

# This farm grows potatoes of every color

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**  
For the Capital Press

Michael Steinmann is the third generation of his family to farm near Ashton, Idaho, growing a variety of seed potatoes.

His grandfather — from Germany — started the farm in 1918.

“My dad took over when farmers were shifting from horses to tractors. I grew up on the farm, went to college, and was working elsewhere, then in 1990 came back to the farm and we expanded,” he said.

His grandfather and father raised seed potatoes.

“I wanted to do a little different twist. My neighbor in Logan, Utah, had a wholesale garden seed business and when he heard I was moving back to the potato farm he asked if I could grow red potatoes for seed. So when my wife and I came back we started raising varieties of red potatoes to sell seed to him,” Michael said.

“We now farm about 1,000 acres, with 440 acres in seed



Steinmann Farms

**Michael Steinmann grows many colors of potatoes for seed on his Ashton, Idaho farm.**

potatoes,” he said. “This year it’s 14 different varieties: red, yellow, brown, white, purple, blue — all different colors.”

The seed business has expanded every year with new customers. A distributor in the Portland area now handles his customers from Oregon and Washington.

“Our business grew to where it was difficult for me to deliver to every mom-and-pop outfit; we ran a semi and it would take 3 or 4 days for my driver to make that trip for all the deliveries,” he explains.

His seeds are also sold in Utah and all of Idaho. He delivers to D&B Warehouse

in Caldwell and they distribute to all their stores in southern Idaho. I do the same with Intermountain Farmers, delivering to their warehouse in Salt Lake and they distribute to their stores in Nevada, New Mexico as well as Utah. We sell to Cal Ranch and Valley Wide, as well as a few mom-and-pop places in Idaho and Utah,” Michael said.

On the farm he has dependable help, and his youngest son, Rob, is involved in the operation. Rob has a young family and will probably take over the farm someday. The whole family — daughters, daughter-in-law — helps

on the farm. Granddaughters drive truck and a grandson runs the side-digger, and other family members help during harvest.

“We have three guys (brothers) who come every

year from Mexico. They’ve been with me more than 20 years,” he said. “The oldest brother is now bringing his oldest son. They are like family to us and we could not operate our farm without them.”

Garden seed is just one part of the business.

“We still raise seed potatoes and some of the varieties go to large commercial potato growers. My largest customer company is Magic Valley Growers, in Wendell, Idaho. We grow a specific variety for them; they have a special niche market for those,” Michael said.

He also sells seed potatoes to large farms such as Simplot.

“We grow special varieties for them as well,” he said. “We ship some seed potatoes into California — a special variety for the

Bakersfield area.”

Other crops are rotated with the potatoes including wheat, barley and alfalfa. He also leases ground from neighbors who are not potato growers, to not have to worry about variety mix-ups.

“We keep track on our own ground, and plant back the same variety we had 2 or 3 years ago in that field; then if there are any volunteer plants it would at least be the same variety,” he explained.

Very few people in his area are raising reds and other colors, and he is the only one raising garden seed — which is put into 50-pound bags and delivered to garden centers.

With seed certification, there are many hoops to jump through. It’s a unique business, with unique needs, but very satisfying for this potato farmer.



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