

Delivering value is what drives decisions at Wilcox Fresh

At Wilcox Fresh, there is a concerted effort to deliver the best value to the consumer, according to Lynn Wilcox, president of the Rexburg, ID-based potato shipper.

"That doesn't necessarily mean we will be the cheapest," said Mr. Wilcox. "It has more to do with providing a potato that is high in nutrients and is produced in a sustainable fashion. At Wilcox, we are marketing the concept as much as the product."

Mr. Wilcox, who oversees sales and packingshed operations, is a member of the third generation of the family-owned farming operation and is joined by brothers Terry, who manages farm operations, and Ron, who oversees the ranching and cattle operations. But he said that the three have overlapping duties and are involved in all aspects of the company.

"Terry has a degree in range management, and he is very meticulous with our soil programs and how nutrients can be best used by the plants," said Mr. Wilcox. "Under Terry's guidance, we also have introduced more beneficial bacteria into our program, which has enabled us to reduce the amount of pesticides we use. We try to be good stewards of the land."

"We're trying to be responsible and sustainable because we want to take care of the land," said Terry Wilcox. "We use biological products that help preserve the soil and make fertilizers and natural minerals more available to the plants. We eat what we grow, so we have to be able to trust how we grow it."

Lynn Wilcox said that preliminary data the company has collected during a yearlong study have shown that these measures have resulted in a potato that contains a higher level of nutrients, which further goes to the firm's value proposition.

Terry Wilcox believes that part of providing the best value also involves staying current on the latest production techniques, such as using GPS in the fields and employing Good Agricultural Practices and other technology to attain the best yields.

"With GPS, we can operate more efficiently because we can pinpoint our plantings and save fuel as a result," he said. "We also use devices to measure moisture in the soil, but we also use our hands and feet — that is sometimes the best way."

Regarding some of the challenges the operation faces each year, Terry Wilcox said, "Mother Nature seems to have her own rulebook, so there are always some challenges with the weather. Also, with the global economy, it is hard to tell if we'll get a good return after investing so much in a crop. There is a lot of competition, and we're not the biggest fish in the pond, but we've been pretty successful so far. Our quality and yields seem to improve every year."

The efforts undertaken at Wilcox Fresh have not gone unnoticed by consumers, who are becoming increasingly more educated about the source of the foods they eat, said Lynn Wilcox.

Recently, Wilcox Fresh was featured in a segment on Lifetime Television's "The Balancing Act," where the company's "Potato Jazz" microwavable value-added line was highlighted.

"The first airing of the segment was just before Thanksgiving, and we received over 1 million hits on our Facebook page," said Lynn Wilcox. "We're focusing on using social media to make a connection with the end consumer, and it has proven to be a great tool for us."