

### GOVERNMENT EXPERT REPORT ON POTATOES

Paul M. Williams, Assistant in Marketing, Makes Extended Report on This District

Paul M. Williams of the Bureau of Markets, U. S. Department of Agriculture, has made for general publication the following report on the western Nebraska potato situation for the period of September 16 to November 30:

The high prices paid for labor and low market prices have assisted in making this season generally unprofitable to western Nebraska potato growers. Probably the best satisfied growers are those who sold during the early part of the digging season, September 21 to October 21, when labor was more plentiful and prices were better. Many of these growers hauled direct to the cars and thus saved much expense in handling. Others accompanied their cars to market, these growers usually being well satisfied with their returns.

Probably one of the chief reasons for the low prices received was the poor grading. The great majority of growers apparently prefer to sell their potatoes field run. When their ungraded stock comes into competition with the well graded sacked stock of other sections, Nebraska growers do not receive a top price. However, there is little incentive for growers who sell in wagonload lots at the car door to grade their offerings as there is very little in the way of a price differential between ungraded and graded stock. Buyers offer little or no premium for good sound smooth stock over that paid for scabby rough stock. This practice does not encourage the potato grower to grade his stock, neither does it tend to raise the tone of the potato industry in western Nebraska.

The exceptionally rough handling the potatoes received on the farm is another potent factor for the poor condition in which Nebraska potatoes reach their destination. During the early part of the digging season many potatoes were allowed to lie in the sun for several hours before being gathered. Later in the season, potatoes which had been dug were allowed to lie on the ground over night, and frequently frost showed up in this stock. It cannot be expected that potatoes accorded such treatment will be stored by large dealers to any considerable extent, or that they will bring the top market prices.

The crop was picked in wire baskets and dumped into high backed wagons. From the wagon the potatoes were scooped into the pit. They are forked out of the pit at selling time into the wagons, forked again out of the wagon into the car and then scooped back into the ends of the car. Much of the stock is bruised or cut in this way and dry rot and other conditions set in which materially lessen their value on the markets. During the heaviest part of the movement it developed that Omaha dealers were adverse to handling potatoes from this section, probably for no other reason than they were improperly handled and poorly graded. It cannot be expected that the dealers will buy this stock to any large extent until the crop is handled with the respect due a perishable product and graded according to the specifications of the Bureau of Markets.

The soil and climatic conditions are favorable to the extensive raising of potatoes, not only for table stock but for seed stock. The stock which is raised in the dry lands section, particularly, should find ready sale in the southern markets for seed. Considerable of this stock is now sold in the south as the chart of shipments shows, but with proper seed treatment, handling and grading this should become a truly great industry in western Nebraska. It would seem that the logical market for the table stock is in eastern Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri, due largely to favorable freight rates. Nebraska's chief competitors are Minnesota and Colorado. It is interesting to note that much of the Bliss Triumph seed stock is sold in Oklahoma and Texas, a few scattering cars also going to Louisiana and Tennessee. It was particularly interesting to note that a few cars of Bliss Triumph dry land stock were sold in the Monte Vista section of Colorado, while several cars of the Early Ohio seed stock were sold in the Greeley, Colo., district. This might be considered indicative of the possibilities of the dry land section of Nebraska as an important seed potato producing section in the future. In the extreme western portion of the state in what might be termed the Morrill-Scottsbluff section, white varieties are raised principally. This section is largely irrigated, corresponding somewhat with the Greeley, Colo., section. This stock is more carefully graded and much of it is sacked and usually finds sale in such markets as Kansas City and Omaha.

**Western Nebraska Prices**  
In the Alliance-Hemingford section, the dealers were paying \$1.60-\$1.65 for Early Ohio in carlots on September 21, before which date there was very little loading. The price declined two days later to \$1.50 holding steady at that figure until September 28 to October 4, when a slightly stronger price prevailed, the growers receiving \$1.60-1.70 for wagonloads trackside. On October 5 the price had declined to \$1.50, holding steady at that figure until October 13, when the prevailing price was \$1.40-1.50. The price suffered a steady decline from that date until October 22, when the wagonload track side price was \$1 per cwt. This price held about steady until November 12, when growers were paid 80c-85c per cwt. Bliss Triumphs did not commence to move in sufficient quantity to quote until about October 8, the wagonload track-side price opening at \$1.60-1.70 per cwt. The price of Triumphs suffered a general sympathetic decline with Early Ohio

until October 22, when the price settled to \$1. This price held about steady for both varieties at Hemingford until November 9, while at Alliance the price ranged from 80c to \$1 from November 2 to 9. The price at both Alliance and Hemingford on November 11 and 12 was 80-85c per cwt. for both varieties. After this date, frosted stock commenced to show up to a considerable extent, which led to a further decline and also a wide range in prices, ranging from 40c to 70c per cwt. in wagonloads.

#### Prices in Important Terminal Markets

The first car of Nebraska ungraded Early Ohio reported sold on the Kansas City market brought \$2.25 per cwt. on September 20. On October 4 and 5 Early Ohio had declined to \$1.75-1.85 in bulk for choice stock. On October 17 a car of Nebraska bulk Early Ohio sold at \$1.90, while on October 26 graded Ohio reached \$2 per cwt. On October 30 partly graded Ohio sold at \$1.60, while on the 12th of November car of No. 1 sacked Early Ohio brought \$1.95. From the 15th of November to the end of the month, bulk Early Ohio, ungraded, ranged from \$1.20-1.35 per cwt. Ordinarily it would seem that the shipping point price fluctuates with the Kansas City market.

Omaha retailers were paying \$2.75 to \$3 per cwt. for sacked partly graded Early Ohio on September 19, this price holding steady until September 21. From September 23 to October 2 No. 1 this variety sold in jobbing lots from \$2.50-2.75. During the balance of the month of October the jobbing price remained above \$2 per cwt., but sold as high as \$2.50 per cwt. for No. 1 sacked stock. About November 4 the price declined for No. 2 stock to \$1.40 to \$1.60. No. 2's sold in less than carload lots on November 6 at \$1.65-\$1.75, while on the 25th of the month No. 1 Early Ohio jobbed at \$1.90-\$2.

Only the general price trend is indicated in the above review. As will be noted below, Nebraska potatoes were distributed in the period under consideration to 274 cities and towns. In a very large measure, the small city played a very important part in consuming the Nebraska crop. It is to be regretted that figures are not available regarding the prices at which potatoes sold in all the towns using Nebraska stock.

The following list shows the total carlot shipments of potatoes from the western Nebraska section, as reported by the division superintendents from the Burlington Alliance, the Burlington Sterling and the Cheyenne Division of the Union Pacific. This also includes shipments from the Black Hills Division of the C. & N. W. shipped after November 1:

Nebraska	679
Missouri	262
Kansas	104
Iowa	44
Colorado	27
Texas	18
Illinois	18
Oklahoma	12
Arkansas	4
Tennessee	3
Louisiana	3
Wyoming	1

Total cars	1,175
Cars shipped previous to opening of field deal	72
Cars destinations unknown	14
Cars shipped this season from Black Hills division of C. & N. W. to 11-1-18	821

Total number cars out western Nebraska to 11-30 ..... 2,082  
Total number cars shipped last season (entire season) ..... 1,993  
For the purpose of giving some more detailed information as to the quality and condition of the stock from the entire western Nebraska section, the following summary shows the classification given the potatoes by the f. o. b. inspectors. It will be well to bear in mind, however, that (1) the inspection service was not inaugurated until October 1; (2) growers shipping their own stock, i. e., potatoes of

their own raising, were not required to have their potatoes inspected.

Of the 2,082 cars which had been shipped up to November 30, 1918, 377 cars were graded U. S. grade No. 1, or 18.1 per cent; 875 cars were graded U. S. grade No. 2, or 42 per cent; 166 cars were graded "under-graded", or 8 per cent; 664 cars were unclassified, or 31.9 per cent.

**In Conclusion**  
A careful study of the Nebraska potato section will convince (1) that a more careful selection of seed and proper seed treatment will help Nebraska growers raise better potatoes, (2) that in order to reduce the waste and preserve the life of the potato in storage, Nebraska potatoes must be handled with the care due a perishable product, (3) that no one thing will tend more to put Nebraska potatoes on a par with potatoes from other sections than careful grading as outlined by the Bureau of Markets, and (4) that an improvement in the methods of marketing is needed.

A daily Market News Report on potatoes was issued from the Alliance office of the Bureau of Markets from September 16 to November 30. Similar reports on various commodities are issued the entire year by the Bureau of Markets, 437 Keelene building, Omaha, Nebraska. These reports contain accurate shipment and market information of value to the growers and shippers and can be obtained daily, without charge, upon request.

They convey information which can be of much use to the growers and shippers in marketing their potatoes. A few moments spent each day digesting the contents of the Daily Market News Report will keep them fully in touch with the different phases in the marketing situation.

PAUL M. WILLIAMS,  
Assistant in Marketing  
Fruits and Vegetables.

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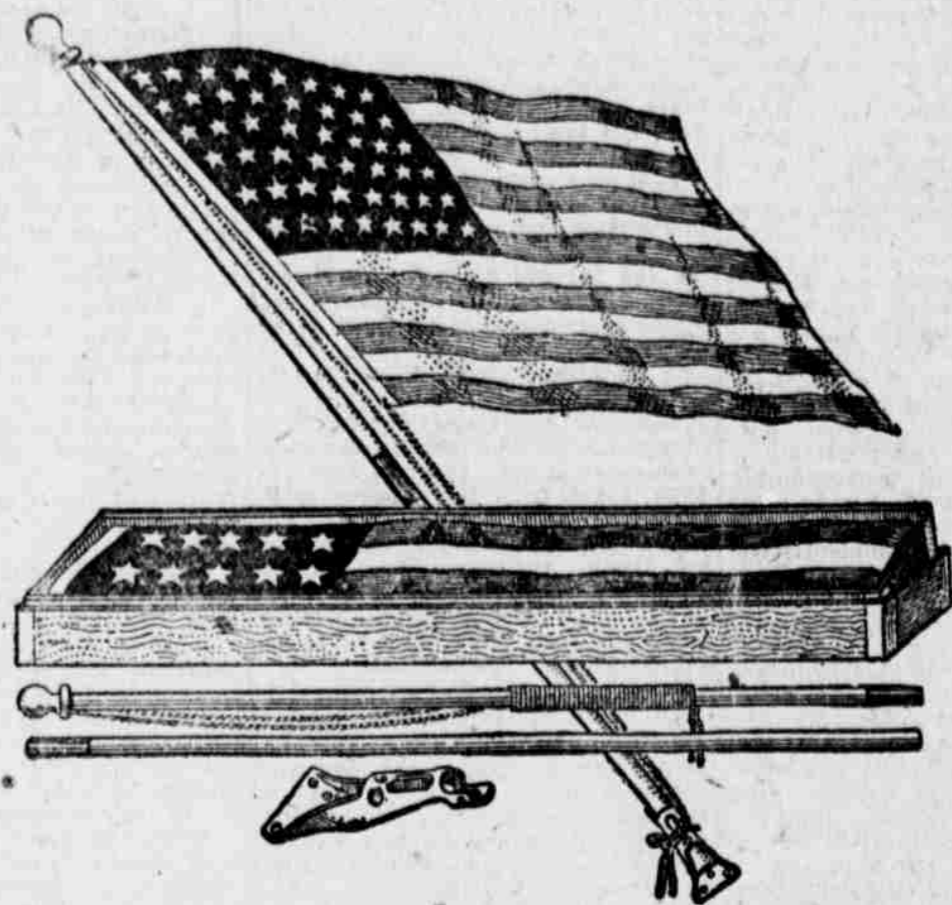
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