

## THE WISCONSIN POTATO AND VEGETABLE STORAGE RESEARCH FACILITY

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July 26, 2006 marked a significant event in Wisconsin potato industry history. On that day, more than 400 people gathered at the Hancock Agricultural Research Station to talk about partnerships, cooperation, and the quest for knowledge, and to dedicate a shining example of all three— the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Storage Research Facility. The cutting of that red ribbon stretched across the west entrance to the Facility was the culmination of more than 20 years of discussions and 5 years of planning.

From the outside, it is impossible to guess what is contained inside. The sleek, shiny white exterior gives no indication of the inner workings. When passing through the entrance, the first thing most visitors note is the sheer size. The distance from floor to peak is some 30 feet. Brett Favre would have to give his all to toss the pigskin from end-to-end. The central work area is 40 feet wide. On either side are the Facility's heart and soul — bins and lockers, nine of each. The bins simulate typical, if there is such a thing, bulk storage. The lockers store small containers of potatoes and vegetables — crates, boxes, bags and buckets — under environmental conditions similar to bulk storage. When filled to capacity, some 2 million pounds of produce call the Facility home. Each bin and locker has its own air exchange, humidification and refrigeration systems. Although adjacent, each is sealed and separated from the others. Each is controlled independently by cutting-edge computer technology. There are no switches to flip and no dials to turn, only two brightly colored screens with images of buttons that one merely has to touch with a fingertip to make things happen. Each and every bin can be monitored and controlled from a laptop computer any place in the world where connection to the Internet is possible.

It was an exciting day in mid-September when the first plastic crates of tubers from research plots on the Hancock Station were wheeled into the Facility. It was even more exciting a couple of weeks later when that first truckload arrived from a local grower and those freshly lifted Russet Norkotahs made their way along the conveyors through the custom bin piler and gently rolled onto the floor of Bin 8. It was exciting not because rolling potatoes have any particular allure, but rather because that very first tuber represented commitment. The Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Storage Research Facility was conceived by the growers, designed by the growers, and built by the growers of Wisconsin. It represents commitment from growers to their profession. It represents the trust of an industry in its university. On October 1, 2006 the potato and vegetable growers of Wisconsin turned the keys to this magnificent achievement over to their partners at the University of Wisconsin. Work is underway.

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