

BUSINESS PROFILE

Aaron Troyer grows family farm into computer age

BY MARY BRIGGS
Special to Florida Weekly

One of the most valuable lessons Aaron Troyer learned at college was where he belonged. "College really showed me what I did and didn't like," said Troyer, 30, who oversees the day-to-day operations at Troyer Brothers, the family-owned potato farm in southeast Lee County. "I didn't like being stuck in a building surrounded by cinder blocks and fluorescent lights. I wanted to be outside."

Although most children of farmers tend to leave the family business for greener pastures, Troyer, the son of Pennsylvania Mennonites and full-time farmers who now reside in Florida, devoted his college education to improving operations back home. He's used his teachings and double master's degrees from the University of Florida to create software programs that monitor pesticide usage and rainfall, and he has introduced technology in the potato fields — a move that has whittled manpower and increased productivity.

Tractors use lasers to level the sandy soil and an optical scanner can be programmed to harvest specific-sized potatoes. "Weather stations at the farms upload information that I can track on my laptop," said Troyer.

The farm, which grows everything from creamers to jumbos that are sold locally, nationally and in Canada, consists of individual properties owned by Troyer's father, David, and his uncles, Vern and Don. The family works about 3,000 acres in Florida and has been farming in Pennsylvania since 1943.

Aaron, who moved to Florida with his parents when he was 5, oversees the local operation, which is one of the state's top potato producers.

Troyer has been working in the family business since he was a youngster, sandwiching school between farm chores. "I'd do whatever was needed — cultivating, painting, working in the packing house," he said.

He graduated from Lehigh Senior High School, then attended Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, fast-tracking his studies by taking summer classes at Edison State College and earning a bachelor's degree in economics in just three years. He attended the University of Florida on a USDA national needs scholarship, finishing with master's degrees in agribusiness and agribusiness economics.

"Growing potatoes in Florida is like trying to put a square peg in a round hole," said Troyer. "Potatoes like to start out in cool temperatures, grow in warmth and get harvested when it's cool again. We do the opposite."

But, technology is aiding the process, and allowing the Troyer brothers — and son — to battle farming's biggest unknown.

"We're constantly working against the elements, the weather," Troyer said. "Rain's a risk, dryness is a risk, and we also have freezes here."



Aaron Troyer oversees the day-to-day operations of Troyer Brothers potato farm in Southeast Lee County. COUTESY PHOTO

fields for the next year's crop.

The farm's end product — yielded in shades of white, red and yellow — are fresh table stock, some sold locally under the Sun King name or a private label. None of the crop goes to a processing plant. If you eat potatoes for dinner tonight, they could very well have come from the Troyer farm.

Troyer, who married a Russian exchange student he met at college, lives in Alva. He serves on Lee County's Agricultural Advisory Committee, and in 2002 founded Agricultural Risk Management, an insurance agency specializing in crop insurance.

"The future is what you make of it," he said. "You want to grow and expand and become more efficient and competitive. To do that, you have to use new techniques and new technologies."

Despite the challenges he and his family face, Troyer says he's happy with his career path.

"You either like farming or you don't like it; there's really not much in the middle," he said. "We're fortunate that we're a profitable company and do pretty well, but it's a huge effort every season with a tremendous amount of risk. You're literally putting money back into the ground." ■

Woodyard & Associates LLC

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

(239) 425-6000 WWW.WA-CR.COM

PROFESSIONALS WITH PASSION

<p>Warehouse – Airport Woods Comm. Ctr.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62,400± SF • 3,311± SF Office Space • Off Daniels Pkwy • Quick Access to I-75 • 3-Phase Power • 3 Dock High Doors • Extra Paved Parking <p style="text-align: center;">Price: \$3.90 PSF + CAM Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1379</p>	<p>3 Building Warehouse For Sale or Lease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30,000±SF Total • Zoned IL • 22'± Ceiling Height • 4.95± Acres • Off US41/Near Alico Rd • Water/Septic • Access to Major Corridors <p style="text-align: center;">Price Sale \$3,000,000 Lease: \$8.00 PSF NNN+ \$2.00 PSF + CAM Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1874</p>	<p>Office Space For Lease</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">Just Reduced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,166± SF • Zoned CPD • Planned Dev. • Off Brantley Between Summerlin & US41 • World Plaza Office Park <p style="text-align: center;">Lease Rate: Call For Details Contact: Steve Wood</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1880</p>	<p>World Plaza II Condo For Lease</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">Lease Options Available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,000± SF Suit • Medical/Office • Med Impact Pd • Will Divide • Off College Pkwy • Ample Parking <p style="text-align: center;">Lease: \$12 PSF NNN – Call For Details Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1955L</p>	<p>Office/Warehouse Metro Plantation</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">New Listing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6,325±SF Building • 1,988±SF Office • IL – Light Industrial • Two OH Doors • Ample Parking • One Truckwell • Just off Metro Pkwy • North of Crystal Dr. <p style="text-align: center;">Lease Rate: \$5.98 PSF + \$2.50 PSF CAM Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA2015</p>
<p>Residential Investment Property</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">Motivated Seller</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully Leased Out Duplex • Professionally Managed • Located in Lehigh Acres • Well Maintained • Positive Cash Flow • Adjoining Duplex Available <p style="text-align: center;">Price: Motivated Seller - Make Offer Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1774</p>	<p>Office/Retail Space For Lease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,297± SF & Up • On Lee Blvd • Just East of State Rd 82 • Great Visibility • Zoned PUD • Early Fall 2008 Occ. • Vanilla Shell Build-Out with Restrooms <p style="text-align: center;">Lease Rate: \$22.00 PSF + CAM Contact: Honora Jacobus or Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1157</p>	<p>Professional Building for Sale or Lease</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">Near Cape Coral Hospital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,468± SF • 1 Bk off DelPrado • Near Hospital • Zone P1 - Professional • 11 Parking Spaces • Medical/Professional • Ideal for Insurance/Accountant/Atty & More <p style="text-align: center;">Price: \$590,000 Lease Rate: \$16 PSF NNN Contact: Tom Woodyard or Carrie Vincent</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1925SL</p>	<p>Office/Warehouse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,325±SF Unit • Four AC Offices • Conference Room • Bonus Mezzanine Area • Located on the NW Corner • Off Metro Pkwy & Danley Drive • OH Door 10'x12' <p style="text-align: center;">Price: 2,325.00/MO + tax Contact: Todd Holman</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA2023</p>	<p>Medical/Professional Office Space For Lease</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: yellow;">Best Priced In Lee County</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,084± SF • 2,800± SF • Easy Access to All Major Corridors • Fully Built-Out • Impact Fees Pd • Imm. Occupancy • Central Ave Location <p style="text-align: center;">Price: \$8.00 PSF + CAM Contact: Robyn Wright or Alex Wright, CCIM</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">WA1951</p>

The statements and figures presented herein, while not guaranteed, are secured from sources we believe authoritative. Subject to prior sale, lease, withdrawal and price change without notice.

For a complete inventory of our listings, visit www.WA-CR.com (239) 425-6000 WWW.WA-CR.COM

Woodyard & Associates | Pinebrook Park, 12995 S. Cleveland Ave, Suite 219, Fort Myers, FL 33907 | Toll Free: 1-800-425-7900