
A History of Montana Potato Farms



50th Annual Montana Potato Convention, 2015

Compiled by: Erika Kimm, 2015

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Buyan Seed, Co.

Sheridan, Montana

In 1961, Bill Sr. and Leona Buyan bought Buyan Ranch, Inc. in Sheridan, Montana. The ranch at that time was currently raising beef cattle and hay. When Bill Sr. passed away in 1977, Bill Jr. took over the ranch operations. In the year of 1985, Bill married Peggy. They, with the help of Leona, ran the daily operations of Buyan Ranch. In 1992, with the way of beef cattle prices, they decided to become more diversified and started raising seed potatoes.



The Buyan Family

The farming tradition was carried on from Leona's father, who raised cattle and potatoes in Madison county. Starting from scratch, they had to build a potato cellar, purchase equipment, and learn how to raise potatoes. It was an expense that they had hoped would help their overall operation. They started by first raising Russet Burbank potatoes. In 1993, the Flathead unfortunately had a PVY outbreak; this ended up being Buyan Ranch's step to the future. That was the start of Buyan Ranch Seed Potatoes.



Leona Buyan completes the final sorting before the seed potatoes make their way into storage.

In 1995, Buyan Ranch began to raise the Umatilla variety. Today, they raise Russet Burbank and Umatilla varieties, with around 180 to 200 acres each year. Most of their seed is sold to various growers in the Columbia Basin with some seed going to Minnesota.

They are fortunate to have their oldest son, Marcus, on the ranch. Marcus went to Havre and graduated with a degree in Diesel Mechanics. He then worked three years in Billings at Signal Peak underground coal mine, but decided that his place was on the ranch. Bill and Peggy are happy to have the extra help running the



Rouging Umatillas (L to R) Mike, Bill, Marcus, Clintin, and Peggy.



Rouging Umatillas (L to R) Mike, Bill, Marcus, Clintin, and Peggy.

daily operations of the ranch. Their second son, Mike, graduated from Rocky Mountain College with a degree in aviation. Mike is now a pilot for Ryan Air in Alaska. With two weeks on and two weeks off, Mike comes home and helps doing whatever needs to be done on the ranch. Bill and Peggy also have a grandson, Clintin, that is nine years old and takes part in all that everyone else does.

During harvest, Marcus runs the harvester, Mike runs the windrower, Bill drives truck and Peggy runs the crew, sorts, and tries to keep everything going. Leona helped sort potatoes up until six years ago!



Marcus runs the harvester.



Mike runs the windrower.

The Buyans run their operation by themselves with the help of one seasonal worker who is here from March until the end of October. They also have extra help for when they start shipping and during potato harvest. The Buyans are up-front with all of their customers; if something is not right, they let the customers know. Bill will contact their customers several times during the year to see how things are going. They feel that being in contact with customers maintains a great relationship with them. They like to ship to their customers with the best package possible, meaning the best quality and best looking potatoes.

Buyan Ranch, Inc. still raises about 400 head of beef cattle, hay, grain, and potatoes. So, the only down time they have is from the end of November until the end of January. They feel that if you work hard and try hard, that things seem to all work out.



Mike, Marcus and Bill checking on the four-row windrower.



New sorter.

Coles' Corner Farms

Manhattan, Montana

Located half way between Manhattan and Churchill, Montana, Coles' Corner Farms potato operation was established in 1975 by Garrett and Bill Cole with thirty eight acres of Russet Burbank seed potatoes. Married in 1977, Bill and Barb have owned and operated the family farm throughout the years with the help of family and friends.

In 1984, a second cellar was built on the farm in order to expand storage capacity. Russet Burbank, Russet Norkotah, Altura, and Umatilla varieties have been grown as part of their certified seed potato program.

They currently raise 120 acres of Umatillas and sell seed to Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Wisconsin. Life on the farm has been a lot of work, but also has provided many opportunities for fun memories to be made. Bobcat tricks, motorcycle and rouging cart mishaps always keep life interesting on Coles' Corner.

Bill and Barb are appreciative of being part of the Montana certified seed potato community for the past forty years.



Bill and Barb Cole.



Digging in the late 70s.



Home place painting by
Sandi Van Middendorp.



1970s



Harvesting in the 70s.



Bill Cole in the 70s.

Eugene Cole Farm

Manhattan, Montana

Bernard Cole, Gene's dad, began growing potatoes in 1947. He and his three brothers grew around fifty acres of potatoes until 1962, when Bernard went on his own. He later partnered with Aldert Klompien and they farmed together until 1976. In 1969, they grew their first crop of certified seed potatoes.

In 1976, Gene and his brother, Sherwin, joined the operation. They farmed as a partnership with their dad until 1986 when Bernard "retired". In 2001, Sherwin sold his share of the partnership to Gene. Today, at age ninety, Bernard continues to help with the operation.

Over the years they have grown Russet Burbank, Norgold, Sangre, Nooksak, Umatilla and Norkotah varieties. Gene now grows Russet Burbank and Norkotah 278 seed potatoes.

The farmstead is located five miles south of Manhattan at the intersection of Heeb and Stagecoach Trail roads.



Harvest crew, 1951.

*Bernard Cole
harvesting
potatoes, 1951.*



*Planting
potatoes with the
“Iron Age”
planter, 1951.*



Harvest, 2015.

Cottom Seed, Inc.

Dillon, Montana

Cottom potato production in Dillon, Montana dates back to the early 1930's, when Philip Cottom and his father-in-law, William Irvine, came to the area to grow seed potatoes. The families had been in the business in Leadore, Idaho as early as 1920, but preferred the richer soils around Dillon. They were very progressive for the time and within a few years were shipping seed potatoes throughout the United States and as far as South America, New Zealand, and Hawaii. At this time, the operation was known as "Irvine and Cottom".



Bill & Dixie Cottom Family, 2015

Potato production in the 1930's was a labor-intensive business. What machinery they had was small and a lot of the work was done by hand. Harvest consisted of a two-row digger

bringing the potatoes to the surface and large crews of up to 100 men picked the potatoes into baskets, transferred them to large bags and hand loaded them on to trucks. Storage was constructed by a railroad on the South end of Dillon in 1937 with a capacity of 125 cars. In 1946, a large wool house next door came up for sale, and Irvine and Cottom bought it and converted it into additional potato storage. In 1940, they purchased 1200 acres of farm land in Texline, Texas and started growing seed potatoes there for shipping to the South Eastern States. The Texline farm was later sold.



Philip Cottom & William Irvine in Texline, TX, March 1944.

As time progressed, operations became more mechanized, and in 1952 the first potato harvester that would load potatoes directly into a truck came on the scene in Dillon. In the 1970's, most of the irrigation evolved from flood to sprinkler and in the 1980's, pivots gained popularity. In the 1990's, modern storages were built; and in recent years, the equipment started using GPS for guidance.



*Harvest in the
early 1950s.*

In 1959, Philip's son, Bill, graduated from Montana State University with a degree in Horticulture and joined the operation. In 1969, Philip Cottom and his partners sold the potato operation to Skone and Connors from Warden, Washington. Bill Cottom stayed on the farm and managed the operation for Skone and Connors until 2004. At this time, the Cottoms bought Skone and Connors operations in Dillon and merged it with the Cottom holdings and renamed the potato operation Cottom Seed, Inc.

In the early 1980's, Bill's sons Steve and David joined the operation and took over when Bill retired. The sandier soils on the East Bench were producing better quality potatoes than the valley ground, so the Cottoms began purchasing more land on the bench. This expansion continued through the 1980's and 1990's and until 2004 when they bought out Skone and Connors

Currently, the principle operators of day-to-day activities are Steve, his wife Cathy, and David. David's son, Shane, is involved on a seasonal basis and there are a number of key employees who are valued for their respective areas of expertise.

*Philip
Cottom
on
Celtrac,
1954.*



*Cutting seed
potatoes in
Dillon in the
1950s.*



Dan Kimm Certified Seed Potatoes

Manhattan, Montana

In the year 1971, I was a high school graduate with no desire to go to college (I should have thought about that a little more!). All I ever wanted to do was farm. My dad, Alan Kimm, was a hay and grain farmer and was getting out of the hog business at the time. I had helped my Uncle Wilbur (Bill and Scott's dad) off and on in the potatoes through my teenage years. The year I graduated, he offered to let me grow twenty acres of spuds on my dad's farm. I rented ground from my dad, and Uncle Wilbur supplied the seed and equipment. My job was to fertilize and water the potatoes. That year, we raised a great crop and split the profit. I made enough money to buy my first wheel line. That was the beginning of my career for the next forty-plus years.



Harvest, 2009.

On December 7, 1973, I married my dear wife Jan. We raised two great children, Jeff and Jami. We jumped into the potato business head first with a lot of great times and our share of trials. We survived the high interest rates of the late seventies (barely) and low potato prices.

Through a lot of prayer and hard work we turned the farm into the successful potato and grain operation it is today.

In 1980, Ken and Lavonne Veltkamp started working in the potato business with us on a crop-share program which lasted for over twenty-five years. We had a great working relationship and friendship which has carried on through the years.

On November 24, 2009, our world was turned upside down. Jan was diagnosed with stage four bone cancer. She passed away April 20, 2012. Thankfully, my son-in-law, Jack Meyer, who had been working with us for several years, and my brother-in-law, Karl De Jonge, were there to help me through this difficult time.

A year later, I met another wonderful lady, Kathy, who had lost her husband to cancer as well. We married in the spring of 2013.

The Lord had other plans for me and it meant starting over. I retired, moved off the farm for the first time in sixty years, built a new home near Bozeman, and turned the farm over to my daughter and son-in-law, Jack and Jami Meyer. My prayer is that Jack and Jami continue to take this farm to a new level of success as fourth generation farmers.

Today, Kathy and I enjoy our new life together. Between thirteen grandchildren, a home in Bozeman and Arizona, and traveling, we keep plenty business. I do still help on the farm for planting and harvest- I haven't lost my love for the farm!

Droge Farms, Inc.

Manhattan, Montana

The Droge family first became involved in the potato industry in 1940 when Jake Droge started a plot of commercial potatoes as a senior in high school. Jake partnered with his brother-in-law, Arie Dyk, growing and packing Russet Burbank potatoes. The potatoes were packed in 100 pound burlap bags at a packing shed in Amsterdam, Montana, and then loaded onto railroad cars.

In 1947, Jake started a dairy operation on Stagecoach Trail Road, Manhattan, Montana. After several years of growing potatoes and operating the dairy, Jake decided to discontinue the potato operation and focus solely on his dairy farm, grain crops, and raising his family.

As time went on, Jake's son, Glenn Droge, completed Dordt College in 1974 and returned to the family farm. Jake's son, Vernon Droge, also graduated from Dordt College in 1980 and also returned to the then expanding registered dairy herd operation.

In order to support three families, the decision was made in 1985 to re-enter the potato industry- this time as certified seed potato growers. Jake, Glenn, and Vernon began as Droge & Sons raising sixty-five acres of Generation II and III Russet Burbank seed. The partnership



Glenn, Vernon, and Tim Droge.



Jake Droge at the controls, 1950's.



Harvest, 2014.

continued with both the dairy and potatoes for ten years and in 1995 the dairy herd was sold.



2015, Droege Farms, Inc. (L to R): Todd Chamberlain, Donny Braaksma, Glenn Droege, Vernon Droege, Tim Droege.

Ironically, the year Droege & Sons began growing seed potatoes, 1985, is also the year the Gallatin Valley experienced its earliest recorded severe cold spell. Much of the valley's seed potatoes were lost to frost. Fortunately, due to the higher elevation of the Droege fields compared to other fields in the area, the potatoes were protected by a blanket of snow on several mornings when the temperature dropped below zero.

In 2002, the business was incorporated and began operating under the name of Droege Farms, Inc. Also during this year, a devastating fire destroyed a large building on the farm

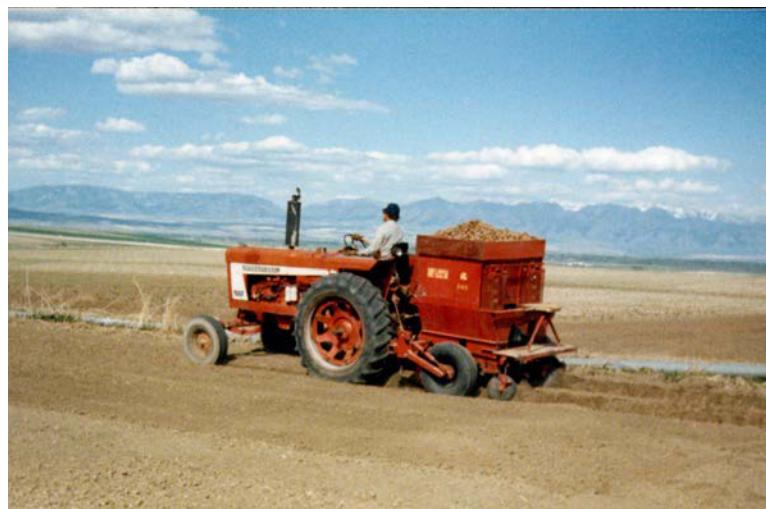
which contained the shop, machine shed, farm equipment, and seed storage. A rebuilding process began, which included the creation of a new packing shed, Big Sky Growers, LLC., located on Highline Road, Manhattan, Montana, in partnership with Dan Kimm and Weidenaar Ranches, Inc.



1986, Droege and Sons.
(L to R): Valerie and
Vernon Droege, John
Leaverton, Glenn and
Lynne Droege, Mike
Molyneaux.

The Russet Burbank variety has been the predominate variety grown at Droege Farms, Inc. and still makes up approximately one-half of our potato acreage in 2015. Droege Farms, Inc. was one of the first Montana growers to bring the Alturas variety of seed into the market and is still the main supplier of low generation Alturas seed to the Idaho seed market. In more recent years, Droege Farms, Inc. has helped introduce the Classic Russet and the Teton Russet to the seed industry.

As the next generation joins the potato industry (Glenn's sons: Terrence Droege at London Hills Farm; Timothy Droege at Droege Farms, Inc.; and Jeffery Droege at Dry Hills Distillery), Droege Farms, Inc. promotes the family farm as the backbone of agriculture. Droege Farms, Inc. believes that all we have belongs to God and we are here to tend and care for His creation in the best way possible.



Planting, 1985.

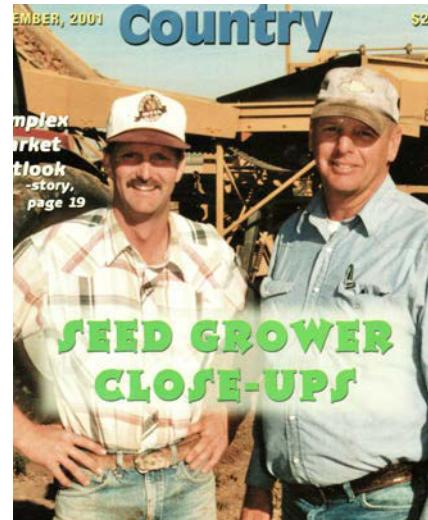
Dyk Seed Potatoes, LLC

Manhattan, Montana

Arie Dyk began raising potatoes when he was seventeen years old. He was the youngest of five boys and a sister. His father died when he was six months old and his mother raised the family on her own with help from other people living in the Churchill community. The five boys learned their love of farming by working for other farmers in the area.

Arie raised twenty acres of commercial Russet Burbank potatoes in his first year, 1941. He purchased drop seed from the Cottoms in Dillon and Guy George in Whitehall for the first few years. Over the next few years, he increased up to forty acres, raising Russet Burbank and Red potatoes from certified drop seed purchased from John Weidenaar, Cottom, and William Dyk. Arie rented land from area farmers, including Hank Kamps, Henry Kimm, Jake Dykema, George Klompien, Walter Sales, Harry Droege and Lloyd Flikkema. The crop was planted with a two-row John Deere planter and cultivated and hilled with an Alice Chalmers side-view tractor.

The potatoes were row irrigated using sod and canvas dams to divert the water out of headland ditches. Later, stainless siphon tubes were used to row irrigate. Al Newby, Paul Newby's father, sprayed the fields with a biplane for insects and diseases during the growing season.



Dan and Doug Dyk.



New two-row John Deere Pick planter, 1943



Loading crew; 4 men loaded- one on each side putting sacks up and two stacking sacks, 1944.



*Break time, 1944; '41
Chevy and '44
International trucks
loaded with sacks by cellar
on south end of Churchill.*

The potato vines were beaten with a two-row beater before harvest. A two-row John Deere digger placed potatoes in one row on top of the ground. Arie hired local men to hand-pick the potatoes into sixty pound sacks hanging from a waist harness they wore. Arie, his brothers, and other men would load the sacks onto flatbed trucks to haul to the storage by Churchill. The sacks were dumped onto a little conveyor that piled the potatoes into bins in the storage. The storage was dug down into the soil with a flat room made with 8"x8" beams, corral poles across the beams, covered with plastic, small straw bales, and dirt to form the roof. They would harvest five to eight acres a day.

The stored potatoes were graded out of the storage into US#1 and US #2 classifications over small grading equipment and packed into 100 pound sacks. The four to twelve ounce potatoes were sold to various produce companies in Bozeman, Butte, and Billings for \$2.40-2.60/cwt for US #1 and \$1.60-\$1.70/cwt for US #2. The small tubers were usually sold to cattle ranchers for feed.

As the years passed, Arie's brothers joined in the business along with farming grain operations. The acres increased to a high of 170 acres in 1950. They dug with two, two-row diggers and were packed into sixty pound sacks by twenty to thirty immigrant workers being paid \$0.07/sack. Each would pick about 400 sacks per day and earn \$28/day. They rented an old school house to keep the immigrants housed. They could harvest ten to fifteen acres a day.

In 1950, Arie and his brothers built a storage pack shed next to the Northern Pacific Railroad in Amsterdam. They washed and packed the potatoes into "Dutch Mill" brand 100 pound sacks loaded into boxcars, seven stacks high, mostly destined for the Chicago market. They traded potatoes for the grading and packing equipment that a buyer was replacing with new equipment. The US #1 potatoes were sold for \$3.75-\$4.00/cwt and US #2 for \$2.50-\$2.75/cwt.



Planting with the four-row planter, 2003.



Doug managing cellars during harvest.

By the early 1960's, Arie's brothers had all bought dry land or irrigated grain farms in the area, and one moved to California buying a walnut and almond farm near where his wife grew up. Arie continued to raise potatoes and switched to raising Certified Seed Potatoes like the other Gallatin Valley growers in 1965. He built a new free-span roof with wooden beams, steel sheeting, and urethane insulation and he added a cement floor with air trenches to the Churchill storage in 1965. He raised sixty to seventy acres of Russet Burbank seed potatoes on the seed he purchased from Wilbur Kimm. Arie and brother Leonard also farmed 1500 acres of dry land grain on the bench west of Amsterdam.

Arie's son, Dan, began working with him on the grain and potato farm as he grew up. After high school graduation in 1980, Dan started taking over parts of the potato business on a share basis with his dad. In 1983, they added Doug Dyk into the potato business after he returned back to his dad's dairy farm. Doug had been a partner in a diesel mechanic shop in Billings before returning to the farm and was a Certified Diesel Technician. Doug raised twenty-five acres in 1983 on a half share for using the equipment and storage. Doug's share kept increasing as time went on while purchasing equipment for the operation.

After Dan graduated from MSU with a Crop Science degree in 1985, Dan and Doug completely took over the potato business while Arie kept doing the grain farming with Dan's help. Doug built a 40,000 cwt storage in 1985. The storage was one of the first in the area with a modern computer-controlled air system. In 1985, they had severe frost damage



Hand-bagging nuclear seed plants.

to the potato fields, but were able to store and sell the seed potatoes from the storage. The next year, many of the neighbors also added computer-controlled air systems to their storages. Doug added two more bays in 1990 to his storage and Dan rented Rich Wiersema's storage. The Churchill storage was converted into a shop and equipment storage, because it was located too close to the highway through Churchill. They washed and packed oversized potatoes through the Wiersema packing shed on a share basis with Rich Wiersema.

In the mid 90's, Doug and Dan formed Dyk Seed Potatoes, LLC. as 50/50 partners. They raised around 180 acres of Russet Burbank seed potatoes. In the early 2000's, they started raising more potato varieties and early generation potatoes.

In 2005, two more 40,000 cwt storages were built at the storage complex north of Churchill. They quit renting Rich Wiersema's storage and packing shed.

Dyk Seed Potatoes, LLC. now raised around 240 to 250 acres of seed potatoes consisting of five varieties including Russet Burbank, Shepody, Amish/Ranger, Blazer and Umatilla. The oversize potatoes are washed and packed by Big Sky Growers, LLC. on a cost basis.

An interesting note about Doug's family history probably influenced his decision to become a potato farmer. William Dyk, who Arie purchased drop seed potatoes from for planting his crops in the mid-1940's, was Doug's grandfather.



Dan harvesting, 2006.

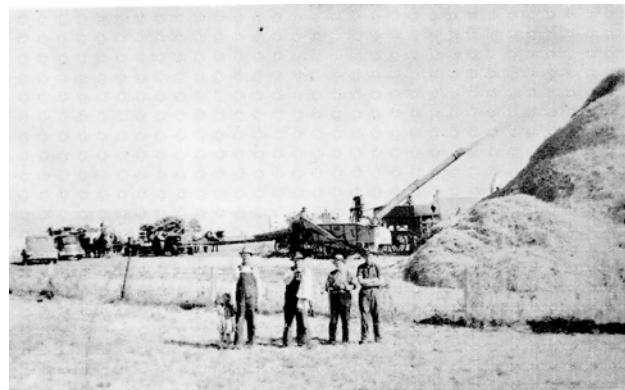
Dykema Farms

Manhattan, Montana

The Dykema family farm, like many other farms in the Manhattan area, has operated under a handful of names for the past five generations. The farm started with great-grandpa Derk and great-grandpa Klaas who purchased the farm along the south end of Woodenshoe Road in 1928.



The Dutch Dykemas sponsored by Jake Dykema



Ethel Kimm, Nick Kimm, Klaas Dykema, Dirk Dykema and Bert H Van Dyken.

Next in line was Grandpa Jake in 1943. Jake raised potatoes branded with the name, Dykema Brothers Wild West Potatoes. Jake was also a well-known cattle trader.

Jake was followed by Ranger in 1973. Ranger still farms the family farm raising hay and grain using the name TRI View Ranch. Ranger and his brother, Dale, also raise black angus beef cattle under the name Dykema Livestock.



*John Hofman and
Stanley Kimm*

In 2012, three of Ranger's four sons: Kurt, T.J., and David, bought the seed potato operation from Ron Dyk, Whataview Farm. The fifth generation of the Dykema family is operating using the name, TRB Dykema, LLC.

The Dykema family currently raises certified seed potatoes, alfalfa hay, grains, and black angus beef.



Harvest, 2015



Harvest, 2015

Hansen Seed Potatoes

Dillon, Montana

Chad started farming at an early age. He has been heard telling his wife and children, "I was driving a tractor by the time I was three years old." While that may be a bit of an exaggeration, he was raised on a farm in Montevieu, Idaho. Farming was pretty much all Chad knew until he married and tried his hand at a few other career opportunities.

By 1993, Chad had settled back into farming. He and his brother, Kirt, ran their dad's farm in Montevieu. His father had been growing potatoes his whole life. His banker once told him he had to stop raising spuds. He got a different banker. Chad and Kirt ran their father's two thousand acre farm for seven years. They raised hay, grain, and, of course, spuds.

Then, in 2000, their father decided to sell the farm. With the realization that they now had to move their operation, they started to look toward the Dillon, Montana area. They had been buying their seed from Cottoms for several years and knew that MSU had an excellent seed program. This would also be an opportunity to grow their crop away from all the commercial growers in close proximity to them.



In the spring of 2000, Chad and Kirt rented some ground and planted their crop. During the summer they bought nine acres and had four potato cellars built on it. They lived in a camper while they tended their crop. That fall, Chad moved his family to Dillon- just in time for harvest. It turned out to be the "Harvest from Hell". Six weeks of rain, cold, mud, frost, break downs, frozen potatoes and two families crammed in to a run-down, single-wide trailer. To top it off, the next spring, after finding out that they had chemical damage, they had to dump their entire crop. By now, they were starting to wonder if they had made a big mistake moving their operation to Dillon. Chad told his banker that if he ever wanted to be paid back, he had better go with him for another year.



Since then, things have gone a little better. The first few years, they rented ground wherever they could and only grew spuds. In 2006, Chad bought 150 acres of his own ground. Over the next few years, Chad bought more and more acreage in Dillon, while Kirt was buying ground in Montview. They were partners in both operations until they bought each other out in 2011. Then in 2013, Chad had the opportunity to purchase Art Mangel's farm when he retired.

That same year in 2013, Chad's sons, Chuck and Cody, decided they would like to try their hand at farming. This spring, Chuck and his family moved on to a bigger adventure while Cody and his family have decided they quite like being farmers. Time will tell. They now have about 1600 acres, with 600 of those acres devoted to potatoes. They still rent a little ground as well.



"All in all it's been a good move", says Heather (Chad's wife). "Since we've been here, we've seen our kids graduate, serve missions, get married, and supply us with the next generation of spud growers. Twelve grandkids so far, and we've decided, it's the best crop of all!"



Holbrook Seed Potatoes

Twin Bridges, Montana

Guy George, Sr. immigrated from Lucca, Italy in 1903 when he was nine years old. His family settled in Meaderville, and he went on to work in the copper mines and then as the superintendent of mail carriers in Butte. In 1920, he married Lucille Rinaldi of Laurin, MT and a year later, the couple began farming in Waterloo (south of Whitehall), operating as Riverside Farms and Ranches. Along with their four children, Gloria (Broksle), Guy Jr., Leona (Buyan), and Olive (Smith), the couple raised dairy cows, grains, hay, potatoes, and over 1000 turkeys.

The family grew their first potato crop in 1937, with thirty-one acres grossing \$8,000, which was used to buy a new Ford car. The family operation grew to 28,000 acres with 800 acres under irrigation. They typically produced 40,000-50,000 cwt of commercial potatoes, and in later years, produced seed potatoes.

During potato harvest, it was common to see Guy's daughters hauling 100 pound burlap bags, one in each hand, right alongside the men in the field. Guy and Lucille continued farming until 1966, when they sold the farm and retired to Sheridan, MT.



Their oldest child, Gloria, married John Broksle in 1949 and they, along with John's brother, Rudy, owned and operated ranches south of Twin Bridges, including Broksle Ranch's current location. The Broksle's raised Hereford beef cattle, dairy cattle, turkeys, and potatoes. Gloria was well known in the area for her beautiful flower gardens, good cooking, and the variety of birds she kept including emus. They began growing seed potatoes in the mid-1950s, growing mostly Russet Burbanks. John and Gloria had three children: Sherrie (High), John Jr., and Tom.

All three children worked on the home place at one time or another. John and Gloria's children remember attaching clips to 100 pound bags of certified seed potatoes and hauling the sacks to town to be loaded on railroad cars by hand. John (Spud) and



Scott and Laci Holbrook with their son, Rhett (6 months) during planting, 2015.

Guy George, Sr., is shown above with his son, Guy George, Jr., displaying extra fine potatoes, part of a "good crop." See story above.

his wife, Lori, left the ranch in the 1980s to start their own farm on the East Bench south of Twin Bridges, growing seed potatoes for several years.

Tom (Tater) managed the family farm for several years. When he decided to leave the ranch in 1988, Sherrie and her husband, Dan, moved back to help Gloria run the ranch. Dan and Sherrie continued growing Burbanks for nearly thirty years, while also growing other Russet varieties such as Norkotah, Ranger, Shepody, and Frontier. Dan and Sherrie also grow grains and hay, as well as having converted a primarily Hereford herd to a black angus cow-calf operation. Dan and Sherrie have two children, Colt and Laci (Holbrook).

After completing graduate school in 2011, Laci wanted to get back to Twin Bridges and agriculture. She began working with a local grower, Dennis Day, growing early generation seed potatoes. They operated as partners for four years, until Laci and her husband Scott were ready to take over the business and Dennis was ready to retire in 2015. At the same time, Dan and Sherrie decided to no longer grow potatoes and focus on their cattle operation as well as to provide Laci and Scott the infrastructure to grow potatoes. Scott and Laci continue to grow spuds



George Family. (L to R) Back: Olive (Smith), Leona (Buyan), Guy Jr. Front: Guy Sr. and Lucille.



Dan and Sherrie High

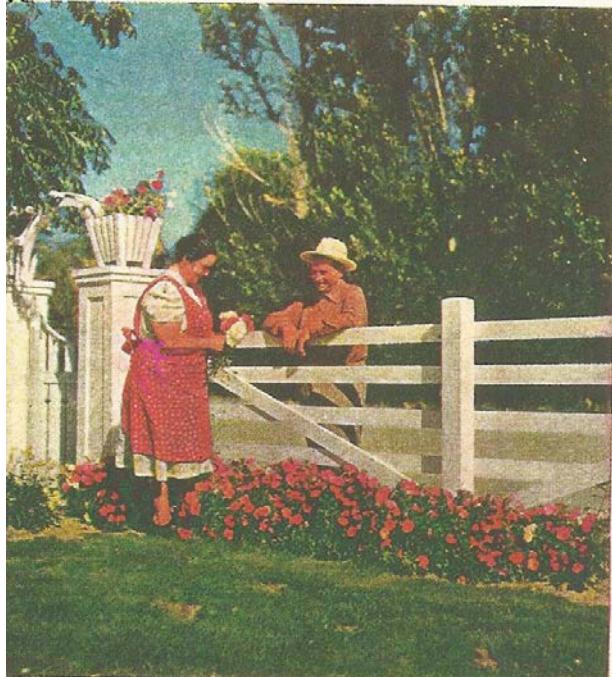


John & Rudy Broksle built this cellar in 1958. The roof is laid with twigs, straw bales, dirt and then tin. The concrete floor was added in the 1970s. The structure is still in limited use today. Sherrie Broksle is in the foreground riding her stick horse.

on the family ranch as Holbrook Seed Potatoes. Colt, an engineer, is set to move back to the family ranch in 2016.



Tom (Tater) and Debbie Broksle sorting spuds going into the cellar in the mid-1980s. Photo was in the local newspaper, the Madisonian.



Guy and Lucille George pose for an article published in Farm Journal at their home in Waterloo (1960s).



The Broksle family. (L to R) Tom, John Sr., Sherrie, and Gloria in 1965.

Kamps Seed Farm, LLC

Manhattan, Montana

Sid Kamps' grandfather, John Kamps, bought our home place in 1934 and sold it to his dad, Henry Kamps, in 1945. He farmed it until 1971 when Sid and Betty bought it. We are looking forward to having the fifth generation being involved in the near future.

After being in a partnership with Weidenaar Ranches for six years, we had the opportunity to buy out Aldert Klompien, who was retiring, in 1988.

We started by renting storages for three years and growing sixty acres of Russet Burbanks. After the third year, we took Tim as a partner and built a new storage on our farm at 3270 Lee Road, Manhattan. The first crop in the new building was in 1991. We started out with all used, two-row machinery and two-ton trucks. As the years went by, we expanded our markets and also acres to meet demand. We started growing Ranger Russets and Dark Red Norlands. In 1995, we started growing early generation seed. We used plantlets from the University and transplanted them by hand and harvested them by hand. After a few years, we bought a mechanical transplanter which saved a lot of time. The last several years, we have gone to mini tubers instead of plantlets. We built our own one-row digger for harvesting the nucleas. The same year, we added a fresh-pack shed to the side of the storage. We established a good market for the fresh pack red potatoes and that continues to this day. We also added another partner, Tim's bride, Kari Vanover Kamps. In 2001, we added another storage and shop. We have gone to all six-row equipment and use all diesel trucks and four



Sid and Tim Kamps



Harvest, 2004.

semis. We grow approximately 240 acres now, leasing land in Springhill, since we don't have enough land of our own. We haul the potatoes twenty miles from field to cellar.

We look forward to Tim and Kari's family joining us in the business. Scott plans to finish college this coming spring and hopefully will start growing potatoes with us. Megan, Brad, and Tyler are still in high school, but are already a big help. There are a lot of new things in the industry and we look forward to the future.

We praise and thank God for His countless blessings through good years and bad years. Psalm 100:5 says, "For the Lord is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations."



Harvest, 2004



Harvest, 2014



Harvest, 2014

Kimm Brothers Farming

Manhattan, Montana

Stanley Kimm immigrated from the Netherlands to Manhattan, Montana in September of 1950. He was sponsored by the Henry Kimm family and employed by Jake Dykema, a second cousin and a potato grower in the Churchill area. He lived on their farm and came to know the family well, learning the basics of potato farming in America.



Washing shed, 1967; Stanley & Martin Kimm

Stanley went to work at the Yellowstone Pine Sawmill in Belgrade in 1954 and two years later, grew his first potato crop. He built his own cellar during the summer of 1956, while still employed at the sawmill.

In 1958, Stanley harvested his crop of 52 acres, finishing well before the frost hit. His Manhattan neighbor and fellow immigrant, John Heidema, had died that summer, leaving his widow Anne with 28 acres of potatoes un-harvested. Stanley pulled in with his one-row digger behind a John Deere A and harvested her crop, finishing well into November. 80 acres, one row at a time! In December of that year, he married Corrie Oudman, a Dutch immigrant from Alberta, Canada.

Stanley and Corrie continued to raise potatoes, switching over from commercial potatoes to certified seed in 1967. They lived on the farm in Manhattan, where his father ran a dairy. After his father died in 1972, Stanley took on the responsibilities of the diary, along with his potato acres. Seed time and harvest were hectic. He would start the day with the morning



Spring planting, 1990; Stanley & Corrie Kimm.

milking, dig potatoes until evening, and milk again, falling into bed and then starting the whole routine again the next day.

Stanley's children grew up with potatoes. In 1976, Stanley broke his leg during shipping season. He couldn't get his crop in that spring, but Martin, 14, and Jake, 11, begged their dad to let them plant the crop. They put in eleven acres on their own, weeding, rouging, and irrigating, until finally at harvest time, Stanley was able to help again.

Martin joined his dad full-time in the spring of 1980, after graduating from high school. Jake joined in 1983, and they formed a partnership in farming that spanned three decades, expanding the operation in 1998 to include new farm land in Toston, Montana. In 2013, Martin's son, Taylor, came back to the farm and Jake bowed out of the potato end of farming, taking over the farm in Toston and concentrating on hay and grain.



Fall Harvest, 1982; Stanley Kimm on the tractor.



Fall harvest, 2000; Stanley, Martin, Taylor & Jake.



Fall harvest, 1964; Stanley Kimm on tractor.



Fall harvest, 2015; Tayor Kimm in tractor.

Kimm's Organic Potatoes

Manhattan, Montana

Kimm's Organic Potatoes began in the summer of 2005 as a test plot to analyze the effect of dairy manure compost on potatoes. Jason and Yvonne Kimm had a small plot of land, only a quarter of an acre, next to their home to plant a few different varieties of potatoes and apply the compost.

Although that first year harvest produced nearly as many weeds as potatoes, it pointed the way to a new adventure. Opportunities for sales in the local grocery store and restaurant markets opened naturally in the Bozeman area. Stocks of potatoes made it until just after Christmas the first year and production was increased the following year.

The business evolved creating an opportunity not only for local commercial market sales, but also for a plot where biological and organic amendments and techniques are tested. Much of what is learned in this small plot is able to be carried into conventional production at Kimm Seed Potatoes.



Jason and Yvonne Kimm during harvest, 2015.



Jason and Yvonne Kimm with their children Benjamin, Willem, Sarina, Joshua and Eliza.

Certification

for 'Organic' and 'Seed' were pursued leading to the ability to begin filling local garden seed demand for Certified Organic Seed. Organic Certification was completed in 2006 and Seed Potato certification was completed in 2012. Seed sales have grown to account for nearly 25% of total sales. This continues to be a primary driver for the business as it provides a layer of protection for the local seed potato industry by filling local Organic garden seed demands with an in State source of seed. In addition to serving many of these local

markets, Kimm's Organic Potatoes provides an opportunity to involve our children intimately in potato production; allows us to employ many young people in the area for help with weed control, harvest and market preparation; develop relationships with many customer oriented business in the Valley; and to learn more each year about soil and plant health and stewardship of God's creation.



*Yvonne Kimm with son
Willem pulling weeds,
2015.*



*Planting organics,
spring, 2015.*



*Harvest, 2015. (L to R):
Mary Braaksma, Sarina
Kimm, Yvonne
Kimm. Harvest, 2014*



Kimm's Organics.



Jason & Yvonne Kimm and family planting organics, 2014.

Kimm Seed Potatoes

Manhattan, Montana

The mid and late 1800's saw a wave of immigrants from Holland finding their way to the U.S. including the Gallatin Valley of Montana for increased religious freedom, opportunities for farm land expansion, escape of increasing European population, shrinking job environment in the wake of industrialization, agricultural pressures such as the potato blight epidemic of the mid 1800's, as well as educational freedom for their children. Among this group was the thirty-three-year-old Jacob R. Kimm and his family, arriving in the Manhattan area in 1893.

Jacob purchased his first land in the Gallatin Valley in 1894 from the West Gallatin Irrigation Company and continued expansion of his farm over the next thirty years. He was involved in crop and cattle production, an active member of the Christian Reformed Church, and an early

member of the Association for Christian School. In a 1926 letter home (to Holland), near the end of his career, he commented that: [his sons and sons-in-law are all successful farmers and their farms are all mixed- they grow grain, peas, and hay and they breed sheep. They have "auto truc," tractors, threshers: "it goes well, everything is well arranged...I can't do any more work, just drive around a little. That is why cars are so convenient."



(L to R): Scott Kimm, Alan Venema, Bill Kimm, Mark Kimm, and Jason Kimm.



Planting potatoes in the late '60s.

Wilbur planting potatoes in the late '60s.

The Kimm Seed Potatoes history continued through Jacob's son, Henry, who purchased the current home farmstead from the bank in 1927. Henry continued the mixed crops and livestock and saw the farm passed down to his sons and sons-in-law as well: son Harold

having a dairy and crops, Alan having pigs and crops, and Wilbur looking after cattle and crops on the original homestead.



Picking up potatoes in the late '50s.

Picking up potatoes in the late 50s. Potato combine built by Wilbur in the early 1950s.

It was 1946 when Henry Kimm planted his first crop of commercial potatoes. In 1948, after serving in WWII, Wilbur had a growing desire to give potato production a try as his father had done. Undersized potatoes were the problem of the day. The solution involved feeding them, mixed with straw and skim milk, to the cattle.

Wilbur and his wife Irene, raised their first seed crop in 1958. At the time, the seed was purchased from a Twin Bridges area farmer, Guy George, from whom many habits of fussy potato production were learned. Soon after, in 1960, Wilbur began his high generation seed plot work. His farming habits were punctuated by attention to detail, especially the cleanliness of equipment, storages and disinfection practices. Wilbur also was something of an engineer/builder/blacksmith, building his own potato harvester in the early 1950's. The one row harvester, which followed a two row digger, dug potatoes for Wilbur until 1969 when a two row Lockwood harvester was purchased. He was also one of the first to build and use a roguing cart. Melvin Love, of Three Forks, later asked Wilbur if he could copy the blue print and begin commercial production of the carts.

Wilbur and his oldest son Bill's attention to detail and work ethic become a natural foundation for high generation seed plot work. The Kimm Seed Potatoes history of selecting for uniform tuber type, set numbers, and plant vigor, came from their early work and communication with customers. In 1967, Dr. Shepherd came to MSU and started the first virus-free potato production. Two and a half acres were planted on the farm and nearly 20% of the lot was infected with Potato Leaf Roll Virus in the first year. It was in the late 1970's



Bill and Marian Kimm planting seed plot.

when the original ‘mother plant’ that would evolve into the K-Line Russet Burbank, was found on our farm. This plant had forty-seven evenly sized tubers weighing nearly twelve pounds. The progeny from this plant are still produced today. Wilbur was also involved in the Montana State Seed program as one of its directors.

Many things have changed since the early years of high generation seed work. However, the foundation laid by Wilbur still remains untouched and many of his adages including, “Pay attention to detail”, “Take care

of the soil and the soil will take care of you”, and “Honesty to all”, still form the core values of what Kimm Seed Potatoes is about today.

Bill and Scott Kimm, two of Wilbur’s sons, have carried on those values. In the years of Wilbur’s slowing down due to arthritis, and his death in 1995, his sons Bill and wife Marian, and Scott and wife Denise, have continued progress in their farming. They saw to increase in machinery, storage and irrigation assets, increased land ownership and rent/lease relationships. Significantly, they also were able to maintain and build on Wilbur’s reputation for excellence in seed quality and cleanliness, as well as honesty and stewardship of land and customer relations.

Today, Kimm Seed Potatoes include a new generation of owners: Jason (Yvonne) and Mark (Erika), Bill’s sons, and Alan (Jodi) Venema, his son-in-law. Enduring in them are the same core values that stretch back to the inception of the farm. Again, there is also continued development of new technologies in soil care and fertilization, irrigation, storage and equipment. The high generation work continues to be a hallmark of Kimm Seed Potatoes and one of our passions. We hope to continue to serve our God, our families, and the potato industry with these commitments well into the future.



Jason and Mark Kimm.



Harvest in the early 1950s.



Harvest 2015.

There have been so many changes since Jacob Kimm first came more than 120 years ago. The idea that it was a luxury for each family to have its own car, and the fact that 'auto trucs', threshing machines and steel wheeled tractors were the new paint of the day, seems more ancient than just three or four generations. Today's GPS driven tractors, ELIZA and PCR testing methods, gravity flowing irrigation water in PVC pipelines, pivot irrigation, increasing organization of the industry through the University system, could not have been imagined. Still, Jacob's commitment to his God, our God, is the legacy that enables all the rest of our commitments to continue. This commitment to a faith was celebrated in a Centennial Hymn written by and for the early Dutch immigrants:

O Lord, beneath Thy guiding hand our fathers' fathers formed our creed, Brought prayer and psalm to this fair land And were supplied in every need.

Belief in Thy sustaining power Restored their hearts in days of fear; Thy grace and glory, hour by hour, Gave hope and blessing through each year.

In every part of life the light of Knowledge shines, at home, abroad, May covenant children, taught the right, Tell others of their sovereign God.

Thy Name, O Lord, still leads still Draws; That Name we sing with ardent voice, That thousands more many know Thy laws and in Thy saving cross rejoice.

To God be the glory!



Planting, 2014.



Seed plot harvest 2014.



Lake Farms

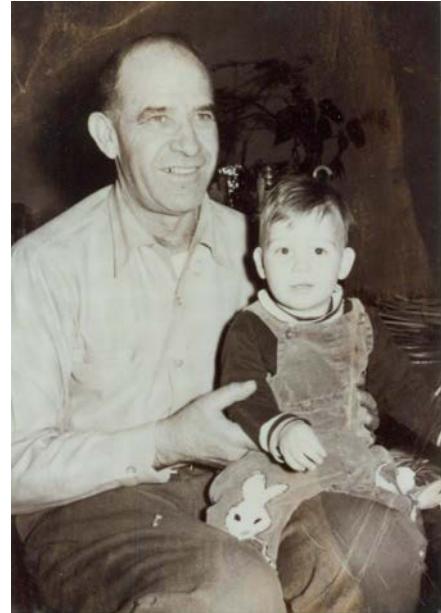
Mission Valley, Montana

Ace and Agnes Lake moved to the Mission Valley from Idaho in 1934. So begins the potato story for Lakes in Montana.

After raising a variety of crops, they added raising potatoes in the 1940s after being asked by the government to support the war effort. Coming out of Idaho, folks thought that Ace would have had some potato experience.

Ace started by growing a smaller commercial acreage of five to seven acres. There were a couple of reasons for this: there was no machinery available and rill-flood irrigation. You couldn't buy machinery. Ag machinery production stopped because all industrial production was supporting the war. Ace had to re-manufacture horse equipment into tractor-pulled potato equipment. The first digger was re-manufactured from a narrow horse-drawn digger. He widened it by splitting it down the middle and adding four inches—quite an effort when you also had to add four inches to each piece of digger chain! Early irrigation was all rill-flood. Shovels and dam slopes and soil types restricted how many and where potatoes could be raised. Ace started out with five to seven acres and eventually built up to distributing water to twenty-three acres.

The first storage on the homeplace was excavated with a Fresno. The family put up posts and then added a pole roof covered with hog wire, straw, and dirt. The harvest was done with a



Ace Lake with Jack Lake.



*Potato Harvest,
1947.*



Ace Lake driving the tractor; Roy Lake on the back middle of harvester.

small Model H John Deere tractor a single row at a time, hand picked into burlap bags and then hauled to the storage.

In the late 40s, the Glacier View Potato Growers Association was formed with about fifteen growers. They built a 52x200 foot potato storage in Pablo on the railroad side so that shipping could be done during cold weather and they could load their product directly from storage onto rail cars. This potato storage was engineered and supervised by Ace Lake who was the President and manager of the association.

Marketing the potatoes also had its unique problems. This was a commercial endeavor and the product was shipped all over the country; Chicago and St. Louis to name a few places. Due to competition from Idaho, Lake county growers had to absorb a 50% higher freight cost and another fifty cents because of lower name recognition. 100 pound burlap sacks were used. They also used special 100 pound wood crates for the military.



Ace Lake driving the tractor. Harvest, 1947.

In the early 50s, the first sprinklers came in so that more potatoes could be raised. Lakes used hand-line for the first ten years and then started changing to wheel lines in the early 60s. When the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project in Washington finally began delivering water, a market developed in Montana for producing seed potatoes. By the mid-fifties, Lakes converted to raising certified seed potatoes.

Ace began getting sick in the early 50s, so Roy, who had been off at college, came home for a couple of years. He then volunteered for military service. He thought it was better to control

his destiny by volunteering, which he did for two years. In 1956, he came back to the farm. He was married in 1957 and moved back on the farm permanently. With his father and brothers, they began farming as AW Lake & Sons.

With seed, a community storage was no longer desirable for the seed buyers. In 1958, Lakes built their first above-ground seed storage.



Caden helping with seed plot at harvest.

Lake Brothers, Inc., Roy and Jack created Lake Farms along with Roy's wife, Evelyn, and Jack's wife, Susan.

New safety was built into the Montana potato industry with the arrival of Mike Sun and the tissue culture program he introduced. It came at a perfect time and created new opportunities.

Much has changed since 1934 and much has stayed the same. The equipment is bigger and technology rules but it is still a lot of hard work. Everyone is still on the farm here in 2015. Roy and Evelyn raised six children on the farm and Jack and Susan have raised four children. Who knows what the next fifty years will bring!

The partnership continued until the death of Ace Lake in 1960. The farm was parceled out between the three brothers. Don and Roy continued to work together and in 1970 became Lake Brothers, Inc. The seed operation continued to increase to 160 plus acres of seed potatoes over the years.

The brothers plan was to acquire land and share equipment until the families were ready to go out on their own. This arrangement lasted until 1983 and benefited both families in establishing a good foundation and a good reputation. With an end of



Jack Lake during harvest, 2015.

Schutter Seed Farm

Manhattan, Montana

John and Grace Schutter immigrated to Montana from Holland in 1947. After farming on a dry land farm for one year, they leased an irrigated farm for ten years. In 1952, they started to raise seed potatoes. When the leased farm was sold, they bought a farm on Wooden Shoe Road in 1959. An irrigation well was drilled in 1960 to supplement canal water. With a good supply of water and their own land, they could now expand their seed operation. At this time, John began his own seed plot. From his experience on seed farms in Holland, he knew the advantages of making selections from within a variety.



(L to R): Sid Schutter, John Schutter Jr., Johnathan Schutter, Carl Schutter, Nick Schutter, and Cliff Schutter.



John Schutter Sr. checks a pivot.

In the mid 1960s, he sent a sample of potatoes to a plant pathologist in Holland who had agreed to put them through the meristem process to make them virus free. When the tubers were ready, John and Grace went to Holland to visit family and take the potatoes back. He was told that they would need additional permits to get them into the U.S. Saying there was not time for that, John put four tubers in his overcoat pockets and came home with them. They planted them in the house and increased them through stem cutting. By the late 1960s, they had enough volume to sell. That was the first virus free seed sold in the U.S. Montana seed became very popular in the industry as all the growers switched to virus free seed.

John and Grace were blessed with eight children, three girls and five boys. They all grew up working in the potato fields. As the family matured, more land was added and potato acreage increased to meet the demand for seed.



Sid and John Schutter.

Sid and John Schutter, Manhattan, Montana.

When John was in his mid-forties, he was diagnosed with a form of muscular dystrophy. As he lost his muscle strength, his focus on the farm became more managerial. With five boys at home, he was able to oversee the operation into his later years. John's hobby and love were raising and being part of the potato industry. He taught and encouraged us to grow the best crop that we can. John passed away in 2000 at the age of 78.

Currently, our farm is operated by John's five sons, Sid, John Jr., Carl, Nick, and Cliff. We are very thankful for the lessons and opportunities that we received from our parents. With some of the next generation staying on the farm, we feel that we can continue with our goal of providing the best seed service to our customers.



Harvest time at the Schutter farm keeps the brothers and hired help busy from dawn until dusk.

Harvest time at the Schutter farm keeps the brothers and hired help busy from dawn until dusk.



John Schutter, Sr.



Cliff Schutter takes a quick break during harvest.



John Schutter, Jr.

Skinner Spuds, Inc.

Toston, Montana

In 1864, at the age of fifteen, William M. Cowan left Kentucky with his two older brothers and arrived in Virginia City during the gold rush. By the time they arrived, most of the claims had been taken, so they decided to find a place where there was good farm ground and no fighting. They walked for two days and ended up in the Gallatin Valley near present day Central Park. They were able to survive by raising horses and mules and running freight from Utah and Idaho to the gold fields. At the age of forty-three, William married Louisa Gibson. In 1895, William was able to purchase some land and a few years later, added to what has become the Cowan and Skinner Ranch Company.

When he was in his twenties, Alvin took over the ranch from his aging father. He married Beryl Purdom, whose family also came to Virginia City in 1864 via Fort Benton. Together, they raised seven children. In 1944, the oldest daughter, Florence, married her high school sweetheart, Paul Skinner. At the time, Paul was serving in World War II as a B-24 bomber pilot. After the war, Paul and his brother-in-law, Bill Cowan, rented the ranch for three years. Paul then purchased a farm near Harrison, Montana. In 1955, Paul and Florence returned with their four children, Bill, Cynthia, Mary, and Joe, to be partners with Alvin on the family ranch. In 1963, Paul and Florence purchased the ranch from Alvin and Beryl.

For nearly eighty years, the property was basically a cattle ranch and for a number of years raised registered Hereford cattle. In 1968, Bill left to go to the University of Illinois with no intention of returning to the ranch. He did not like cattle and horses. After gaining an advanced degree and his life-mate, Sheila, they returned to Montana while Bill applied and waited for a job. While working in housing construction for Alvin Douma, Bill started to become interested in the seed potato industry. Here was an opportunity to grow into farming (no cattle), with a small acreage and hard work. Bill started with eighteen acres in 1974 and worked for his dad for use of some machinery and land. Stanley Kimm unselfishly shared advice and some equipment for the first few years. It would have been impossible to start without these two men. The demand for seed was strong in the early to late seventies and the good prices helped Bill get a good start.

In 1978, Joe returned with a degree from Montana State University, and with his wife, Jo Jo, went into a full partnership with Bill. Joe took responsibility for the cattle and Bill was responsible for the potatoes. Mary's husband, Jim, started working with Skinner Brothers in 1982. In 1985, Joe, Mary, and Bill started to buy out Paul and Florence's interest in the ranch. Over the years, Bill and Joe expanded both operations and land. In 2002, the family purchased a farm near Toston that they had been renting from Koehnke and Sons. The

Koehnkes had been successful potato farmers in the area. During this time, Joe and JoJo== Jo raised two boys, Jake and Luke. Bill and Sheila raised one daughter, Wendy. Jim and Mary raised two children, Eric and Corrie. All of these kids worked on the farm while growing up, and although none of them returned to the farm, they have had successful careers in other fields.

In 2002, Joe and Bill discontinued their partnership and sold the cattle. In 2003, Joe successfully ran for Gallatin County Commissioner and is still in that position. They have rented out the homeplace. Bill has stayed in seed potatoes and mainly rents the family property near Toston where most of their seed potatoes are grown. In 2011, Bill joined in partnership with Clark Johnson in Skinner Spuds, Inc.

Note from Bill: Even with the yearly challenge, I do not regret spending forty-two years in the seed potato business. Any successes I have experienced have been totally due to a good mate, parents, partners, customers, and those many men like Wilbur Kimm and John Schutter, Sr. who have set a standard of excellence for the rest of us. I am also eternally grateful to a gracious God who has allowed me to live and work in such a wonderful place.

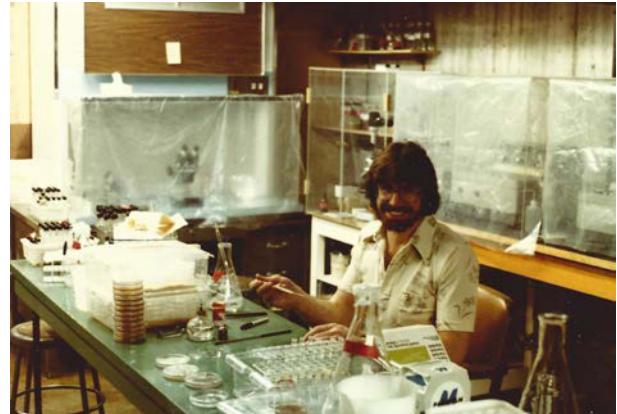
Starkle Farms, Inc.

Ronan, Montana

Our operation is a third generation farm located in the Mission Valley. Roger's grandfather raised sugar beets in the valley in the 1930's and his father, Vic Starkel, began raising seed potatoes in the 1950's following the closure of the sugar beet plant in Missoula. Vic and Marge Starkel had eleven children including six sons of whom all affirmed during their early years.

Roger farmed with his brother, Ed, for fourteen years before breaking off on his own in 1999.

Roger, Ed, Dave, and Bob continue to work together during planting and harvest.



Roger Starkel at MSU Potato Lab, 1981.

Roger became interested in continuing on in the agriculture industry after working in the potato lab while attending MSU in 1980. Roger gained experience in the then new technology working with Dr. Mike Sun. At this time, he learned how to meristem potato plantlets and became excited about taking the technology to the farm. He became one of the first operations worldwide to have an on-farm tissue culture laboratory and greenhouse facility.

Currently, Kathy runs the laboratory, handles the bookkeeping, and assists with marketing. Roger supervises and manages the greenhouse operations and the entire fields production of the farm. They farm approximately 1500 acres of potatoes, grain, and alfalfa.



Brother Bob Starkel, 1978.



Roger and Kathy have been blessed with three daughters, Cambrie, Carli, and Kendra, and a new son-in-law, Carli's husband, Dean Hughbanks.



Old greenhouses.



New greenhouses.



Potato Cellars.



Early Seed Plot, 1986.



Cambrie Starkel in 1987.

Spring Creek Farms, Inc.

Manhattan, Montana

Barb and I started our potato lives in 1974 when we planted seven acres of Russet Burbanks. We were engaged at the time and she had one more year to complete in nursing school in Kalamazoo, Michigan. It was a great time to start in the seed business as the Columbia Basic potato industry was in its expansion phase. The next year, my father and I started the partnership we called Venhuizen Seed Potatoes. We increased our acreage somewhat each year and in 1980, we incorporated the business. In 1984, Barb and I were able to purchase a farm right across the road from our home. It was a wonderful addition, but when half of our crop froze in the ground ten months later, we questioned our wisdom! However, the Lord was good and blessed us and we proceeded on. In 1990, we were able to purchase another property along with my brother Dale and his wife Nancy, and thus had a more permanent land base for growing our seed. We also started growing other varieties about this time.

Sadly, in 1999, my father passed away and I no longer had the benefit of his wisdom, wit, and common sense. Nonetheless, we continued to move forward. In 2001, as our sons Eric and Nick joined us on the farm, we were able to purchase a farm in the Toston area and thus were able to expand our acreage. We also branched into more varieties and started selling into several other states.

In 2004, our first grandchild was born; what a blessing! Our son Tim joined us in 2006 after graduating from college. About this same time, we changed the name of our farming operation to Spring Creek Farms, Inc. We continue to try new varieties as promising ones came along or as customers asked us to grow specific varieties for them. Along the way, storages were built, machinery was purchased, and employees came and went. Like every farmer, we endured hail, wind, frost and poor years and bumper crops.

As more grandchildren came along, our family started raising its most important crop- kids! We have thirteen grandchildren in all; Eric and Jessica have Turner, Johnathan, Max and Clara; Nick and Stephanie have Ada, Clark, Owen, Lena and Nora; Tim and Ashley have Brenna, Beau, Avery and Elliot. My mother, Roelena, is still living in her home on the farm and takes an interest in whatever is going on. Barb continues on as an RN at a nursing home in Bozeman as well as all other activities of the farm.

Over the years, we have always tried to be honest and fair in our dealings with customers and to stand behind what we sell. The Lord has always been faithful and we have been truly blessed! We live in a beautiful spot in a great state and are able to work with wonderful people in a great industry doing work that we love. Life is very good!

Weidenaar Ranches, Inc.

Manhattan, Montana

1948

- John Weidenaar and good friend and neighbor, Wilbur Kimm, thought the Gallatin Valley would be a good place to raise potatoes.
- 37 acres planted with Iron Age two-row planter
- Had one row digger
- Bagging by hand
- Loaded by hand onto trucks
- Stored in under ground cellar
- Delivered on “refers” to Big Timber, Billings, Butte, Idaho Falls, etc. to market
- George B Kamps, a long time farm partner and friend, worked alongside John for many years.



1947 KB6 International Truck. Proud of their load.



1950: John Weidenaar driving truck; Jack and Dean on front of planter.



1950: Potato Harvest



First underground storage.



Far Left: John Weidenaar

1954

- Built warehouse and washing shed next to Milwaukee Railroad Tracks for easy loading and shipping 100 pound bags to Chicago.

1956-1963

- Started raising certified seed potatoes
- Purchased first new Dahlman harvester

1963

- In the passing of John in March, he left a legacy, "Always leave God's land better than you found it."



Potato harvesting crew, 1950.



Our first 1952 Forbes harvester.

1963-2001

- Jack and Dean Weidenaar formed Weidenaar Ranches, Inc. and raised 200 acres of potatoes. Also raised winter and spring wheat and alfalfa for rotation.
- Jack VanderMolen, Sid Kamps and Larry Van Dyke were potato partners over the years.

2001

- In the passing of Jack, his son Brian and nephew Kyle took over the farming operations.
- Jack, like his father John, left a legacy, "Always leave God's land better than you found it."

2003

- Brian and Kyle entered into a successful partnership with two local growers, creating a wash shed named Big Sky Growers.

2015

- Today, Weidenaar Ranches, Inc. plants 285 acres of certified seed consisting of Umatillas, Russet Norkotahs, Classics, and Russet Burbanks. Brian and Kyle continue the legacy of "Always leave God's land better than you found it." Raising potatoes in the Gallatin Valley has proven successful and taught tremendous work ethics. Strong faith in God has made this journey successful!
- John A. Weidenaar, a 6'8", fifth generation Weidenaar, will graduate in December from Montana State University with an Ag. Business degree. He has a passion to farm after his football career is finished.

Montana Seed Potato Program History

Bozeman, Montana

Derived from "Spud: Reflections on the Montana Seed Potato Program" by Orville McCarver, 2006.

Potato Seminar

In 1966, we had our first potato seminar held in Deer Lodge, Montana. We got personnel like Earl Spencer, Doyle Burns from the National Potato Council, and other people who were quite knowledgeable about potatoes and potato seed certification. We presented programs at the seminar in 1966. The seminars have been going on every year since. We got more buyers and growers together than we ever had before. We have covered many subjects that are relevant to potatoes and have gotten some of the best speakers that there are for our seminars. They are still going today.

All growers were assigned roles. All carried them out well. I was very surprised at the turnout and enthusiasm there. We had over 250 at the evening banquet. We had commercial people with useful exhibits. The Annual Potato Seminar was repeated at Deer Lodge through 1972.

All growers and families at Deer Lodge contributed to the seminar. Leaders included John Vanisko, Francis Koehnke, Carl Meyer, Gene Bennett, Al Donich, Glen Launderville, Andrew Nicoles, Bud Jacobson, Bud Beck, Charles Beck, Frank Lovell, Melvin Reisted, Robert Johnston, County Agent Harold Strobel, and Don Temcke. Their families also participated.

Since 1972, the seminar has been rotated every two years at Bozeman, Kalispell, Missoula and back to Deer Lodge. It has enlarged every year. People come from Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Canada, and other states. Subject matter items have been numerous - law, electronics, experts on diseases, insects, weed control, irrigation, storage, all kinds of machinery, bruising- you name it. We have had very good to excellent speakers on the program.

Besides being educational. I have detected other benefits from these Seminars. Of course, buyers and growers came closer, and communicated better. They realized there were good seed stocks available and seed renewal became easier.

Trade personnel helped in several ways. In November of 1995, the 30th Seminar was held. The success of these meetings, I feel, has been and still is above my expectations. They have opened up lots of knowledge.

Progress

In 1922, Montana had 29,000 acres, almost all of it in commercial potatoes. Today we have about 10,000 acres of certified seed potatoes. In the 1920s, we were producing about 100 cwt per acre. Today, we get up to 300 cwt per acre and some growers get more.

There were times in the 1920s when the environment was rampant. Some stocks were said to contain as much as 65 percent mosaic. Now, we see large fields without any pathogens. Montana growers export approximately 3,500,000 cwt of certified seed annually. The number of acres certified has grown every year from 1921 through 2000. In the period, there have been no years when Montana had no acres of certified seed potatoes.

As the years went by, there were more gradual changes. Prior to the 1970s, many of our storage facilities were "Idaho pole" cellars. They were built with poles, straw, brush, and earth. Most floors were earthen. Though these were simple and low-cost structures, they surprisingly kept potatoes well. The earthen floors, and sometimes earthen walls, seemed to have an ever stabilizing effect on temperature and humidity. Both are very important in storage requirements. This is not to discredit modern storage with automatic and electronic controls as well as the latest building materials.

Montana lagged behind other states in permitting bulk shipping of seed potatoes. For about three years, there was much discussion of it. It was a topic at least two of our Potato Seminars. In about 1971, bulk shipping was predominate here, but under several close conditions and limitations. Needless to say, it has saved many dollars in costs of bags, filling, handling, and removal from bags. Yet, many contend that burlap bag gave tubers "protection".

Geography

Certified potatoes have been grown in most counties and many valleys of Montana. During World War II there were approximately 10,000 acres in the Milk River Valley alone. The principle varieties were Red (Bliss Triumph, Pontiac). After World War II, growers faced competition from the Red River Valley. The Montana growers had a freight rate disadvantage, and less yield per acre. In addition, all growers were forced to mechanize more. Automatic seed cutters, planters, and harvesters soon became universal. A larger acreage is now required for one family farm to justify modern machinery. It seems that no one single area (valley or country) has captured certified seed potato production.

In 1958, there were about 1,400 acre as of potatoes in the Deere Lodge Valley. Now there are less than half that many. Then, there were four growers in the Gallatin Valley but now there are twenty. Then, Flathead County had approximately 1,000 acres in potatoes. Now, there are

about half that many. So, the industry does shift geographically. Montana had some research on potato production early, but not enough. In 1956, growers were using something like forty pounds of nitrogen per acre. Today, they use over 200 pounds per acre. The recommended seeding rate was approximately 1,000 pounds per acre. Today, it is approximately double that. In the mid 1950s, yields were something like 220 sacks per acre. Today they are 360 sacks or above. So, the balancing of growth factors (water, nitrogen, phosphorus, potash, heat units, sunshine, etc.) with the seeding rate may not be determined with only one or two seasons of experiments.

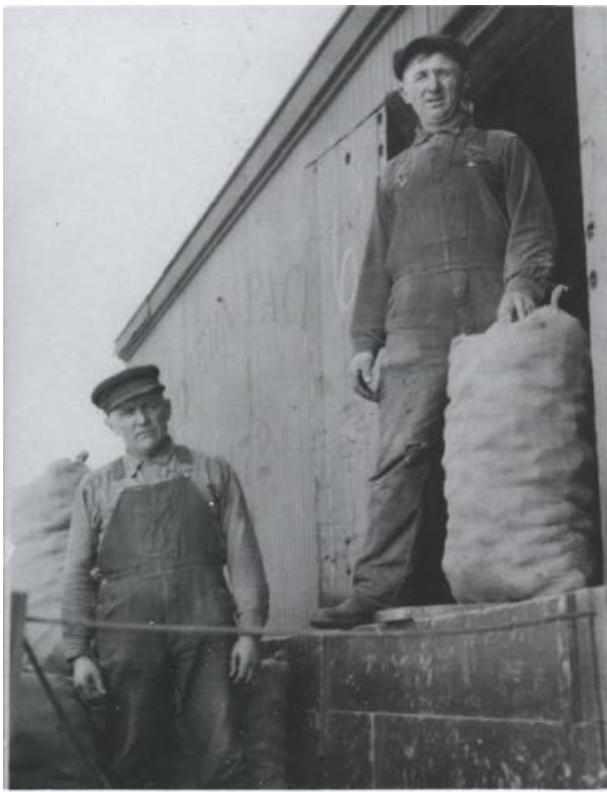


Potato harvesting crew, 1950.

(Left): Dr. F.M. Harrington (left), Chief of the Department of Horticulture at Montana State College and William L. Irvine (right).



Using a
two row
assisted
planter in
the 1930s.



(Left): Loading seed potatoes in refrigerated rail car for the first stage of the trip to Argentina from the Irvine & Cottom farm.



(Above): Loading potatoes from the field to be taken to the cellar on the Irvine & Cottom Farm.

(Below): Roguing crew removing all abnormal plants in the late 1930s on the Irvine & Cottom Farm.





Bernd, LeRoy, Bud
and Bob Jacobson.



Harvesting potatoes in the
1930s on the Cottom and
Irvine farm near Dillon,
Montana.



*Harvesting
by hand on
the Irvine
& Cottom
farm in the
1930s.*



*Jim Fleming's truck
loaded with sacked
potatoes weighing about
25 tons.*



100 lb bags of seed potatoes on farm trucks in the spring of 1967. Trucks owned by Walt Mangles, Gil Mangles, Chuck Caffrey and Paul Caffrey.



Leonard Salomon and his nephew, Ted Salomon, rouging potatoes the easy way.



John Schutter, Sr. and Wilbur Kimm discuss business.



Professor Frank Harrington, Mr. Isaac, and Mr. Irvine of Irvine & Cottom in Dillon, Montana conferring on matters related to potatoes.



Montana's Mike Sun (left) and Harold Small at the Montana Seed Seminar



Russ Sylvis and Mike Sun in the late 1970s looking over plants in the greenhouse indexing program.



Joannie Sun, Mike Sun, and Anna Sun.



Irene Kimm, Wilbur Kimm, Helen McCarver, and Orville McCarver.