

with applications coming about every two weeks. Even with such efforts, the region isn't immune—late blight, the fungal pathogen that sparked the 19th-century Irish potato famine, has been found recently in Alberta.

"The weather here has changed in recent years," says Terrence Hochstein of the Potato Growers of Alberta, the 140-member regulating and lobbying body that, among other tasks, negotiates prices with the province's processing plants. "It's been wetter and warmer than the norm in recent years. But that's not a result of so-called climate change," he contends, "it's part of a cycle. It's just another thing farmers raising crops here have to contend with.

"Potatoes require you put a lot of money in the ground," continues Hochstein. "Inputs can run as much as \$3,500 per acre, but the potential to earn

a profit is there because the demand for potatoes is there, especially in Alberta."

"It is a high-risk crop," agrees John, "but it can be rewarding too. When it goes good, it's really good; when it's bad," he continues with a knowing chuckle, "it's really bad."

Even with the risk, John says, "We would like to grow more potatoes, and we're working toward that. When more contract becomes available [with processors], we will take that ... So we'll grow as the opportunity comes along.

"The potatoes have been good. We've had success as farmers, even though we had a difficult start, and it allows me to work with two of my children."

He then looks around, smiles and asks in that booming, Dutch-laced baritone, "I can say that over the years we've been blessed in a lot of things, yes?" **FL**



**VISIT WITH THE
VOSSEBELTS.**

Scan the code with your phone to see a video of the Vossebelt farm, or visit myFarmLife.com/alberta.

machines, we can straddle four rows, and that eliminates us compacting the dirt between the potato rows as we're harvesting. It's really advantageous for us."

The MF7620 is the family's first Massey Ferguson, but has proved to be a valuable part of the operation. "We shred most of the potato vines before we harvest, and it's perfect, that Massey on the vine shredder," Delbert says. "Size-wise, it's got enough horsepower to be able to pull the shredder without being too large and wasting diesel fuel. It's a very good tractor."

The AGCO CVT, or continuously variable transmission, that's used in both Massey

Ferguson and Challenger equipment was a major selling point for the Vossebelts. "It's very fuel-efficient," says Dwayne, Delbert's brother. "We really like the CVT transmission too, because you've got such a wide range of speeds."

"That's important," adds Delbert, "because when we're harvesting potatoes, conditions change constantly. So you always are changing the speed of your equipment. And with the CVT transmission, you can pinpoint exactly what speed you need to be. The CVT transmission is a real asset on this farm."

"Yeah, and operating [tractors] for so many hours of the day, cab comfort is

really important to us too," says Dwayne. "And the suspension on these machines is phenomenal. They're so smooth. For a long day, it's really important to us to have cab comfort."

The switch to AGCO also brought another advantage to the Vossebelt operation.

"Hanlon's service is amazing," says Delbert. "I could phone the service department, and those guys are there within an hour or so. I can't stress enough how important that is, and [Hanlon] is always helping us out."

Concludes Delbert: "We made a good decision by switching. In the future, we'll definitely purchase more AGCO products."

Potatoes are the world's **fourth most consumed** food crop after rice, wheat and corn /// Potatoes consumed per person, 2011: **118 lbs** in the U.S., **56.4 kg** in Canada