

## **2019 BMO Farm Family Awards Biography Southern Potato Co.**

Southern Manitoba Potato Co. Ltd./Southern Potato Co. is a fourth-generation family farm currently operated by Keith and Karen Kuhl, along with their sons Marlon and Jeremy Kuhl. The Kuhl family has been farming since Keith's great-grandfather, Sam Kuhl, immigrated to Canada in the 1800s. In the mid-1920s, Keith's grandparents, Henry and Maria Kuhl, purchased the original farm in Gnadenthal, Manitoba, that was the beginning of the Southern group of companies. In the mid-1950s, Henry and Maria's son, John Kuhl, took over the farm, along with his wife Lillian. John together with his brother Henry Kuhl and brother in law Dave Bueckert started Southern Manitoba Potato Co. in 1960. By 1978 this farm had grown to be one of the largest farms in Manitoba. In 1978 due to the partners families wanting to farm independently John Kuhl purchased a scaled down version of the farm, at this point he included his six children as shareholders in the company.

Keith is the third child of John and Lillian and is today the President and CEO of Southern group of companies. In 2011 Keith and his 3 children reached agreement with Keith's siblings to redeem their shares giving them control of the farm. Keith's children, Andrea, Marlon and Jeremy joined him as full partners.

As part of the succession plan, a separate company was formed and named Southern Potato Co. Inc. As Marlon and Jeremy were managing all day to day operations of the farm Keith wanted to find a method that would allow them to be rewarded for their work while allowing the whole family to continue to benefit from ownership of the assets. Today SMPC (the asset company) is owned by Keith and his children and owns the assets, SPC (the operating company) is owned by Marlon and Jeremy.

Marlon and Jeremy take care of all day-to-day management of the farm, with Keith continuing to oversee the companies. Marlon's children aged 15, 14 and 11 have started helping on the farm, today there are often four generations working together (along with a dedicated team of employees) at Southern Potato Co.

The Kuhl family's history and love of farming has instilled an utmost respect for the land as well as a family culture that believes that each generation of farmers has a responsibility to improve the land and pass it on to the next generation in better condition than when it was received. Southern Potato Co. uses traditional practices for pest management, including carefully planned crop rotations to build the soil's organic matter and cover crops to reduce erosion. Risk mitigation has been an important part of the success of the farm. To reduce the risk of excess moisture Southern has leveled and installed drain tile onto much of the farm, irrigation has been added to reduce the risk of insufficient moisture, the farm has stretched the boundaries of the farm to deal with the risk of farming in one climatic zone. The farm also continues to carefully select equipment that will provide the best return for the farm. Other tools that Southern Potato Co. uses to ensure maximum production while maintaining and improving the health of the land include variable rate seeding, fertilizing, and crop protection application.

In addition to their own farming operations, the Kuhl family believes that by serving on agricultural boards and committees, they are improving the agricultural economy for farmers and helping all farms succeed. Keith has served on the Peak of the Market Board for many years, including numerous years as Board Chair. Keith served 8 years as chair of the Canadian Potato Council and 4 years as President of the Canadian Horticultural Council. Keith also serves on the Board of Directors at International Development Enterprises Canada (iDE), which is an NGO that works to improve agriculture

in many developing nations. Jeremy is Vice-Chair of the Seed Potato Growers of Manitoba. Marlon chairs the Chipping Potato Growers of Manitoba board and is chair of the board of the Winkler Bible Camp.

The Kuhl family believes that sustainability doesn't just involve the land; it means a commitment to your local and global community. With this mindset, Southern Potato Co. has partnered with iDE Canada and Mennonite Economic Development Associates to help develop agricultural solutions in developing nations. The Kuhl family and companies have also partnered with Justice Water (part of Youth with A Mission) to improve sanitation and freshwater initiatives in third world countries.

Outside of the agricultural community, the Kuhl family has been involved in sponsoring new Canadians and working to successfully integrate them into Canadian life, Andrea (Keith and Karen's daughter) serves on the Kuhl Foundation Board (which provides financial aid to young and aspiring musicians) and works with other music organizations; Karen serves on the Kuhl Foundation Board, the Salem Home board and sings in numerous community choirs.

Keith and Karen are very proud of their family which includes 7 grandchildren. Keith's father John always had faith in Keith and encouraged him in his farming career. John provided the opportunity for the family to succeed. Today it is common to see 4 generations on the farm.