

Spud competition mashes Idaho's market

Better harvests loom in Washington, Oregon

OTHELLO, Wash. (AP) — The brown desert scablands here are one of the nation's battlegrounds for what may seem a lowly prize — the potato.

But the potato — and the trillions of french fries, hash browns and chips made from it — have pitted Washington and Idaho against each other.

Maine is upset too. It has made corporate farmers Peter Taggares and Jack Simplot into agricultural kings — though they too are embroiled in legal controversy.

Farmers of Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon have tapped the mighty Columbia River to grow potatoes. Computers, exotic chemicals and infra-red overflights help guide their growth.

In the lands booming with a potato fortune — some liken it to a gold rush atmosphere — the potato is a vegetable of controversy. Though fortunes can be made, marketing wars rock the industry even as dozens of processing plants overflow with new frozen crinkle-cut fries.

"This business is cutthroat as hell," says Henry Hohwiesner, general manager of Rogers of Walla Walla, which operates a medium-sized plant at Pasco.

"There are enough processing plants that there is no way we can set our own price. We try to inch our prices up, but we can't if our competitors mark theirs down."

Says David Pahl of the trade group Northwest Food Proces-

sors Inc.: "Selling on the fresh market is a crap game."

Maine potato officials complain that the deluge of cheap Western potatoes is crunching prices. They say they receive \$3.75 per 100-pound sack less this year than last.

Maine also knows of Taggares and Simplot, who earlier this year created a commodity market sensation by defaulting on a giant shipment of that state's spuds.

And so it goes. One Columbia Basin grower is selling his No. 1 grade potatoes packed in cartons in Los Angeles for \$140 a ton. Strippers, tiny potatoes less than two inches long, sell for about \$14 a ton.

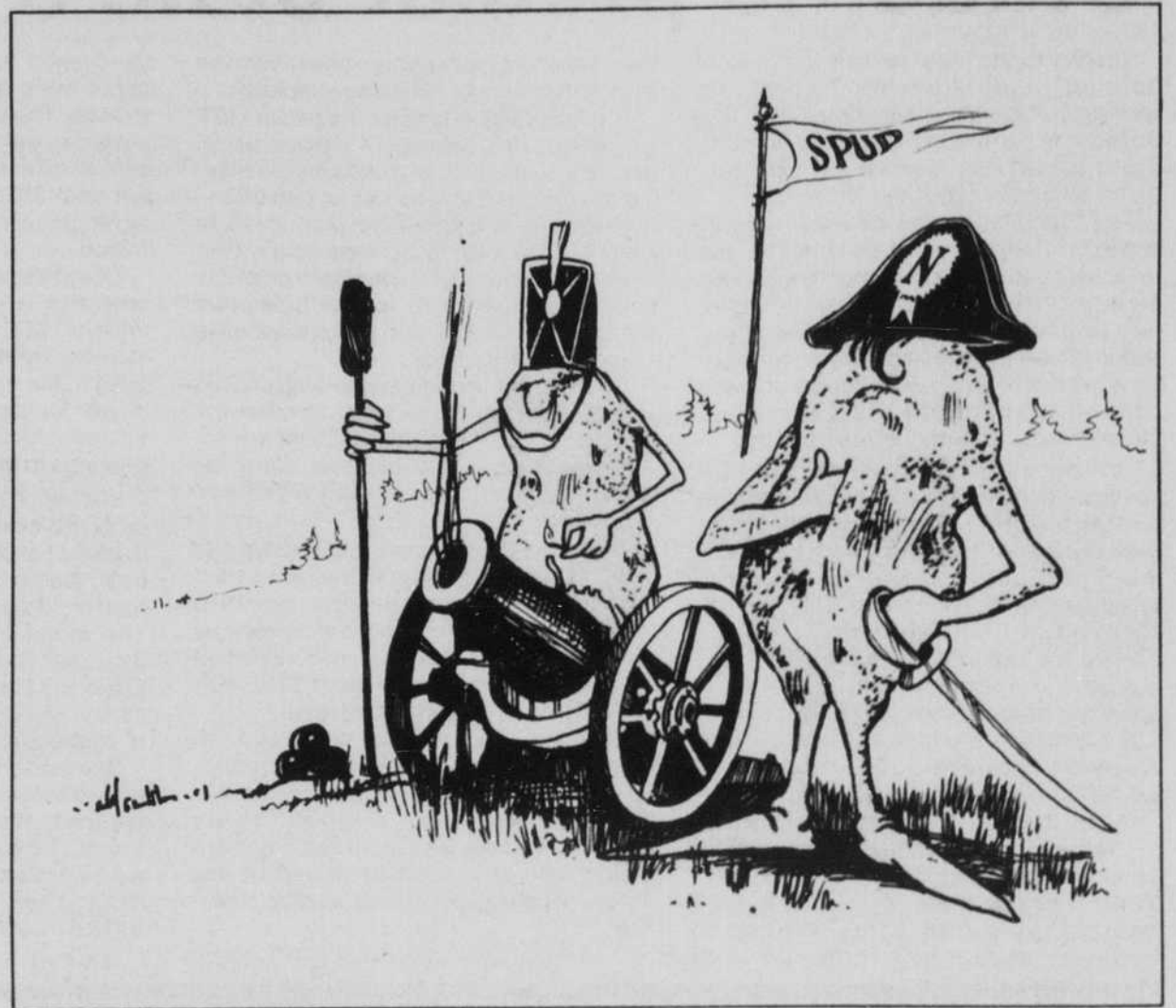
"At that price, it's hardly worth feeding to cattle," says Pasco packer Robert Burns.

Hohwiesner says his plant's contract price is a medium \$53 a ton.

A caricature of the marketing trench warfare is the high-level argument between Washington and Idaho.

Nearly everyone wants a potato variety called the Russet Burbank, a long, light brown spud with a pure white interior. But in Idaho, it's called the Idaho potato.

No one can say which state grows the best potatoes, though sandy Washington and Oregon soils produce much higher yields. But the Washington Potato Commission began an advertising campaign: "Why 'Idaho' Potatoes Grow Better in Washington."



Idaho sued.

The Gem State asks for \$500,000, claiming the Washington commission has infringed on its trademark, the Idaho potato.

Washington growers are irked because an Idaho-grown potato gets up to 1½ cents more a pound than one from Washington, even if it is inferior.

Idaho Potato Commission Director Gordon Randall says there's something special about

Regardless, people are buying potatoes of every stripe. Idaho, Washington and Oregon, the top three producers, grew more than half of the 350 million 100-pound sacks raised this fall in the United States.

Idaho grew potatoes to fill 85.2 million of the sacks this fall. Washington stuffed 55.8 million sacks — a 466 per cent increase from production of 12 years ago — and Oregon chipped in with 28.9

more than 20 million sacks.

Last year, the potato crop nationally was worth \$1.2 billion — \$560.4 million of it from the Big Three Northwest states. About 86 per cent of the Northwest crop was sold to freezers, the men who make french fries and hash browns, and to plants which make flakes and chips.

The biggest producers are the

World at a glance

From Associated Press reports

Soviet grain crop record

MOSCOW — The Soviet Union harvested a record grain crop of 223.8 million metric tons in 1976, Agriculture Minister Valentin K. Mesyats announced Wednesday.

Mesyats, confirming previous hints at a bumper crop, told a news conference the Soviet Union plans to boost the average annual harvest of grain to 235 million tons by 1980.

Despite the good performance, the minister said, the Soviets will fulfill their commitments to buy grain abroad.

Iranian oil sales down

TEHRAN, Iran — The National Iranian Oil Co. reported Wednesday its sales are 10 per cent below expected levels, or down more than \$6 million daily, as a result of the split price decision among oil exporting countries.

With Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates selling at lower prices, the Iranian company said 25 new customers have reduced their Iranian purchases from 1.2 million barrels daily to 693,000 barrels a day. It added production is being cut as a result.

Brazil doubles coffee export

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil — Brazil more than doubled its coffee export earnings in 1976 although the volume exported increased only by about 7 per cent, according to figures announced here Wednesday.

The Brazilian Coffee Institute said that the country earned \$2.32 billion from exports of 15.6 million bags of 132 pounds each in 1976, while the previous year it earned \$934.1 million with a total export of 14.6 million bags.

The Coffee Institute is a government agency that strictly regulates the flow of exports. It operates as a national cooperative, buying and selling coffee grown in Brazil.

Oil tanker feared sunk

BOSTON — Chances that the missing Panamanian tanker Grand Zenith is afloat with its 38 crew members and 8 million gallons of industrial oil diminished Wednesday, said Coast Guard officials.

"Tomorrow (Thursday) I suspect we're going to have to be searching about 10 per cent for a vessel and 90 per cent for debris and lifeboats," said Coast Guard Capt. Bernard Hoyland, chief of the Search and Rescue Branch of the 1st Coast Guard District.

Commission sued for campaign: "Why 'Idaho' Potatoes Grow Better in Washington"

an Idaho spud. He says it's because of warm summer days, cool nights and the state's warm, volcanic soil.

But, says one Oregon grower and processor, "This thing about warm days, cool nights and volcanic soil is baloney."

The coordinator of the University of Idaho's potato programs, Walter Sparks, believes there is "a slight difference in flavor and mealiness," with Idaho's potato holding the edge.

But horticulturalist Robert Thornton of Washington State University says he knows of no information "that supports the opinion that Idaho potatoes are better than other potatoes."

George O'Leary, executive director of the Washington Potato Commission, goes farther.

"There's no such thing as an Idaho potato," he declares. He notes that 10 million pounds of Oregon and Washington spuds went to Idaho processing plants last year, "so they can't think they're that bad."

Idahoans retort that when forced to use alien potatoes, they don't label them as a genuine Idaho product.

In the midst of the controversy, Washington made another change. Its advertising now follows a "Hot Potato" theme.

million sacks.

Maine, its markets undercut by the Western production, ranked fourth with 27.4 million sacks of fall growth. California, its crop harvested in the spring, grows

corporate farms, which constitute about 40 per cent of all Northwest potato acreage. And leading the way among corporate farmers are Simplot and Taggares, two of the richest men in the Northwest.

Inequality report (Continued from Page 1A)

equity pay raises to women employees: "a minimal amount," Mitchell commented. Some new policies in hiring were also adopted, Acker said. SWC is also concerned with the status of classified women, those employed by the University but not part of the faculty.

According to Mitchell, SWC continues to make a surveillance of salaries, and inquiries about sex discrimination. It also can receive complaints about discriminatory practices. Full-fledged grievances must be submitted to the Office of Affirmative Action.

"Much discrimination is social practice," said Mitchell. "It can only be rectified when it reaches consciousness."

Along the same lines, current chair of SWC Myrtice Butler said the committee is striving to raise people's awareness of discriminatory actions. The SWC report recommends "that women on campus be strongly encouraged

to share their views and difficulties on any matters related to sexism with the SWC committee. For example, we suggest a weekly 'sexist comment of the week' feature in the Emerald and the Oregon Week."

Butler cited one instance of a female student who asked her professor when a paper was due. The professor replied, "For you baby, any 2 a.m. at my apartment."

SWC will conduct open meetings on Thursday mornings at the Faculty Club during winter term. The meetings begin at 9:30 a.m. and last until noon, Butler said. The next meeting will be Jan. 13, and Paul Olum, vice-president of academic affairs, will be present to discuss several topics regarding affirmative action. Potential topics include the deans' review process, and the necessity of recognizing affirmative action policy in the appointment of new deans and department heads.