

dealer, the brothers have standardized their brand names, including their harvesters and windrowers. This allows them to reduce the size of their parts inventory. Their harvesters are Lockwood; the windrowers are Spudnik. They also own a Harriston Clod Hopper.

Welcome Inspection Visits

"Some of our customers visit each year to see how the crop is coming and how we are doing," Nick relates. "They want to make sure we are paying attention to detail. That's so important, because if a commercial grower does have a seed issue affecting his crop, it is almost impossible to fix during the current production year. Knowing that, customers want to make sure that they are purchasing the best possible product. We try to keep in close contact with them and welcome and encourage their feedback, both on quality as well as the services we provide."

As growers well know, the market now demands traceability, another service that the Schutter brothers can document with exactness.

"We keep meticulous records," Sid points out. "We can go back 10 years on any field and tell you what was grown there and can trace any potato lot back to its origin. Growing certified seed potatoes in Montana makes most of that pretty simple, because the state has a one-way street with its certification laws. Any seed grown in Montana has to come through Montana State University's (MSU) potato lab and greenhouse, where it is cleaned up and then released as disease free."

The Schutters have their own Russet Burbank selection stored at MSU. Each year, microtubers from that selection are planted in the family's on-farm greenhouse. Later, the plantlets are transplanted into the field as part of their early generation program.

While the brothers sell mainly Generation 3 seed to commercial customers, they also supply earlier generation seed to other foundation growers. Their primary markets are Washington, Oregon, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Montana and Idaho, but they also have customers in other production areas.

Wheat, Barley and Other Crops

Between John, Jr., Cliff, Nick, Sid and Carl, 9,000 to 10,000 acres of prime farmland is under pivot irrigation, most on picturesque hills that appear to roll on with no end in sight. In addition to potatoes, the Schutters grow wheat, barley and a limited acreage of dry edible peas. John, Jr. also grows garbanzo beans.

The wheat is primarily grown for the seed market. The family has its own seed cleaning operation. John also is affiliated with an outside commercial seed cleaning company.

As the years have rolled by, the brothers – they have farmed together for more than 30 years now – have married (all but Carl) and have children of their own. Others are working on the farm or have expressed the desire to come back after finishing their schooling.

"We do hope that some of our kids can raise their children here. This is a wonderful community in which to live," Cliff says. "As a family, all of us care about our community and the area in which we live. We have given service here, from serving on planning boards and conservation districts to our local churches. Several have also served in various responsibilities with the National Potato Council and U.S. Potato Board." ●