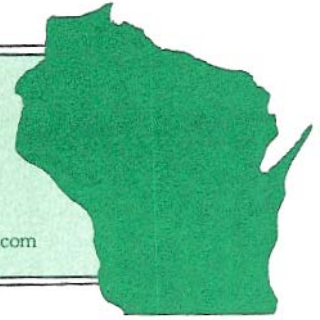


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**Photos available upon request**

## ***CHEFS LEARN VIRTUES OF WISCONSIN POTATOES: LOCAL, FAMILY FARMED, HEALTHY GROWN & DELICIOUS***

**WAUSAU, Wisconsin**—“I had *no idea* we grew potatoes in Wisconsin,” said **Executive Chef Bill Baumann** of **Mo’s—A Place for Steaks, Milwaukee**, as he boarded the bus en route to some of the State’s finest potato fields and facilities, “and I *certainly* didn’t know Wisconsin grows so many different potato varieties!”

“We hear that all the time,” replied **Angela Hemauer, Director of Promotions & Consumer Education for the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA)**. “No one outside the area knows Wisconsin is the third largest potato-producing state in the country. Or that our growers initiated what is now a nationally recognized program of agricultural conservation in large-scale potato production.

“Because chefs are behind so many of today’s food trends and new product ideas, and support closer connections between food and farmers, we thought they could help us understand how we can tell our story more effectively.”

So WPVGA brought nine notable Wisconsin chefs to the Central Sands Area to meet its passionate potato growers, tour its prolific potato fields and sophisticated packing & shipper sheds, and hear from the state’s leading potato researchers. They learned about what makes the State such fertile ground for potatoes (cool northern temperatures, and glacial soil that warms up rapidly and drains easily), why Wisconsin is the birthplace of more potato varieties than any other state (climate and a state-of-the-art seed farm staffed with top potato researchers), and Wisconsin’s “Healthy Grown” potatoes, the result of a strict environmental practices program developed by WPVGA, the World Wildlife Fund and University of Wisconsin.

“I buy local whenever I can,” stated **Jimmy Wade, chef/owner of Heaven City, Milwaukee.** “Who knew I could buy my *potatoes* locally, and that so much goes into them? I really like this thing they’re doing with the Healthy Grown potato. It’s impressive that the farmers wanted to do this on their own to be more environmentally friendly, and that they found great researchers to work with them on it. Even their packers and shippers signed on to carry the program all the way to the customer. That really sets them apart, in my mind, and makes a big difference to me.”

Of course, the chefs enjoyed eating a lot of Wisconsin potatoes, too, and even participated in a taste-test comparing three varieties of Wisconsin potatoes as part of new research underway at the **Hancock Research Station** that is exploring potato flavor. “The yellower one tasted rich and buttery, one tasted more earthy and was drier, and one was pretty much what I’d describe as a good, standard potato,” commented Baumann of Mo’s—A Place for Steak. “Flavor’s really important, especially when you’re charging \$4 or more for a big, beautiful Russet like we do.”

“A lot depends on how you’re going to use it,” added **Leonardo Guevera, Executive Chef of Restaurant Magnus, Madison.** “I use three or four different [kinds of] potatoes for different dishes. It’s good to know that Wisconsin potatoes come in different varieties, with different tastes and colors. Customers look for that.”

As the tour wound down, conversation signaled a growing spirit of collaboration: “I’m looking forward to working with Wisconsin potatoes,” said the **Executive Chef Ulrich Koberstein of The American Club** resort in **Kohler.** “We’re always looking for new ingredients to try, especially if they have a strong local or American heritage. Customers like to see new things, as long as they taste good. That’s the key. From what we’ve tasted here, I think there’s a lot we can do.”

“This is what we’d hoped to accomplish,” reflected Hemauer. “These fabulous chefs came to hear our story, that Wisconsin farmers are *family* farmers and good stewards of their land, and they grow a lot of potatoes—*wonderful potatoes*, in more varieties than any other state—with the same care and attention that these chefs give to the meals they make. And, just like these chefs, our growers are working hard to understand what their customers want, not just in terms of production, but in terms of taste. We’re really excited that they want to work with us! In fact, they’re helping already.”

Hemauer says that WPVGA will be sending the chefs different shapes, sizes and varieties of Wisconsin potatoes to try in their kitchens. The chefs’ feedback will help guide the association’s marketing and research efforts, including the new flavor research.

For more information about Wisconsin potatoes, call Angela Hemauer, Director of Promotions & Consumer Education, Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association, at 715.623.7683.