



Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce Newsletter September 2023

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CHECK OUT THIS INCREDIBLE INFORMATION FROM FOX 21 NEWS ABOUT THE SAN LUIS VALLEY!

[FOX21 NEWS: WE ARE THE SAN LUIS VALLEY](#)

[Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce works to enhance the quality of life in the city.](#)

Did you know?

San Luis Valley keeps Colorado near the top in fresh spud output

article from ColoradoBiz

July 14, 2020 by Eric Peterson

The San Luis Valley, the world's largest alpine valley, is often associated with the Great Sand Dunes, UFOs and vortexes. But its potato industry is another big, if more mundane, calling card.

The wide swath of high desert flatland between the Sangre de Cristos and the San Juans is a massive alluvial plain. The sandy soil, in concert with sunny days and cool nights, makes it an ideal place to grow potatoes. The underlying aquifer, under strain since the 1970s, is another critical piece of the potato-growing puzzle. Its isolation, and the resulting low disease pressure, makes it an

even better place to grow potatoes for seed.

In all, Colorado grows about 20 million hundredweight — or 1 million tons — of potatoes a year, ranking it sixth in terms of gross weight in 2017. The 2019 crop's value was more than \$200 million.

Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee in Monte Vista, likes to point out that Colorado is second to only spud king Idaho in one respect. "We're the second-largest shipper of fresh market potatoes in the country," he touts. "We don't really have any processors in the state of Colorado other than some dehydration plants."

That means Colorado-grown taters end up in home kitchens and restaurants, not in the frozen aisle. Ehrlich says sales of frozen potatoes had risen for decades before the ratio stabilized in the past five years.

"We're growing around 50,000 acres," Ehrlich says. "Our acreage base is probably where it needs to be based on water availability. We used to grow more acreage than we do now, but the water basin's been over-appropriated since the 1970s."

A pair of ancient aquifers under the valley floor supply the farms, wells and municipal water systems, and are replenished by snowmelt. "It's cyclical," Ehrlich says. "It's feast or famine with weather. As long as we get good snow in the winter, that's what we need — good snowpack."

Supporting the state's industry, Colorado State University's San Luis Valley Research Center was established in 1888 near Del Norte and moved to its current location outside Center in the 1940s.

"We primarily focus on potato breeding and the study of diseases and how potatoes are stored," says Zach Czarnecki, the center's farm manager. The 20-employee operation also certifies potato seed grown by Colorado growers. "Our breeding program has released quite a variety of potatoes here," Czarnecki says. "This year, we just released three new cultivars."

He highlights the new Rocky Mountain Russet as more resistant to potato virus Y, one of the industry's most destructive pathogens that can impact yield by 40%. "Seed growers are very interested in this," Czarnecki says. "To have a variety that is resistant to [potato virus Y] means quite a lot to growers here. That's the main criteria the potato certification service is looking for when they're certifying seed. They're looking for how much virus is present in the seed."

Czarnecki says that's especially important in a seed-producing region like the San Luis Valley. "Potatoes are vegetatively propagated, basically meaning you cut up potatoes and plant pieces of them," he says. "That's how you get a new potato."

Breeding a new cultivar starts in a greenhouse with about 200 varieties. "The first couple years are basic breeding, where you're crossing parent plants and they're producing true seed, and the seeds are put out in the field," Czarnecki explains. "We keep producing seed for them. Each year is another cycle of field selection."

Breeding a new potato is a long process, Ehrlich adds. "Potatoes are tetraploids — they have four sets of chromosomes — and it takes 14 to 16 years to develop a

new variety of potato.”

The center’s greatest hits are largely specialty potatoes like Purple Majesty and Harvest Moon, along with a type of Norkotah released in the 1990s. “Their biggest success on the russet market has been the Norkotah,” Ehrlich says.

“Purple Majesty is an interesting potato. It’s really high in antioxidants, meaning it’s really good for you to eat, but it doesn’t store well.”

CRISPR genome-editing technology could cut variety-development time in half, “but it’s not proven technology in potatoes yet,” Ehrlich says. “We’re trying to invest in newer breeding technology, not necessarily genetically modified but looking at molecular markers and things like that so we can identify genes. They know the potato genome now, so we can identify genes that would create better nutritional value and maybe resistance to disease. Breeding’s a big deal.”

Sheldon Rockey of Rockey Farms near Center is a third-generation potato farmer in the valley. “Our grandfather bought the first land that we farm now in 1938,” he says. “He actually made more income off of lambs than he did potatoes, but it’s always had potatoes on the ground since he bought it.”

Today, the operation plants 250 acres of potatoes every year, and rotates 250 acres as fallow to mitigate disease. Growing seed potatoes for other growers “from Maine to California” has been a big part of the business since the 1980s, Rockey says.

Because of this, Rockey Farms works closely with the research center on variety development and seed certification. “Variety development is their number-one output,” Rockey says. “It’s definitely been a good program. They’ve developed some good varieties,” highlighting Purple Majesty and Harvest Moon.

“Our biggest thing is making sure we establish good sustainability with the aquifer,” Rockey says. “It went down a lot in ’02, when we had the great drought or whatever you want to call it. It’s gone down, it’s come back, it’s gone down, it’s come back. We’re also pressured a little bit from outside to take water out of the aquifer and put it over on the other side of the mountains.”

He says Mexico represents an opportunity for Colorado’s potato growers, but the market is not open to U.S. exports. “If we can get past that, we would have another market we could ship to,” he says.

While potatoes have their critics, Ehrlich says much of the fault-finding is misguided. “They tend to be anti-french fry, which I get,” he notes. “Potatoes don’t actually make you fat. They’re actually a complex carb that you need in your diet. You need carbohydrates for brain health and for energy. Potatoes have more potassium than a banana and half your daily requirement of Vitamin C.”

Business of the Month:



Phone: (719) 589-4789

Address: 1560 W 12th St. - Alamosa, CO

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The Pirate PTO (district-wide PTO) and the LOR foundation would like to announce that we are hosting our first big school/community event! Our 'Back to School Bash' will be held on September 8th from 4:00 to 7:00. There will be a free meal, booths, activities, Sno Shack, Drift Away Coffee, etc...AND, everyone will receive free entrance into the high school football game that evening!

We look forward to strengthening our family/school/community partnerships through this event and hope to do it at the start of each year!



Pirate PTO and the
LOR Foundation
Present...



Pirate Hoodies
will be available
for purchase!!

Monte Vista School District & Community

Back to

School Bash!

Friday, September 8th
4:00 - 7:00
@ MVSD High School
Baseball Field



FREE Meal & Entrance into the HS
Football Game for EVERYONE!



Game @ 6:00

Sno Shack (first 300 free!)
Bounce Houses
Booths
Activities/Fundraisers



Splash Tower!! Come soak
our school & community
leaders for \$1!

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

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September 9 • Monte Vista

- TATER TROT 5K RACE • CRAFTS & FOOD VENDORS • GUIDED AGRICULTURAL TOURS • PROFESSIONAL CHEF COMPETITION • THE FAMOUS MASHED POTATO DUNK TANK • FRESHLY HARVESTED COLORADO POTATOES •
- MUCH MORE! •

[COLORADOPOTATO.ORG/POTATO FESTIVAL](https://coloradopotato.org/potato-festival)

[Click here for more information!](#)



3rd Friday Art Walk

**Downtown Monte Vista
4-8PM**



**May 19th
June 16th
July 21st
August 18th
September 15th**

**Live
Entertainment**

Local Artists and Vendors

Hands on Art Activities

Music

Door Prizes

and more...

**Art
Demonstrations**



**Hosted by
The Mystic Valley Art Council
mysticvalleyartcouncil@hotmail.com**



Please join us in downtown Monte Vista, Colorado every 3rd Friday for our community Art Walks.

Artists, entertainment, art demonstrations and art activities will be set up on the first block of Adams Street and in local businesses throughout town. Local businesses will be offering some amazing art walk specials and will be participating in a community scavenger hunt each month. This is a wonderful opportunity to get out and enjoy an evening of art, entertainment, local shopping and local dining in Monte Vista.



San Luis Valley Intertribal Powwow

September 22-24th, 2023

MC
Whitney Rencountre

Competition Pow Wow
All Dancers and All Drum Groups
Invited

Indigenous Arts and Crafts

Friday 2-8PM
Saturday 10AM-8PM
Sunday 9AM-Noon
Community Feed Saturday evening

Outcalt Event Center at the
Ski Hi Complex
Monte Vista, Colorado



[For More Information Click Here](#)

*Questions or seeking
information? - Click the
buttons on the right-
hand side to view more
information about
Monte Vista as well as
various local events in
the San Luis Valley!*

*Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce
Facebook*

*Monte Vista Chamber of
Commerce*

The next Monte Vista Chamber board
meeting Thursday, September 28th at 7
AM.

Member Updates



We hope you decide to move messages from the Monte Vista Chamber to your Primary tab from the Promotions tab. By doing so, all future emails from us should be delivered to the Primary tab. Thanks!

CHECK OUT
MEMBERSHIP
BENEFITS HERE!

New Members:

- No new members this month

Renewing Members:

- Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges
- Monte Vista Eye Care
- The Optimystics Citizen Action Network
- Tu Casa
- Valley Electric, Inc.
- Valley Lumber & Supply

Do you have an event in the San Luis Valley that you would like to add to our website? Please click the button below to fill out an Event Submission Form with as much information as possible. We will add the event to the Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce website as soon as possible and will contact you if we have any further questions about the event.

Thank you!

Event Submission Form