

# IDAHO GROWERS EXPECT RECORD BEET YIELD, HIGH-QUALITY SPUDS

Idaho growers anticipate digging another record-yielding sugar beet crop and potatoes with excellent quality, thanks to ideal weather during the critical points of this growing season.

Rupert grower Duane Grant, chairman of the board at Snake River Sugar Co., said a "phenomenal" beet crop has matured about 10 days ahead of normal, and the company expects a "third year in a row of steadily increasing, record yields."

Grant said beets have begun turning yellow, suggesting plants have exhausted nitrogen and are shifting from vegetative growth to sugar accumulation. Grant said early beet harvest will begin during the first week of September — earlier than many years — and new equipment at the Mini-Cassia processing plant will "help push the tons through more efficiently."

Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association Executive Director Mark Duffin said growers reported good emergence, strong stands, virtually no replants and plenty of heat throughout the growing region — a formula for an excellent crop.

"I think the beet crop could be very, very good yield wise," said Hazelton grower Randy Grant, adding now through Oct. 1 is the critical period for sugar formation.

Aberdeen grower Andy Povey has noticed beets have been using a lot of water, evidencing rapid growth. Having a thick stand also bodes well for sugar, he explained. Thick stands consume nitrogen quickly, triggering sugar accumulation, and yield a large number of small beets, which tend to have a better sugar percentage. Recent cooler nights should also boost sugar formation, Povey said.

Randy Grant, a Russet Burbank grower for the processed potato industry, said spuds benefited from plenty of warm weather without extreme temperature fluctuations during key growth periods.

"The quality is there. We don't see the rough potatoes, the growth cracks and that type of stuff," he said. "It was ideal growing weather when they started making their shape."

Only recently has he noticed spud fields beginning to "show their age," following a 10-day stretch of extreme high temperatures to end July and begin August. He said the recent heat stress shouldn't affect quality, and bulking should resume when temperatures dip back to normal.

Duane Grant has also noticed potato fields are now "looking older," but he believes the quality of the crop was protected when foliage grew to cover rows, providing shade, prior to the onset of hotter weather.

Aberdeen grower Dirk Driscoll believes the recent hot spell could affect yields.

"It may not size up as well because of the aging of the plants due to hotter weather, but for the most part, we have a good quality crop at this point," Driscoll said.

American Falls grower Jim Tiede said a lack of summer showers has nullified concerns about potential late blight pressure, thus far, and growers in his region haven't been overwhelmed by large numbers of potato psyllids, which spread zebra chip disease in spuds.

In his test digs, Idaho Falls grower Derek Reed has seen "big spuds for this time of year."

"I'm expecting a little bit better (potato) yield than last year, but not a record yield by any means," Reed said.

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