



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald, File

Eric Olson, left, checks the spud storage operation at Ward Farms near Baker City being handled by Bob Adams, top of pile, who controls the conveyor inside the cellar.

Potato:

Continued from Page 20

“All grocery items took a big jump last spring, and that was to be expected.”

Lathim said he didn’t anticipate, however, how rapidly sales from fast-food restaurants rebounded.

With drive-thrus the main option, sales for some franchises exceeded even pre-pandemic levels, he said.

One reason, Lathim said, is that customers were more likely to buy a meal not just for themselves, but for the entire family.

The “steady rise” in fast-food sales after the first month or so of the pandemic was crucial for the frozen potato business, Lathim said, because those franchises make up about 70% of the demand for those products, particularly French fries.

POTATO PROSPECTS FOR 2021

Although the pandemic continues, the potato market has stabilized, at least compared with conditions a year ago, Ward said.

He said the supply of potatoes in storage is slightly above average, which has contributed to a 10% cut in acres planted in potatoes in Baker Valley this year. Growers in the valley contract with the Oregon Potato Co. and

J.R. Simplot Co., Ward said.

Lathim said Columbia Basin potato growers contracting with two processors will have acreages slightly above 2020 levels but below the 2019 figure. Growers working with a third processor will have an increase in acreage to meet the demand of a new processing plant slated to open in December 2021, he said.

The bigger problems with the 2021 outlook are prices, which are dropping, and production costs, which are rising.

Lathim said processors in the Columbia Basin, which include Lamb Weston, J.R. Simplot and McCain Foods, in effect set the potato market for the rest of the nation because that region not only plants its spud crop earlier, but it also has large volumes.

Lathim said processors are proposing a price cut for the 2021 crop of about 3%.

Ward expects that will be the figure adopted across the region.

If the 3% price cut prevails, as Ward expects, it will not be the only challenge for potato growers.

He said production costs, including fuel, fertilizer and equipment, are projected to increase.

Lathim pegs the increase at a bit more than 4%.

See Potato, Page 22



**PACIFIC
INTERMOUNTAIN
MORTGAGE COMPANY**

Farm & Ranch Real Estate Loans
www.pacificim.net (541) 523-4079

Expanding operations one generation at a time.

Just the Right Tractor
FOR YOUR HORSES



Branson TRACTORS

www.gyllenbergeq.com

New
2515R
25 hp

- A compact tractor with loads of power
- Front-end loader lift capacity of 2,200 lbs.
- Hard working and stable enough for the job
- Durable steel frame construction
- Easy attaching implements
- Also available with hydrostatic transmission
- One of the heaviest tractors in its class - 3014 lbs.

Gyllenberg Equipment, Inc.
10 E. Campbell Street, Baker City
541-523-7823

