. So when conditions are less than perfect, which is usually the case, we can still dig.

**What's the best advice you could give to other growers in regard to harvesting potatoes?**

Match your equipment needs to the amount of acres grown, soil type, and speed of transporting or storing to maximize efficiency and the timeliness of harvest. F