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O.C. Schulz & Sons relishes five decades in Red River Valley

By

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O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc. understands the importance of customer satisfaction. The company has spent the past five decades perfecting its growing, packing and shipping operation of its high-quality potatoes.

The family-owned-and-operated company, located in the Red River Valley of North Dakota, has always viewed potatoes as a large part of the farm and a large part of the family's history.



“I have been involved with growing and shipping potatoes for over 40 years,” said David Moquist, a partner in the Crystal, ND-based company. “It has changed a lot. Earlier we shipped most of our product by rail with a few trucks. That changed quickly to mostly trucks. At first the buyers arranged most of the transportation but now we end up finding a lot of the transportation.”

That means business evolved from selling FOB to mostly delivered prices.

“Rail business has increased some recently, but instead of 500 CWT cars, we are now putting 1750 CWT in cars,” Moquist said. “I would say the receivers are all larger now and therefore there are less buyers now than there were 40 years ago.”

One thing he’s learned about the family business is that potatoes are labor and management intensive and basically a year-round job.

“It starts with planting in the spring, to the care of the crop during the summer while it is growing, to harvest in the fall, then storage management with grading and shipping all winter long,” Moquist said. “Depending on the crop, we usually finish shipping just before we plant in May. We also have the maintenance of the storage and all the equipment after the shipping season.”

The company prides itself on delivering consistent quality in a timely manner, knowing that receivers in this business do not like surprises.

“We finished shipping last year’s crop in May and will start shipping again in late October,” Moquist said about the upcoming crop of potatoes. “Business is usually good in the late fall and with the holidays.”

Dissecting the upcoming crop from a mid-September view, Moquist isn’t expecting anything too great in 2021, but likens it to an average season.

“We have had a hot dry summer like most of the U.S.,” he said. “The quality looks good so far, but yields will be closer to average, which would be down from last year. Still, we will have good supplies for most of the shipping season. We will probably run out a little sooner but only time will tell. It all depends on demand and price.”

Growing in the Red River Valley helps add demand to the potatoes as they are different than those growing elsewhere in the country.

“It is all about the soil. It gives good red color with clear skin,” Moquist said. “And yellows generally have bright clear skin as well.”

With all the company experienced through the pandemic, it’s not planning any major changes for the rest of 2021, but that doesn’t mean it’s not considering new opportunities when presented.

“We are always thinking and planning about we how we can do things better, but so far have not made any definite decisions,” Moquist said. “It seems that in today’s business climate, we have to plan so much farther out to get new equipment or make major changes.”

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