



## **Jay LaJoie Recounts His Leadership Institute Experience**

As a potato farmer, Jay LaJoie certainly knows what it means to put in a full day's work. Even so, he couldn't believe the daily tempo kept at the Leadership Institute. Simply stated, "The days were packed from 7 a.m. to 9, 10, even 11 o'clock at night," said LaJoie. "It was intense, but really worthwhile."

"I came home motivated," he added. "I realized there's a lot of work to do to make the industry better, and this experience made me want to work even harder." LaJoie appreciated learning more about all the Maine Potato Board and National Potato Council does on behalf of the industry and is eager to play an increasing supportive role.

"I really enjoyed the lobbying training," said LaJoie. "It made me realize we have to know what's going on and that we all need to be involved." He also enjoyed being exposed to new things ranging from the mini-tuber operation to media training to team competitions.

Yes, team competitions. The Leadership Institute did a great job of team and relationship building through activities such as a cooking contest and package design competition. "We had to design a dinner that families could prepare in 30 minutes or less, as well as come up with new packaging for a new 'buy and grill' potato product," said LaJoie.

The competitions were fun, networking was great, and knowledge gained exceeded expectations; however, perhaps LaJoie's greatest take home was a deeper appreciation for the potato industry at large and of Maine as a great place to farm in particular. "We (farmers) all have our issues, but our environment is a big advantage," said LaJoie, noting the West's dependence on irrigation. He added that Maine is also fortunate when it comes to labor. "People we talked with have a hard time finding labor and rely completely on immigrant workers where are we can find local labor."



### **Alan Moir's Take on the Leadership Institute**

As Maine's 2007 Young Farmer of the Year, Alan Moir earned a trip to the National Leadership Institute. He is grateful for having had the experience, especially having returned home with a broader perspective of the potato industry, increased knowledge, new comrades in farming, and a renewed sense of optimism.

Moir is the first to admit that farming has gotten harder and harder. He's also quick to say that he cannot imagine doing anything else. "I love being outside and the joy of farming. Like the old saying goes, 'It's in my blood,'" said Moir.

He was encouraged to realize that he's not alone – and to meet with other young farmers committed to establishing new markets, increasing production, and so forth. "It was great to see what others are doing and to exchange ideas with farmers from Idaho, Montana, Wisconsin, and beyond." Moir said the Leadership Institute opened his eyes to shared problems such as the rising costs of fuel, electric, and fertilizers but also made him appreciate advantages in Maine, especially an environment so conducive to growing potatoes.

Moir was especially interested in learning more about the seed programs out West – something he's had limited exposure to because nearly all of his 700 acres of potatoes are used for processing. He also enjoyed touring farms and production facilities and being exposed to innovative operations ranging from mini-tubers to starch plants to individually wrapped baked potatoes. These are just the kinds of things Moir believes will help sustain the potato industry.

In addition to learning about potato farming, Moir learned a great deal about the industry as it relates to politics. "The Public Policy meeting in D.C. was eye opening," he said. "It made me realize there's a lot to deal with...a lot that I don't think about on a daily basis."

Moir also learned a lot about himself through the extensive leadership training. "They really taught us how to present and get our point across, how to listen to others and interpret what they're saying, how to work with the media, and just how to be good leaders," he said.