



## **NEWS RELEASE**

Monday, September 12, 2022

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Media Contact:** Sherry Locke

[slocke@acap-me.org](mailto:slocke@acap-me.org) / 207-554-4130

### **More than seven tons of potatoes to help feed vulnerable Aroostook households thanks to generosity of Pelletier Family, ACAP, and 250 community volunteers**

More than 250 community members, including 180 Fort Kent Elementary School students with baskets, buckets, bags and their bare hands turned out on an unusually warm September 9<sup>th</sup> afternoon to harvest the ACAP 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Potato Plot on land owned by the G. B. and D. Pelletier Farms on Route 161 in St. John Plantation. The collective efforts resulted in some 3,000 five-pound bags – more than seven tons of potatoes – that will make it to the households of County residents through local food pantries, and two of the bags headed to the White House.

The season-long project was designed to call attention to the significance of The County's agricultural industry and signature crop, as well as to combat food insecurity in the region, highlight the artistic talent of Aroostook residents, and celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aroostook County's most comprehensive provider of social services. It culminated in a heart-warming display of the community coming together with the old-fashioned hand harvesting that brought back wonderful memories for some, and created brand new ones for others.

As they were harvested and brought from the field by the volunteers, the potatoes were immediately placed in specially designed ACAP 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary five-pound potato bags. The unique artistic design on the bag was created by Fort Kent Artist Gert Thibodeau, who was the winner of a County-wide art design contest held earlier this summer as part of the overall project.

Several hundred of the bags were picked up by volunteers of local area food pantries on the spot the day of the harvesting, delivered later that day by ACAP volunteers, or will be distributed County-wide to area food pantries and community cupboards in the coming days.

The initiative is a collaborative of ACAP, G. B. and D. Pelletier Farms of Fort Kent and Northeast Packaging Company (NEPCO) in Presque Isle/Caribou. The Pelletier Family, who owns and farms the land the designated potato plot sits on, donated the field of the Dark Red Norland potatoes grown in it this summer.

"We are excited to collaborate with ACAP and NEPCO to help relieve food insecurity in The County, and proud to have had such a great turnout from the community and area youth to help with the harvest," said Anne Desjardins of G. B. and D. Pelletier Farm.

Aroostook County Action Program  
771 Main St. Presque Isle, ME  
207.764.3721

Northeast Packaging Company  
875 Skyway St. Presque Isle, ME  
207.764.6271

G.B.&D. Pelletier Farms  
207.834.4925  
St. John Rd. St, John Plantation

For their part, NEPCO donated the production run of the specially designed ACAP 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary five-pound bags.

Among those supporting the ACAP 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Potato Plot is a top national leader who knows firsthand the critical importance of the agriculture industry in Maine from the ground up. Aroostook County's own Senator Susan Collins credits her work ethic with the lessons she learned picking potatoes while on harvest break attending Caribou High School. The Senator's State Office Representative Trisha House was at the hand picking celebration to accept a few bags of spuds for the Senator.

Senator Collins will honor the collaborative efforts by ensuring the custom bagged potatoes make it to the White House in Washington D.C. The County native will deliver spuds to the chef at the Executive Mansion. Senator Angus King was personally handed two of the filled potato bags at a recent event in Caribou.

The potato hand picking event was part of the Fort Kent Coming Home and UMFK Homecoming celebrations.

###



#### About Aroostook County Action Program

Celebrating 50 years of service to the people of northern Maine in 2022, Aroostook County Action Program provides the people of Aroostook County with services and resources that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, and workforce development services. Aroostook County Action Program continues to accept new clients as well as serve existing clients through a vast array of programming. To learn more about available services available, contact the ACAP Team at 207- 764-3721.

#### About G. B. and D. Pelletier Farms:

A multi-generational farm with roots in the western St. John Valley, G. B. & D. Farms plants a total of 1,000 acres of potatoes and 1,000 acres of oats and clover. The 1,000 acres of potatoes include 500 acres of Dark Red Norlands, 200 acres of Caribou Russets, and 300 acres of Russet Burbanks that are shipped to Pineland Farms in Mars Hill. Guerrette Farms in Caribou purchases some of the Dark Red Norlands and then ships them to Walmart stores on the East Coast. The 1,000 acres of oats and clover are shipped to Agromart in Grand Falls, NB.

The G. in the farm name represents patriarch George Pelletier who was born in 1945 and raised on a potato farm in St. John, Maine. When George was 17 years old, his father had a major stroke which left him paralyzed and wheel chair bound. Being the only boy in a family of 7 children, the farm fell on George's shoulders. In 1966, George married and had his own family of 4 children. His hope was to raise them on the farm as well. That did not happen.

The 1980's were especially difficult on Northern Maine farmers. Trade imbalance issues with Canada made for extremely difficult market conditions. Crops could not be sold and farmers could not pay their bills. The potato farms that once peppered the Northern Maine landscape one by one went through foreclosure. George was able to sell his equipment and land to pay off his debt. He went on to cut wood on private woodlots and then was employed by Great Northern Paper Company. The thought never occurred to him that he would farm again.

In 1993, George's youngest son Denis knew that his calling was to farm. At 15 years old, with borrowed equipment, Denis planted three acres. Some potatoes were sold on the side of the road, but most were sold to Northland Food Products in Fort Kent. With the profit, Denis and George were able to invest in purchasing some old equipment. With no potato house to store the potatoes, the crop was sold as it was harvested. Northland offered them a contract for 30 acres. George's eldest son, Bruce, joined the partnership that they named G. B. & D. Pelletier Farms. Each year, the number of acres grew. As each year passed more money was invested in equipment and storage facilities for their crop. In 2014, the farm purchased a 30,000 square foot potato storage facility known locally as the packing shed.

There were good years, but also years of struggle. In 2004, George's youngest daughter Anne joined the farm. George's dream of raising his family on the farm far exceeded what he ever expected. Today he gets to work side by side with 3 of his children and 2 grandchildren. All grandchildren have had the privilege of working with their grandfather during harvest time.

With each passing year the farm continues to grow. The hope is that George's grandchildren who have the calling to farm will carry it on to pass on from generation to generation.

#### About Northeast Packaging Company:

Northeast Packaging Company's predecessor and affiliate, C.W. Staples, Inc., began operation in Aroostook County, Maine and neighboring New Brunswick, Canada in the late 1920's and was incorporated in 1937. The company supplied Maine and Canada farms with farm and shipping supplies. The company was also a potato bag distributor. Northeast Packaging Company was established in 1972 by William Staples, son of the founder, Charles Staples. The company began with one paper bag machine but continued to grow consistently through the 1970's and 1980's, adding several more machines making a wide range of multiwall paper bags. In 1993, the company increased production by incorporating a polyethylene bag line as well as adding a line for consumer sized paper bags. All equipment used is state of the art and accommodates the growing need for a diversified product mix.

In April 2008, Northeast Packaging Company purchased Maine Bag of Caribou, Maine. With this purchase NEPCO was able to add more paper machines to its already running fleet in Presque Isle. With this addition, Northeast Packaging is able to service its customer needs at a faster pace than in years past due to increase in productivity. Northeast Packaging now has a total of 9 paper machines, 3 poly presses and 6 wicketer machines. We are proud to say that today the company continues to be family owned and operated.

Aroostook County Action Program  
771 Main St. Presque Isle, ME  
207.764.3721

Northeast Packaging Company  
875 Skyway St. Presque Isle, ME  
207.764.6271

G.B.&D. Pelletier Farms  
207.834.4925  
St. John Rd. St. John Plantation