

Ranch Adds Spud Packing

CHILOQUIN — Northernmost of the Klamath Basin potato growers are Henry, Jack and Gerry Wolff, who operate a ranch called Wolff Brothers and Son along the Williamson and Sprague rivers. The slightly colder weather even this far north has meant a growing season of from two to three weeks later in the spring than the lower Basin.

The ranch in late 1957 built a modern potato packing plant which is located some 20 feet south of the storage cellar. Most of the handling of the potatoes is by water or machines, so human hands have less to do than in most packing setups.

The operation begins in the cellar where a man with a four inch hose directs a large but gentle stream of water at potatoes from any desired bin. The potatoes slowly slide in the water down a slight grade of the cement floor to a center flume, which by a combination of gravity and flowing water move them to the center of the cellar, around a right angle turn and carry them out of the building underground for 20 feet, bringing them into the packing plant.

Potatoes drop from the end of the flume onto a big elevator located in a large sump from where the water is again forced into the storage cellar to be reused in the moving process.

After being elevated to the level of the sorting and packing machinery which is on a floor some four feet above ground level, the potatoes first pass over a pre-sizer which drops the culls into a second flume running under all the sorting tables picking up discards and into a second smaller sump. Another elevator takes them to nearly ceiling height and drops them into a cull hopper.

Potatoes passing the pre-size first are carried through a washer with a heavy pressure and across a foam rubber roller dryer. The clean potatoes are then rolled onto a sorting table which automatically turns them over so the two people at the table can pick out remaining culls and the ones which will make No. 2s. Those are diverted to a crosstable where they are cut, checked and bagged for two by one person.

The No. 1 potatoes next go through a waxer which is a machine containing brushes on which

a few drops of wax are constantly dripped.

The Basin's number one vegetable then goes over an automatic sizer and is dropped into the correct lane on a long rubber belt. It is here that Mrs. Henry Wolff passes final judgement and directs the route any potato shall go. Different lanes lead to sacks for bakers, special order sizes (as for a banquet in a hotel), 25 pound or 50 pound bags.

One man is on hand to change sacks and to weigh, sew, and stack the hundred pound bags. Women usually operate the baggers. Potatoes run from a hopper up a small elevator, which runs until the scales indicate the right number of pounds have reached a container. The container then tips into a waiting plastic, paper or mesh sack which the worker places on a lazy susan. From there another worker tapes, staples or ties the bag and places it in a jenny which will hold up to 275 sacks. A full jenny then is floor jacked up and wheeled to its proper storage area on the north side of the building.

All orders are sent out on trucks which can be backed up to a serv-

ice door and the sacks can be wheeled into the vans.

In the meantime, when it is feeding time for the cattle on the ranch, a wheel allows culls to fall from the bottom of the large cull hopper into a grinding machine and out an elevator which carries them to the outside of the building and drops them into a feed truck. The feed lots are on a hillside a short distance from the potato fields. A few culls may be fed to one or two badly spoiled calves who have been hand fed since birth.

The modern method of handling potatoes from cellar to truck has attracted many visitors to the plant during the last year and most were favorably impressed. One was not! A ranch cat had curled up for a snooze on a conveyor belt during a lunch break. "Meeeoooww! Rrrreeeooww!" "Stop the motors!"

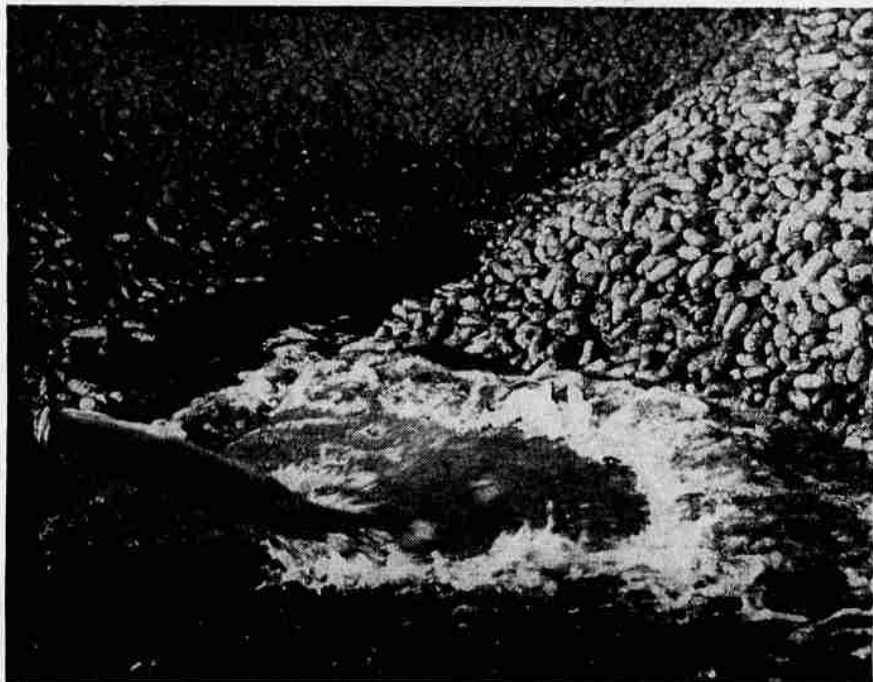
Nearly an hour later when the cat's tail was finally released, it jumped high, landed in the deep water of the sump, scrambled out of that predicament and escaped the building by swimming and

running up the underground flume to the storage cellar. It was his one and only visit to the plant.

The building has been equipped with several special features as the electric coils that run through the cement of the floor to ward off frost permeation. Electric heaters, air ventilators, and excellent lighting also make working conditions more enjoyable.

The plans of the building were worked out by the men after years of study of existing plants here and in Montana and by experience of government researchers in the Red River area. Heaton Steel constructed the windowless steel and aluminum building after the Wolffs had built up the ground level and a contractor had poured the concrete. The back of the building can be removed fairly easily and cellar storage on ground level can be extended as needs indicate during coming years.

Thirteen different brands or grades were processed during the first year of operation and one or two new ones are being tried this year.



A STRONG BUT GENTLE jet of water not only washes the spuds but moves them in the process from the bins to the sorting shed by an underground link. Here you see the spuds at the starting point of the washing operation.



THE PACKAGING END OF THINGS at the Wolff ranch spud processing plant on Williamson River is shown here. Working on the small plastic bags are Ruby Rife, Jim Estes, Alvia Kellogg and Leon Andrews.



FINAL CHECKOUT is made here by Gerry Wolff, left, and Inspector Leonard Kinney at the Wolff Brothers Ranch along the Williamson River. Various size bags are used and better than 13 different brands and grades are handled.



LIVING HIGH is this calf at the Wolff ranch on Williamson River. He is benefiting from the spud packaging operation there in that the culls are fed to the ranch cattle. Most of the feeding is done on nearby feed lots, but this badly spoiled animal gets his feeding right at headquarters from Mrs. Henry Wolff.