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O.C. Schulz & Sons installing new electronic grading system

By

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For more than five decades, [O.C. Schulz & Sons](#) has been growing, packing and shipping potatoes in the Red River Valley, operating out of Crystal, ND.

David Moquist, a partner in the family-owned company, believes the history and uniqueness of the Red River Valley has helped the company stay so successful all this time.

“First of all, this is where I was born so there isn’t anything else that I know,” he said. “My great grandfather homesteaded here and our farm has grown from that and is family run. We now have the fourth generation working and actively managing the farm and packing facility.”

He explains the beauty of the Red River Valley comes from its soil, resulting from the area being formed by a glacial lake, Lake Agassiz.

“As it receded, it left the rich black soil that is ideal for potatoes, especially red and yellow varieties,” Moquist said. “The soil in our area is perfect for potatoes. Not too heavy and not too sandy. There is very little irrigation here so we are dependent on the Good Lord supplying our moisture, which also gives us our excellent taste and quality of our red and yellow varieties. It also means we are more sustainable. We are not dependent on other water sources and power and energy it takes to get the water and run the irrigation equipment.”

This fall, O.C. Schulz & Sons is completely redoing its grading and packing line, installing an electronic grading system that will grade and size the potatoes.

“We are also installing a second consumer pack packaging machine which allows us to meet the demand for consumer packs,” Moquist said.

As of mid-September, it was still a bit early to get a good read on the upcoming potato season, with Moquist noting that the company hasn’t started shipping this season’s crop yet.

“We are in the process of harvesting it and we will put all into storage, and then when it is ready to ship, we will start packing,” he said. “The quality and color looks excellent. We pride ourselves in supplying the quality that the customer demands.”

Having been around for more than 50 years, the company is no stranger to working through challenges, and this year, it is facing many of the same things that other companies in the produce industry are—mainly labor and cost issues.

“We are using the H2A guest worker program to bring in extra help that we can’t hire locally,” Moquist said. “As far as the other costs, we are dependent on the market to supply them.”

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."

[Keith Loria](#)

About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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