

# Harvest Time at Alsum Farms & Produce

By Ashley Posthuma



We associate the months of July and August with many things: sunshine, trips to the beach, cookouts with family and friends, and quality time spent outdoors. What the average person might not associate with this timeframe—but those at Alsum Farms & Produce certainly do—is the potato harvest.

Since 1973, the family-owned and operated agri-business has been headquartered in Friesland, Wisconsin. Alsum Farms & Produce is a vertically integrated family-owned farm, packing facility, and logistics company that provides quality potatoes and produce year-round.

In Wisconsin, the red and yellow potato harvest begins at the end of July, followed by russet potatoes in mid-August. With 2,700 acres of potatoes (and 300 acres of pumpkins!) to harvest, it's safe to say it's all hand on deck at Alsum Farms & Produce this time of year.

Alsum Farms plants potatoes at their two farming locations, Arena and Grand Marsh, Wisconsin; pumpkins are grown at their Grand Marsh farm. The Alsum Farms potato crop supplies about 50% of their potato volume for their customers; they wash, grade, package, and deliver additional potatoes, onions, and produce from several local farms and grower partners around the U.S. to supplement potatoes for the fresh market and serve customers year-round.

The process of packing fresh potatoes has certainly changed over the 52 years Alsum Farms & Produce has been in business, but they continue to invest in their state-of-the-art production facilities. When an Alsum semi pulls into the facility with a load of fresh potatoes, the trailer is slowly filled with water to float the potatoes out and into the facility's flume system. From there, the potatoes ride a conveyor belt into the grading line, enter the barrel washer, undergo a final rinse, and are dried on a sponge roller. During peak season, the conveyor belts are moving approximately 1,000 pounds of potatoes per minute!

After the potatoes are properly cleaned, they go through the sizing and grading process. This includes the inspection of manual and robotic graders who look for imperfections and make sure the potatoes are best in class.

The Alsums are always finding ways to innovate on their farms and in their production facilities. Currently, in the Friesland facility, they have installed two grading “spider robots” to make the process more accurate and efficient. They have also

updated the plant's primary sizer and sorter with machine-learning cameras; these provide visual inspections of potatoes as well as data to keep everything running smoothly, ensuring they're always packing the highest quality potatoes for customers and consumers.

This fall, the Friesland location will be installing solar panels on the rooftops of their office, warehouse, and production facility. This will allow them to generate enough power to fully fuel the facility with renewable energy!

In fact, sustainability and stewardship has always been at the forefront for Alsum Farms & Produce. CEO Larry Alsum is a founding member of the Wisconsin Healthy Grown® Program, a program that has guided their farm stewardship and sustainability practices since 1996.

“In 1992, we began farming, and by 1996 we had helped establish the Wisconsin Healthy Grown Program, Larry explains. “Since that time, the Healthy Grown program has continued to guide our farm sustainability practices utilizing Integrated Pest Management to efficiently manage inputs and implement conservation practices that enhance ecosystem efforts.”

In addition to helping develop and rigorously adhering to the standards set forth by the Wisconsin Healthy Grown Program, Alsum Farms has also dedicated 50 acres of land to prairie restoration and pollinator habitat. As a business that works hand-in-hand with the land every day, they understand just how important it is to take care of our environment and promote sustainable practices for the future.

“Potatoes are perishable and grown from the sandy soils,” the team adds. “The biggest challenge is striving to consistently grow a quality crop when Mother Nature is your business partner. Weather events influence the growing season and ultimately drive the year ahead.”

Thankfully, the harvest this year looks promising. So as you're planning your autumn get-togethers and even cooking family meals during the week, don't forget to pick up a bag or two of Wisconsin Healthy Grown Certified Alsum Farms russet, red, and yellow potatoes. You can find them at your neighborhood grocers including Piggly Wiggly, Aldi, Woodman's, Costco, and independent retail grocers. They're nutritious, sustainably grown, and locally sourced—what more could you ask for?

## Six Storage Tips to Keep Potatoes Fresh

1. **Buy quality potatoes.** Look for potatoes with smooth skin and minimal cuts, bruises, or soft spots. If you do buy a bag with an imperfect potato, remove it from the bag to prevent it from spreading to the others.
2. **Ventilate.** Although potatoes often come in convenient plastic bags, these aren't ideal for long-term potato storage as the plastic traps moisture and causes potatoes to spoil faster. Instead, store your potatoes in a cardboard box, paper bag, or wire basket for ventilation.
3. **Don't wash immediately.** The dirt on potato skins acts as a barrier to protect the potato while in storage. If you wash your potatoes before putting them away, the moisture may lead to bacteria growth. Instead, thoroughly wash your potatoes as you're preparing to cook them.
4. **Store in a cool, dark space.** Ideally, potatoes should be kept in a room that's 45-55°F, like a basement. They should never be stored in the fridge, and sunlight can cause them to become bitter. Potatoes sprout faster when stored in light, moist environments, like kitchen countertops.
5. **Avoid onions, bananas, and berries.** All three of these foods release a gas called ethylene, which speeds up the ripening process. This could affect your potatoes and speed their ripening as well.
6. **First in, first out.** Always use up any produce that is older before buying anything new. This will reduce food waste and keep your grocery bill down.

Want to watch the full potato process? Scan this QR code for a video walk-through!



## That's Amore! Potato Recipe

### Ingredients:

2 lbs Alsum reds, washed and cut into ¼ inch rounds  
1 Cup Diced fresh tomatoes  
2 Tablespoons Olive oil  
1 1/2 Tablespoons Italian seasoning  
1 Teaspoon Crushed red chili flakes  
2 Teaspoons Kosher salt  
1 Teaspoon Freshly ground black pepper  
8 Ounces Pepperoni slices  
3/4 Cup Part skim shredded mozzarella  
1/4 Cup Fresh basil

### Directions:

Preheat the oven or grill to 400°F. (If cooking over an open flame without a thermometer, be aware that time may vary slightly.)

Place the potatoes and tomatoes on top of a large square of aluminum foil. Drizzle with the olive oil and season with the Italian seasoning, crushed red chili flakes, salt, and pepper.

Wrap the foil around the food by creating an envelope style fold over the top and rolling the edges up. This will make it easier to check the potatoes for doneness. It also makes for easy serving.

Place the foil pouch into the oven or over the campfire on a grate. Allow it to cook, rotating the foil package around the heat from time to time to prevent scorching, for about 25 minutes or until the potatoes are tender.

To finish the dish, top the potatoes and tomatoes with the shredded mozzarella cheese and place back in the oven or on the fire for just a few more minutes to allow the cheese to melt. Add the pepperoni on top and sprinkle with basil before enjoying.