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Red River Valley expects nice potato crop

By

Tad Thompson

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“The weather has been perfect since the heavy rains fell in late June,” Ted Kreis said in mid-September. “I think we’ll have a nice crop.”

Kreis, who is the marketing director of the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association, added that in the Red River Valley, “the crop is coming along very well. We had some losses in late June with heavy rain. We thought we lost 10- to 15-percent of the crop at that time. We have possibly recovered some of that through plant recovery and higher yields.

“So overall, it looks like an average-sized crop,” he said.

Red River Valley growers began harvesting Sept. 4. “Without interruptions from too hot weather or too much rain, the harvest goes about eight weeks,” Kreis said. He expects the harvest to end in late October. “Sometimes it goes into early November,” he added.

Kreis said the market price for fresh red potatoes was good going into late August. “But now we need more movement as prices have come down substantially with the summer crop coming in.”

Red potato shippers in Big Lake, MN, got backed up in shipping their new 2020 crop “so the market

price has dropped substantially for them. The price for reds is as low as it's been for quite a few years."

"Hopefully, it's bottomed-out and will strengthen before the Red River Valley starts shipping aggressively in the next month or so."

Kreis expects that this fall the COVID-19 pandemic "will not affect the fresh market too much." The fresh market segment hurt most by the pandemic has been the carton market for foodservice baking potatoes. Carton reds have also lost business, but for red potatoes, "supermarket sales are our bread and butter."

Fresh yellow potato sales "are still doing well," Kreis said. Prices on yellow potatoes "have been steady for quite a few years. I don't see that changing this year." Yellow potato acreage in the Red River Valley has risen steadily for several years.

This year, red potato acreage was down five percent in the Red River Valley because a reduced crop in 2019 brought with it a reduction in red seed potato availability for 2020 planting.

Kreis explained that the harvest season in 2019 was very wet and then a hard freeze caused growers to leave about 30 percent of their crop in the field.

The Northern Plains Potato Growers Association has shifted its promotions budget toward more trade advertising this year because of the COVID-19 influence.

Kreis said the cancellation of several 2020 trade shows has allowed the group to advertise more.

The Northern Plains Potato Growers Association is in East Grand Forks, MN.

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