

MARKETING TABLE-STOCK POTATOES¹

By

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The 1947 production of North Dakota potatoes was estimated at 20,100,000 bushels—1,350,000 bushels more than the 1946 production. The Red River Valley, which includes the area on both sides of the river and where the greater proportion of the North Dakota potatoes are grown, has become a large potato producing area. The Valley is fourth in potato production of the surplus late potato states, and ranks first in the acreage planted to potatoes. Farmers are becoming keenly aware of the marketing problems that must be faced in order to maintain a favorable position in the highly competitive market for their product.

Marketing obviously involves the interests of a large number of people, while production is too often regarded as a problem that concerns only the individual farmer. A farmer who grows potatoes for market is growing potatoes for the consuming public and not for himself. Therefore, if he is to receive good prices for his product he must have a product which meets the demand of consumers.

Before a producer seeds his crop he should know something about the demands of the particular markets where he plans on selling his crop. The main objective of the producer is to get the largest possible returns, and this requires offering a product which meets the approval of the consumers.

What do consumers look for when buying potatoes? Interviews and observations of consumers in the Chicago market, where a large proportion of North Dakota potatoes are sold, in March 1947 showed that 75 percent of the housewives interviewed preferred a clean potato and usually bought washed potatoes when they could get them². Eighty-three percent of the housewives looked for a smooth potato of uniform size. A large number of retailers and consumers complained of the frequent cuts and bruises in the potatoes. Many housewives commented that they didn't mind paying a premium price for a product in which the loss due to cuts and bruises is small.

A recent survey by the Inspection Service of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Market found that 85 percent of the potatoes that did not grade U.S. No. 1 failed to do so because of mechanical bruising caused by rough handling in harvesting, grading and storing³.

An exploratory survey was made this fall to determine where the largest amount of bruising occurred. The four steps observed

¹This is a preliminary report on a phase of Purnell Project 110 of the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station.

²Survey made in March 1947 by the Department of Agricultural Economics North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station, of Chicago retail stores selling Red River Valley potatoes.

³Northern Pacific Railway. Every spud must do its duty. St. Paul, Minn. No date. p. 4.

in the handling of the potatoes from the field to the storage cellars were: digging, picking, loading, and hauling from the field, and unloading from the truck into the bin. While the results of this exploratory survey are not conclusive because of the small sample, they do indicate that a considerable amount of bruising occurs in digging and the greatest amount of bruising while the potatoes are being unloaded from the truck into the bin. Counting the total bruising in the four steps as 100 percent, the survey showed the following amount of bruising at the various steps:

Digging	28%
Picking	17%
Hauling	16%
Unloading into storage.....	39%

Potatoes have to be handled many times in the process of reaching the consumer, and therefore, if precautions are not taken cuts and bruises are bound to result. Studies have shown that a large percentage of the mechanical injury is due to carelessness--in adjusting the digger, in loading in the field, in rough handling in putting potatoes into storage cellars, and in final grading and loading. Close supervision of every step in the harvesting and marketing is necessary to protect the quality and increase the amount of salable U.S. No. 1 potatoes

The Market News Service of the United States Department of Agriculture in their general review of the marketing and distribution of Red River Valley potatoes for the 1946-1947 season stated that "The Valley demand was dull and draggy throughout most of the season with midwestern consumers turning away from Valley potatoes in favor of Western potatoes, which are more carefully graded and packed." Grading and packing potatoes properly goes a long way in promoting their sale. A buyer gets his first impression of a carlot of potatoes when he first opens the door of the car. If the buyer sees a well loaded car in which the potatoes are all in clean sacks he will get a good impression. But if the buyer sees dirty sacks which have wet spots from bruising in transit he gets suspicious of the potatoes right when he opens the doors.

A potato buyer for a large wholesale food firm in Chicago made the statement, when asked what might be done to improve the marketing of potatoes, that the producers should market them in clean bags. This would also eliminate the necessity of the buyer to resack the potatoes after purchase.

Red River Valley potatoes are produced mainly to supply people living outside the valley. When a housewife buys she usually has a choice of potatoes from several areas to pick from. The housewife very seldom buys by variety. Offering potatoes with good eye appeal is probably the best salesmanship. A potato

¹United States Department of Agriculture, Production and Marketing Adm., Fruit and Vegetable Branch. Red River Valley potatoes, a general review of the marketing and distribution of Red River Valley potatoes. Grand Forks, N. D. April 25, 1947. p. 3.

producer must be on the alert to keep up with the improvements in marketing methods by the areas with which he competes. Therefore, he will find it profitable to be especially careful in the harvesting and handling of potatoes as they bruise very easily.

Not all mechanical injury can be avoided, but a large percentage of it can be by more careful handling. The more clean and attractive the potatoes can be made, the higher the price at which they will sell. Too many small potatoes in a lot discourage buyers, and reduce the price received. Keep the small potatoes at home, wash or at least brush the rest and keep bruising to a minimum. Any improvements that a grower makes will be well paid for by the increase in price he receives.

CERESAN POISONING OF SWINE

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The use of grains treated with Ceresan (ethyl mercury phosphate) as feed for animals is often false economy. Diagnoses of mercury poisoning are made each year on specimens of swine and chickens which have been submitted to this laboratory.

Middleton (1) has recently described acute, fatal poisoning in cattle that had eaten oats treated with Ceresan. In contrast to the acute condition described by this investigator, most of the cases encountered here have been of a chronic type.

The following case history of a drove of pigs illustrates the usual type of Ceresan poisoning in swine. In the latter part of July Dr. O. D. Foss of

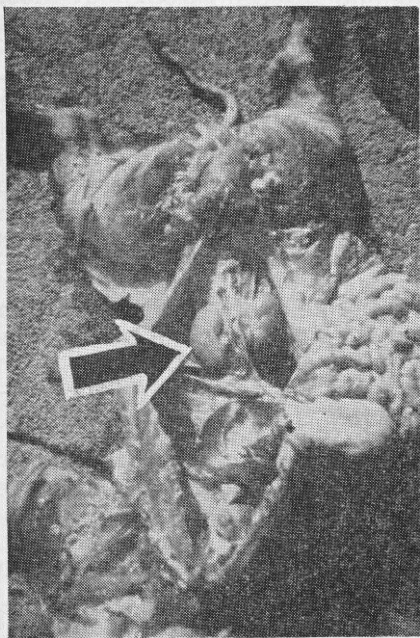


Figure 1.—Ceresan poisoned pig. Photo taken a few days before the pig was destroyed. Note arched back, straight tail and gauntness.

Figure 2.—Ceresan poisoned pig. Note difference in color of liver and kidneys. Kidneys also enlarged and hard.