

Tundra swans mix well with potato fields

By LEE JUILLERAT
For the Capital Press

KLAMATH FALLS, Ore. — Ways that potato fields can be managed to benefit waterfowl were featured during a “Behind the Scenes: Potato Fields to Wetlands” field trip held as part of the annual Winter Wings Festival in the Klamath Basin last month.

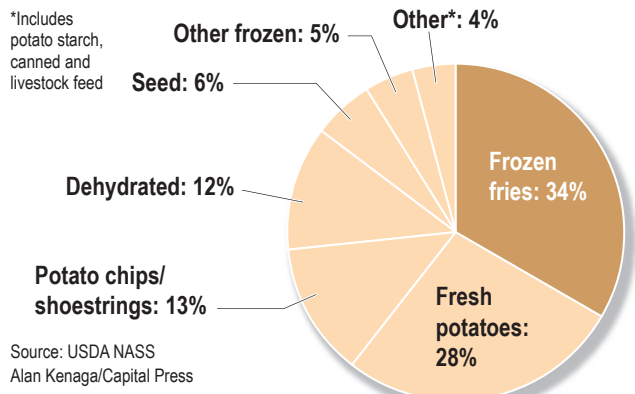
The festival, which began more than 30 years ago as the Bald Eagle Festival, is primarily aimed at birdwatchers and annually draws thousands of visitors. Field trips, classroom sessions and workshops about bald eagles and other birds are based at Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls.

The first-ever “Potato Fields to Wetlands” field trip was sponsored by Walkers Brothers Farm-Gold Dust Inc. to show how about 3,500 acres of former cattle pasture lands near Klamath Falls is being used to grow conventional and organic potatoes and to benefit birds.

During the tour, participants visited the Walkers Brothers-Gold Dust fields and neighboring farm fields filled with thousands and thousands of birds, mostly squawky-talky tundra swans. Rows and rows

Utilization of U.S. potatoes, 2012

More than 23.2 million tons of potatoes were produced in the U.S. in 2012. The breakdown of how they were utilized:



of swans extended in the distance, some appearing as white dots on the southern reaches of Upper Klamath Lake.

This winter, prodigious numbers of tundra swans have been seen on barley fields farmed by Donnie Heaton and nearby potato fields owned by Walker Brothers-Gold Dust Farms.

Participants toured dikes on the former Running Y Ranch just west of Klamath Falls. In recent years, 3,500 acres of contiguous lands have been owned by Malin-based Walker Brothers Farms.

During the tour, Lexi Crawford, an office manager for Walker Brothers, discussed efforts to manage the fields to benefit waterfowl. Through an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for example, a third of the barley fields, which are annually rotated, is left for birds.

“We feel as farmers the birds were here first and we have to work to benefit them,” Crawford said.

Most of the Running Y Ranch acreage is used to grow potatoes, including about 20 percent for organic spuds. Fields used to grow potatoes are rotated with barley or red wheat.



Lee Juillerat/For the Capital Press

Thousands of tundra swans were viewed on a “Potato Fields to Wetlands” tour held during the annual Winter Wings Festival.

ley or red wheat.

Two sections of the Running Y property are leased to other growers for garlic and onions.

Klamath Basin-wide, the Walker Brothers-Gold Dust operation has about 10,000 acres straddling Oregon and California. Except for the Running Y property, which is contiguous, most of the other acreage is broken into smaller holdings. Of those total acres, Crawford said about 2,000 are dedicated to organic potatoes. Both conventionally and organically grown potatoes are used for potato chips and french fried potatoes. In 2015, the business produced about 1.3 million hundredweight.

Along with reserving some Running Y fields for waterfowl and other birds, Crawford said using water from nearby Upper Klamath Lake for flood irrigation “definitely benefits the birds.”

According to the company’s website, Gold Dust-Walker Brothers have been planting organic crops to get a foothold in the organic market and increase the production of the ground.

“Hay crops are known to add nitrogen to soil, which makes them perfect for following a potato crop in a field,” according to the website. “When that same crop is raised organically, with organic fertilizers, not only do you get the benefit

of what the hay crop does for the ground, the soil also gets a boost in organic material that conventional fertilizers simply cannot add.”

Lexi Crawford said the Running Y fields are especially productive because of the rich soils and said the fields have lured large numbers of waterfowl and other birds. While the Walker Brothers have been “generous sponsors” of the annual Winter Wings Festival for several years, she said this year was the first time a field trip was offered to show and explain how the Running Y operation benefits birds.

“It’s something we hope to continue next year and in coming years,” Crawford said.

OTECO

WHEEL TRACK FILLERS



- Fills ruts properly and with the correct material.
- Completely fills ruts with one pass.
- 10 cubic yard (28,000 lbs.) total capacity.
- One-man operation.
- Off-season uses include filling ruts in roads and transporting grain.

THE ONLY SOLUTION

All else is just another problem.

(307) 331-0734
(307) 322-9415
www.otecomfg.com

SPRAYERS for ALL APPLICATIONS

JTI Supply is your source for trusted makers of sprayer equipment & parts.



PBM 100 gal. walking beam sprayer



STORAGE SOLUTIONS

NEW LOCATION!

33935 Hwy 99E,
Tangent, OR. A half-mile north of Hwy 34



Check out our storage tanks.

541-928-2937 • 1-800-982-1099 • WE DELIVER ANYWHERE
See our full inventory at www.jtisupply.com

Branson TRACTORS



Model 4020R

24 - 80 hp.,
4 wheel drive
Compact
Synchro-Shuttle
Hydro 24, 28,
35, 47 hp

SERIES

3120R 4020R
3520R 4525R
3510H 4720H
6640 8050

INTRODUCING THE NEW
BRANSON BOSS 800 UTV's:

Two-or-Four door models have 60hp and speeds up to 58mph.

• Front Winch
• 14" Wheels with 27" Tires

• Hard Doors & Roof
• Top Mount LED Light Bar

• Electric Dump Bed



THE TRACTOR STORE

(541) 342-5464

5450 W. 11th, Eugene, OR

www.capitalpress.biz/hosted/tractorstore