

Klamath Basin Potato Harvest Reaches Peak

Spud Industry Has Important Position

By BILL DECKER

The economy of the Klamath Basin depends a great deal upon its great potato industry which has for many years been the main cash crop. About 20,000 acres a year are planted in the Basin and they bring an average income of nearly 12 million dollars.

The Netted Gem, or Klamath Russet variety, is the most popular type grown in this area, but a large number of White Rose seed potatoes are produced for California growers. The quality of these potatoes is unsurpassed anywhere in the world.

HISTORY

It was not until 1925 that Klamath County saw the 1,000 acre mark passed in potato production, but from that time on more and more acres were turned over to tubers. By 1931 over 10,000 acres were in production and in 1937 that number had been more than doubled.

The highest annual income that the county has ever received from a spud crop was \$16,405,649 in 1952 and the lowest in recent years came in 1955 when local farmers only realized \$6,140,800 in total. These figures illustrate the risk factor involved in raising potatoes.

In an attempt to stabilize such an erratic market the Klamath Potato Growers Association was first organized in 1925 and since then this group has done a great deal toward improving the standard of quality of shipments from this area. Size and weight classifications are determined by cooperative marketing agreements among the late crop producers in Oregon and Northern California. These agreements are designed to assure the public of top quality products and to establish a reputation for our local crops.

An advertising program is financed by an agreed tax of one and one-half cents on each hundred pounds of potatoes sold. This campaign is directed toward consumer education in an effort to convince the public of the food value and excellence of potatoes as a whole and Klamath Basin Russets in particular. Newspaper, radio and television ads all have their place in the program as do recipe folders to be inserted in the final packaging process.

DIVERSION

While there is no direct price support for potatoes the United States Department of Agriculture has a feed diversion program for the Pacific Northwest growers who

divert part of their crop from regular commercial channels to starch plants and livestock feed. These moves are designed to take inferior qualities off the market and provides for a nominal payment to encourage avoidance of surplus production.

Authorities of the National Potato Council agree that the healthiest thing for the potato industry as a whole is the current move designed to encourage growers to market only their best quality products and to divert the rest into nonfood channels.

Looking at it from a purely local point of view, the growers in this area are interested in promoting the consumption of potatoes in general and of Klamath Basin Russets in particular. Since this is the case they are making every effort to see to it that spuds bearing a Klamath label are of the highest quality possible because the best advertising for any product is the product itself.

How are they doing this? First they are trying to convince all growers to ship only their first potatoes. Second, they urge that only the very best land available be planted in spuds so that the tonnage produced will not reach surplus levels and the quality will remain high. Another point they strive to put across is the fact that no one will know that they are eating Klamath potatoes unless the sacks are so labeled.

For the most part producers in the county are cooperating with this program. Some local farmers have even put up their potatoes in 10 pound consumer packs bearing their own label and shipped them to the San Francisco Bay Area where it is reported they were well received.

COMPLICATED

As it is with almost any product, agricultural or otherwise, marketing is one of the most important steps in production. It has been pointed out that careful tilling, planting, fertilizing, watering and harvesting will help assure a high quality product, but none of this will do any good if that product is carelessly handled or adulterated in the final packaging before sale. Most of the potatoes shipped from this area are freighted out in 100 pound sacks to be repacked in 10 pound containers at terminal markets. Once out of the state, our number ones may be mixed with inferior potatoes and labeled under the brand name of the jobber who



A LONG ROW TO MOE, in fact a lot of them, out on the Joe Steele ranch near Pine Grove are neither hoed nor harvested by hand. In the background the mechanical harvester can be seen starting up the gently sloping field. With modern equipment such as that pictured above harvest costs and damage to the crop can be reduced as compared to hand harvesting and more acres per day can be covered. The investment involved in initially buying and maintaining such equipment makes it impractical for the small operator to employ machines of this sort.

sells them to the retailer. Klamath County is in no way helped by such practices.

Marketing agreements among growers throughout the state of Oregon have done a great deal to raise the quality of the potatoes marketed here, now it is up to the farmers to see to it that Klamath Basin potatoes are recognized for their superiority throughout the country.

The Cover

The cover picture for this week's Herald and News Magazine Section of Klamath Basin Living was taken by Don Kettler on the Charles DeLap Jr. ranch in the Mount Laki district. DeLap is in the foreground. A 4x5 Speed Graphic camera was used set at 100th of a second and f32.

Do You Like To Gamble?

The next time you break the skin of a fluffy white baked potato and sniff the fragrant aroma which rises up as you watch a pat of butter melt and form a golden puddle in the heart of the spud, consider well the work, worry and expense involved in producing that potato.

For many months some farmer has spent a great deal of time and money endeavoring to help his land grow the finest product possible, praying for cooperation from the elements and, finally, handling the crop with all the care one might tender a basket of eggs.

Between the planting of the seed and the grading of his crop a farmer has to spend more than \$300 per acre of land to attain a yield of 150 sacks of potatoes per acre. The growing and harvesting costs are not the end either. By the time he has his crop aboard a train or truck he finds that he has spent over \$60 more per acre.

Whether or not he gets this investment back with a profit depends entirely on the market, but no matter what the status of the market his expenses remain relatively static. If an early frost has not either wiped out his crop or greatly reduced the yield, if he has managed to keep his fields clear of disease, if he has watered and fertilized correctly and harvested carefully he may get a maximum

yield. Whether or not he makes any money is then up to the market, over which he has no control.

If you like to gamble, enjoy hard work, long hours and anxious nights, if you have plenty of money you want to invest with absolutely no guarantee as to your return and if you are willing to spend years and years studying agricultural techniques: go into the potato business.

Industries Count On Spud's Talents

The potato is a highly versatile food. Its many uses do not stop within the confines of the food category though. Potato starch, for instance, is a highly necessary item to the textile industry which has found that it alone possesses properties which enable treatment required by certain fabrics.

Alcohol may be made from potatoes and potato flour plays an important part in the diets of many Europeans. Flour made from potatoes is used in this country by bakers because it helps preserve their products and lends a fine, fluffy texture to the breads and rolls.



BULK HARVESTERS, like the one pictured above, have more than proven their worth time and time again. In addition to replacing many harvest workers they do a much faster, more economical job. When operated at the proper speed and set up with care they handle the potatoes as gently as they would be if harvested by hand. This one is in operation on the Joe Steele ranch in the Pine Grove district.



Business Forms

DESIGNED ESPECIALLY TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS!

* SNAP-OUT FORMS * FOLDERS
* LETTER HEADS * STATEMENTS

Quality Printing

Since 1933

GUIDE PRINTING CO.

1205 Klamath Avenue

Phone TU 4-5373