

# Amalgamated reporting strong early sugar beet harvest

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — Officials with Amalgamated Sugar say they're on track for record yields and good sugar content at the start of their early harvest.

"The overall sugar at the South Pleasant Valley receiving station is up quite a bit from last year. Tonnage is up slightly from last year," said Jim Tiede, an American Falls farmer.

Magic Valley beet growers started digging on Sept. 7, with Eastern Idaho growers commencing the following

day, and growers should continue harvesting through Nov. 1. Operations commenced Sept. 10 at the Twin Falls and Paul factories, and processing of a large crop should continue for the next 10 months, said Amalgamated President and CEO John McCreedy.

"Our indication at this point is we have a very, very high tonnage," McCreedy said. "We could have a record crop in terms of size and total amount of sugar produced."

McCreedy said he's cautiously optimistic about sugar levels.

"If the trend stays consistent, what we would antic-

ipate seeing is better sugar content than we've seen in the past couple of years," McCreedy said.

According to a Sept. 1 forecast by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Idaho should produce 6.3 million tons of sugar, with yields expected to average 37.6 tons per acre, up 0.1 tons. In Amalgamated's Oregon territory, beet production is forecast at 495,000 tons, with yields expected to rise 12 percent to 39 tons per acre.

Rupert, Idaho, farmer Duane Grant, chairman of Snake River Sugar Co., said some of his beets have tested

at 16 percent sugar, which is strong for so early in harvest.

"We have expectations for an above-average crop, both in terms of tonnage definitely, and the first sugars coming in also look to be at least average, and perhaps above average," Grant said.

Grant noted some growers, especially near Glens Ferry, were hard hit by the fungal disease Aphanomyces.

Based on strong production, McCreedy anticipates Amalgamated growers will enjoy above-average beet returns. Sugar prices, however, have been trending downward since early 2015 and have

dropped about 6 cents per pound of finished sugar to 33 cents per pound.

Jack Roney, an economist with the American Sugar Alliance, explained sugar prices plummeted during 2013 due to the flooding of Mexican sugar on the U.S. market. Prices recovered in 2014 when the U.S. government imposed anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties on Mexican sugar, and the U.S. and Mexican governments reached an agreement by the end of the year allowing duty-free Mexican sugar imports to resume, with volumes limited to demands of the U.S. market.

Roney believes price declines are "a reflection of the certainty that has been returned to the market" following the suspension of the duties.

Roney said the U.S. beet crop appears to be strong this season. Furthermore, he said, Australia requested greater access to sell sugar into the American market during Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiation. U.S. negotiators have assured sugar producers they may make minor concessions to Australia but won't undermine the nation's sugar policy, Roney said.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Central Washington rancher Sam Kayser talks Aug. 4 in the Teanaway Community Forest about efforts to prevent wolf depredations on livestock. Kayser has lost two cows to wolves this summer. Most recently, a Washington State University graduate student conducting wolf research found on Sept. 5 a cow killed by wolves.

## Rancher resigned to wolves, but can't afford depredations

Attacks occur despite preventive measures

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

An Ellensburg rancher who has lost two cows to Washington's western-most wolf pack says he still hopes to coexist with wolves, but that financially and emotionally he can't take ongoing depredations.

"I'm not going to go for that. I don't know what I'd do about it. We'd have to cross that bridge when we came to it," Sam Kayser said Monday.

In mid-June, Kayser turned loose about 180 cow-calf pairs on a state grazing allotment north of Cle Elum in Central Washington. The Teanaway pack, which has at least five members, has roamed the area since at least 2011, but it did not have a record of attacking livestock until this summer.

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife determined that a cow found dead Sept. 5 on U.S. Forest Service property near the state grazing land was killed by wolves.

Wolves also killed a cow that was found on the state land in mid-July.

The depredations occurred even though Kayser has taken every possible step to prevent them, WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said.

Kayser has an agreement with WDFW to use non-lethal means to deter wolves. He shares the cost of employing a range rider with an environmental group, Conservation Northwest. The calves were kept in a fenced area away from wolves until they weighed more than 200 pounds.

The range rider can track the pack's general location because three members have been fitted with radio collars.

"We have all the tools in place," Martorello said. "There's no way to take the risk to zero."

A second producer grazes almost 2,000 sheep on Forest Service and private land in the

area, according to WDFW. The producer lost at least three sheep to cougars this summer. In early September, another three ewes and two lambs were killed by predators, but the carcasses had been scavenged, and WDFW couldn't identify the predator.

The sheep rancher has used a range rider and up to 11 dogs, according to WDFW. At times this summer, radio collars indicated wolves were in the immediate vicinity of the flock.

Also this year, wolves in northeast Washington have killed three cows and one calf and seriously injured a sheep dog. Those attacks took place where wolves are no longer a federally protected species. WDFW has said lethal removal would be the next step if more depredations occur.

In Central Washington, wolves are protected by the federal Endangered Species Act, and shooting or relocating them are not options, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokeswoman Ann Froschauer said.

## Idaho spud growers report big size, fewer tubers

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — Early in their potato harvest, Idaho growers say they're digging fewer spuds than last year, but tuber sizes are much larger.

Growers — who are now digging early maturing varieties such as Russet Norkotah, specialty types, reds and Ranger Russets — anticipate yields will be down from last season, but will still be above average.

"It's a good crop — definitely bigger (tuber size)," said Aberdeen grower Doug Ruff, who started digging chip potatoes on Sept. 11.

Aberdeen grower Ritchie Toevs has been happy with the lack of rot and high percentage of dry matter in his spuds and anticipates bulk will make up for reduced tuber numbers. His quality has been variable.

"We have one field that's beautiful and another one that's course," Toevs said. "Last year, where they were smaller, they were all smooth. This year, some of our big potatoes had knobs."

Toevs said the return to Idaho growers remains well below the cost of raising spuds.

"I don't know why we don't manage shipments. It's frustrating," Toevs said.

Doug Gross, a Wilder grow-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Workers clean and load red potatoes following harvest Sept. 11 in the Pleasant Valley area of southeast Idaho. The size profile of the crop appears to be up, while the number of tubers is down.

er, said his Norkotah yields and quality are average and his Rangers are slightly above average. He said the crop profile is about the opposite of last season, and prices are "flip-flopping."

"The old crop is pretty well gone and the new crop, it looks like there's better size," Gross said. "The carton sizes are starting to decline (in price), and the consumer bags are starting to rise."

USDA lists Norkotah prices for the Twin Falls-Burley district at \$12 to \$16 per hundredweight for cartons and \$9 to \$12 per hundredweight for 10-pound consumer bags. Since mid-August, University

of Idaho Extension economist Chris McIntosh said prices of 10-pound consumer bags are up \$3 per hundredweight, but 60-count cartons have dropped \$7 per hundredweight.

Retired UI economist Paul Patterson is hopeful that cheaper prices during the past season triggered more consumption of fresh spuds, thereby changing consumer behavior. Though Russet Burbank harvest won't commence until later this month, Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir said test digs indicate Idaho's major variety will also have larger size but fewer tubers beneath each plant.

## Strong dollar, port slowdown reduce potato exports

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

DENVER — A strong dollar, a labor slowdown at West Coast container ports and a large European potato crop aligned to cause U.S. potato exports to drop for the first time in a decade during the marketing year that ended June 30, according to a recent U.S. Potato Board report.

The value of U.S. spud exports, estimated at nearly \$1.625 billion, was down 7 percent from the previous year, according to the report.

Export volume — estimated at nearly 68 million hundredweight on a fresh weight equivalent — was down about 5 percent, but still amounted to the second highest export volume on record, according to USPB.

USPB Chief Marketing Officer John Toasperm sees a rosier export outlook for the current crop, given that the port labor dispute has been resolved, the Euro is strengthening and this year's European potato crop should be down due to reduced acreage and some weather challenges.

"I do think we will resume growth this coming year," Toasperm said.

Toasperm said the port slowdown created lingering

problems that are still being resolved, including foreign buyers switching to other suppliers and a mid-summer glut caused by U.S. spud products finally arriving on top of replacement purchases. He said USPB committed an additional \$300,000 reallocating some of its USDA Market Access Program dollars, emphasizing Japan and South Korea, to win back lost U.S. customers.

USPB reported the largest export reduction occurred in the frozen category, where exports, estimated at \$890 million, were down by 11 percent. Frozen export volume, with a fresh weight equivalent of nearly 4.7 million, was down 12 percent.

Japan, the major foreign buyer of U.S. frozen potatoes, cut its U.S. volume by 23 percent and its global frozen purchases by 13 percent.

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