



## **Potato-Cast**

### **Season 2: Episode 10**

**Title:** Team Potato: What's Fueling Your Trot

**Description:** In this episode, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, Natalia Cervantes, interviews three growers about their favorite ways to stay active and enjoy potatoes over Thanksgiving.

### **Featured Guests:**

- Kevin Schleicher, Director of Sales at Wysocki Family of Companies.
- Wendy Alsum-Dykstra, Chief Operating Officer at Alsum Farms & Produce
- Taylor Grant, Chief Operating Officer at GRANT 4-D FARMS, LLC

### **Resources for this episode:**

- Sign-Up for TEAM POTATO at TeamPotato.com

To be featured on Potato-Cast, email [Natalia@PotatoesUSA.com](mailto:Natalia@PotatoesUSA.com)

Learn more about Potatoes USA by visiting [PotatoesUSA.com](http://PotatoesUSA.com)

To see all the great information available about potatoes, potato nutrition, or fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit [PotatoGoodness.com](http://PotatoGoodness.com)

### **Intro:**

Hello everyone! Welcome to Potato-cast. A podcast full of all your favorite potato industry content. I'm Natalia Cervantes, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, and your host.

As we approach Thanksgiving, I thought it would be appropriate to have you hear all about potatoes directly from potato growers around the U.S.

Let's get into it!

### **Cervantes:**

There are around 2,000 potato farming families operating in the U.S. and here with me today are three potato growers. Kevin Schleicher, Director of Sales at Wysocki Family of Companies. Wendy Alsum-Dykstra, Chief Operating Officer at Alsum Farms & Produce. And Taylor Grant, Chief Operating Officer at GRANT 4-D FARMS, LLC

Each of these growers is a graduate of the potato industry leadership program, known as PILI. This program is dedicated to supporting and cultivating future leaders of the potato industry to advance the industry in the United States.

Our first guest is Kevin Schleicher. Kevin is a fourth-generation farmer. He resides in Wisconsin with his wife and their two adorable girls. In addition to his position as the



Director of Sales, Kevin is a dedicated runner and spends his time promoting potatoes as a performance fuel in his community. He is also an active member of Team Potato.

Kevin, welcome to potato-cast.

**Schleicher:**

As an avid listener to Potato-cast, I am very excited to be here. Thank you for the opportunity Natalia.

**Cervantes:**

How long have you been on Team Potato and why did you decide to join?

**Schleicher:**

I joined Team Potato around four years ago because I believe in providing natural carbs for our bodies. Messaging that comes from farmers and athletes that fuel with potatoes is the strongest way to promote potatoes.

**Cervantes:**

When it comes to fueling with potatoes, what's your go-to dish?

**Schleicher:**

I use fuel with potatoes in a variety of ways but my go-to is simple. Boil bite-sized potatoes and lightly salt them. Once they cool, you can stick them in a pouch and eat them as you run or bike.

**Cervantes:**

Does your family also have a favorite Thanksgiving potato dish?

**Schleicher:**

Do I have to choose just one? My favorite Thanksgiving potato dish is a cheesy hash brown recipe with crushed cornflakes and green onions

**Cervantes:**

Crushed cornflakes on your potatoes? Chef RJ is going to have to get this recipe from you for Potato Goodness.

You and your family stay active. Do you all participate in any annual thanksgiving trotting events?

**Schleicher:**

We have run in our local Turkey trot 5K the last few years, even when below freezing. It's a fun tradition. Our family is excited to do it this year with our kids as well!

**Cervantes:**

What is your favorite fact about potatoes?

**Schleicher:**



A medium 5.3 oz skin on potato has 620 mg of potassium per serving, which is more than a medium-sized banana with 422 mg per serving. That fact tends to surprise a lot of people when I tell them, and it changes their thinking about fueling with potatoes.

**Cervantes:**

As a fourth-generation farmer, what shifts have you seen in the industry?

**Schleicher:**

The potato industry has always focused on sustainability but now customers and consumers alike are asking us how agriculture impacts the planet. It is our time to shine by showing consumers how we care for our land.

**Cervantes:**

What message do you have for farmers out there today?

**Schleicher:**

Farmers, you are the best advocate to tell your story. We have a nutritious product. We farm in sustainable ways. We feed the world. Let's make sure that message reaches consumers.

**Cervantes:**

Couldn't agree more, Kevin. Thank you so much for taking the time to be my guest. It's been a pleasure talking with you and good luck at the Turkey Trot. Hope you stay warm out there.

**Schleicher:**

Thank you for helping us tell our story Natalia.

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**Cervantes:**

Our next guest is Wendy Alsum-Dykstra, Chief Operating Officer at Alsum Farms & Produce. Most recently, Wendy was bestowed the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Grower Association Young Grower of the Year Award. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband and two adorable kids and is a very active member of Team Potato.

Wendy, welcome to potato-cast!

**Dykstra:**

Thank you, Natalia! I appreciate the opportunity to join the conversation today.

**Cervantes:**



We just heard from Kevin Schleicher about his experience on Team Potato. Can you tell our listeners why you decided to join?

**Dykstra:**

Potatoes have always been a big part of my diet and I have always enjoyed staying active. I love that Team Potato brings together a community of active potato lovers and helps bring awareness of the performance fuel that potatoes can provide all athletes!

**Cervantes:**

What potato-fueled activities do you like to do?

**Dykstra:**

I enjoy running and participating in several community 5k events every year. I also enjoy Wisconsin water sports, both water skiing, and wake surfing. More than anything, I enjoy being active with my two daughters, biking, walking, running, or encouraging their participation in sports.

**Cervantes:**

Great way to get your daughters involved in staying active. What's your favorite way to fuel with potatoes?

**Dykstra:**

Potatoes offer incredible versatility with endless possibilities to prepare and enjoy potatoes for any meal, every day of the week. One of the ways I love to fuel with potatoes is with grilled potato wedges.

**Cervantes:**

I love grilled potato wedges too.

What do you think is the most important message for the industry to take away from the potatoes fuel performance campaign?

**Dykstra:**

The Potatoes Fuel Performance message highlights how potatoes are a nutrient powerhouse that provides the energy, potassium, and complex carbohydrates needed to perform at your best all while using potatoes to fuel through a workout or workday. The campaign demonstrates the power of the potato through everyday athletes and helps consumers think about potatoes differently.

**Cervantes:**

As a Potato Industry Leadership Institute graduate and a recipient of the Young Grower of the Year Award, what advice do you have for other young growers across the nation?

**Dykstra:**

I think the best advice I could give is to get involved. Participating in industry events, and programs. Having the opportunity to serve on boards has allowed me to meet so many incredible people in our industry to learn from and collaborate with.

**Cervantes:**

Where do you hope to see the industry in the next five to ten years?

**Dykstra:**

I see the industry continuing to embrace technology and innovation while working to tell our story to consumers. There is a need to educate the next generation of consumers how we farm using sustainable practices which allows us to grow, pack and deliver potatoes that make their way to the dinner tables of Americans. I challenge fellow growers to continue to tell their farms' story of stewardship to take care of our natural resources while working together to help feed a growing population.

**Cervantes:**

That is a great message we can all stand behind.

With Thanksgiving being around the corner, do you and your family participate in any trots?

**Dykstra:**

In September, our family participated in the Alsum Farms & Produce tater trot which benefited local FFA chapters and brought together surrounding communities. On Thanksgiving morning, our family looks forward to the Randolph Christian School turkey trot. For me, the best part of participating in these events is doing them with family.

**Cervantes:**

Great way to spend time with your daughters and be involved with your community. Speaking of trots and thanksgiving, does your family have a favorite potato dish for the holiday?

**Dykstra:**

Our family loves a very traditional mashed potatoes and gravy for the holidays! Grandma's cream cheese mashed potatoes are also a family favorite any day of the year!



**Cervantes:**

Grandma's know best.

Thank you for taking the time to join me on Potato-Cast, Wendy. I wish you and your family a very lovely, and peaceful Thanksgiving.

**Dykstra:**

Thank you! Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family, and all those listening!

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**Cervantes:**

Now, I'd like to introduce you to Taylor Grant, Chief Operating Officer at GRANT 4-D FARMS LLC. He resides in Rupert, Idaho with his wife and their two sweet kids. His focus is managing the brand identity of his company, integrating technology, and helping in the day-to-day operations of the field. In his free time, Taylor loves photography and utilizing drones for capturing aerial content.

Taylor, welcome to potato-cast!

**Grant:**

Thanks for having me on the show! It's a pleasure to be here.

**Cervantes:**

What is your favorite thing about farming potatoes?

**Grant:**

The most rewarding part of growing potatoes is when the harvesters pull into the field, and you get to see the crop being lifted out of the ground for what can feel like the first time. Before that point we've been digging in the field with a shovel and depending on what plant you dig up you might be happy with the crop or disappointed, but when the harvester rolls through the field it feels like you can see the entire picture for the first time. When it's a beautiful crop and you get to see it fill truck after truck you cannot help to smile at the accomplishment.

**Cervantes:**

Farming really is beautiful. And I've seen some of your aerial photography and videography of your farm on TikTok and you're stepping outside of the box. What made you decide to start doing these unique and educational videos?

**Grant:**

I spent several years in Seattle, WA going to school and working as a commercial photographer and what I realized then is that many consumers do not understand how their food is produced. One of my goals when I moved back to the farm was to try and help educate consumers on what we do as farmers. There is this stereotype that farmers are uneducated individuals stuck working with horses and without technology, while in fact they are highly adapted to using technology to solve their problems and wear many different hats throughout their days including being the CFO, CEO, and operators of multi-million dollar companies. My drive to start sharing content on social media platforms was to show the different sides of agriculture, and to help educate the public on where their food comes from and the people behind it all.

**Cervantes:**

That is so important because you're right, consumers aren't that familiar with what it really means to be a farmer.

**Grant:**

I feel like consumers are starting to take a greater interest in how their food is produced but we in the agriculture industry still have a lot of light to shed on how food is sustainably produced year-in and year out.

**Cervantes:**

What do you wish consumers knew more about, in terms of potatoes and farming?

**Grant:**

I wish that customers really understood the nuanced production differences between organic, conventional, and genetically modified potatoes. While they may feel one is more sustainable than the other it may surprise consumers to truly understand what goes into the different production cycles and how each has a place.

**Cervantes:**

Where would you like to see the industry in the next five to ten years?

**Grant:**

Where would I like to see it or where do I think its headed?

**Cervantes:**

Maybe let's tackle both perspectives but start with where it's headed.

**Grant:**

I believe that the potato industry will continue to consolidate as farms without an up-and-coming generation fade. This will also drive a higher focus on efficiency of the production of crops as the availability of crop ground tightens, labor constrains continue,

and the cost of equipment continues to rise. We will have to be sustainable as the requirement to grow more potatoes in the future with less resources.

**Cervantes:**

And where would you like for the industry to be?

**Grant:**

I would like to see the growers be involved in continuing to educate the public on the ins and outs of potato production, how it is a sustainable process, and help to spread the message that potatoes should be on every plate including school meals. I would like to see the potato industry lead the sustainability conversation in agriculture and continue to innovate to bring more highly desirable potato products to the customer.

**Cervantes:**

You're a great example for this. What advice do you have for farmers who are considering getting into the digital space?

**Grant:**

I would tell them to just start and try stuff out! It is truly amazing what varieties of content viewers are attracted to! Maybe someone needs to just start a Tik Tok account that showcases cats playing with potatoes; it'd probably be an instant viral sensation! You never know what consumers will be interested in until you go through the paces with trial and error. My highest viewed Tik Tok video is me showing a piece of equipment that separates rocks from potatoes during the harvesting process. Other videos that have cool drone footage or highly edited content don't even rate at the top of the charts! You will never know unless you try, so just start, and see what works for you and for your audience.

**Cervantes:**

Couldn't agree more. Change is the only constant! You and your wife are pretty active, right? You snowboard, scuba dive, kiteboard, ride motorcycles, etc. Is there one sport that you like over another?

**Grant:**

Yes, my wife and I met snowboarding, got engaged while scuba diving 50 feet down, and went for a 10-day motorcycle trip around Ireland for our honeymoon trip (5 years after we got married), so you could say that we are a bit of adrenaline junkies. We've slowed down a bit with the super-high adrenaline stuff since we have 2 kids now that aren't quite ready for it, but we'll get them there soon enough. Lately we are usually looking to find what we can do as a family, or at least in the same location as a family. My 2.5-year-old son likes to go out sailing on the river or ride on my back while shredding some fresh snow on the mountain. Our 3-month-old is just learning to hold her own head up, so it'll be a bit before we get her out.



**Cervantes:**

What an amazing story! Memories to last a lifetime. But I understand the need to slow it down and find more family-friendly activities.

As a potato farmer, you know that potatoes are nutrient-dense and help fuel you for the day. With that said, do you have a go-to potato dish to eat after a long day of (skiing, etc)?

**Grant:**

I'm a sucker for French fries! Another that we love that is quick and easy is diced up potatoes with spices and oil, then either grilled or baked in the oven. Crispy on the outside, great flavor, and easy for the kids to stab with a fork!

**Cervantes:**

Yum! Simple and delicious.

Since Thanksgiving is right around the corner, I must also ask, what is your favorite way to eat potatoes over the holiday? Any fun traditions you would like to share?

**Grant:**

A family favorite has always been a massive bowl of mashed russet potatoes. The dispute is always, do you leave the lumps in or out?! We'll spend Thanksgiving with my wife's family at our house this year though so we're going to try some new stuff. She made these smash/baked red and yellow potatoes a while back and I've snuck that into my wish list of dinner items for this year.

**Cervantes:**

Lumps in or out, I think that's a debate I'd like to leave to social media.

Thank you for taking the time to be my potato-cast guest, Taylor. I wish you and your family a lovely, and peaceful Thanksgiving.

**Grant:**

Thank you for having me on, I appreciate that chance to tell a little bit of our story! You have a great Thanksgiving as well, and make sure its fueled by potatoes!

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**Outro:**

This brings us to the end of our episode. I hope you all enjoyed hearing from Kevin, Wendy, and Taylor. I encourage everyone in the industry to get up, get active, and join Team Potato. You don't need to be an athlete; you just need to believe in the cause. When you join Team Potato you are joining a community of other go-getters who are simply dedicated to getting things done. Use the link in this episode's description to sign-up today.



Potato-cast is growing. If you are an active member of the potato industry, we'd love to interview you about your operation. To submit yourself or your friend, please email [natalia@potatoesusa.com](mailto:natalia@potatoesusa.com). It would be a pleasure to hear from our dedicated listeners.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Potato-cast! You can subscribe on Spotify, Apple, or Google Podcast by searching for Potato-cast. Feel free to share potato-cast with your friends and family in the industry.

All supporting documents for data provided in this episode can be found on [potatoesusa.com](http://potatoesusa.com). To see all the great information available about potatoes or new and fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit [potatogoodness.com](http://potatogoodness.com).

I am your host, Natalia Cervantes.  
Until next time, have a lovely, potato-fueled day, everyone.