

Pickers May Pick Up Some Cold Cash

The Potato Picking Contest during Barnesville's Potato Days is a salute to a bygone era. There has not been a field of potatoes picked by hand around here or anywhere else for well over a half century.

What potatoes are still grown around the region are all cut, seeded and harvested mechanically. That is a vast improvement over the back breaking labor that it took to bring in the local spud crop. The labor needed was so intense that Barnesville High School was actually closed for a week or so to allow students to help out in the spud fields in the 1940s and 1950s.

There was a day when potatoes were a staple crop on nearly every farm in the region. Those days are long gone with most farmers getting out of the fickle spud market. Local growers are down to about three families scattered around the Barnesville, Baker, Downer and Sabin areas, the Johnks, the Schmidts and the Penders.

RDO also raises a lot of potatoes all over the western part of Minnesota and annually makes a sponsor donation to Potato Days in the form of potatoes and the Friday night French Fry feed.

Those attending Potato Days on Saturday, August 26, beginning at 9:00 a.m. will have the opportunity to see how potatoes were harvested, by hand, back in the "good old days".

A mechanical one, two or four row digger was used to elevate the potatoes and vines out of the ground. Pickers would then come down the rows separating



dirt lumps and vines from the potatoes. The spuds went into a wire bushel basket. Two of those baskets would be dumped into a potato sack for transport later back to the spud house. It was hot, heavy, dirty, hard work with both men and women participating in the spud harvest.

Picking styles varied. Some chose to walk the rows and bend from the waist to pick the spuds. Others worked the rows on their knees. While some harvesters chose to work alone, most pickers worked as a team, each filling a basket and dumping that into a sack. Laborers were paid by the amount of potatoes picked in a day or a week. They were hard earned dollars but welcomed additional revenue each fall to cash strapped residents of the area.

There's a chance to watch live history unfold in the potato

field on the western edge of Barnesville on Saturday morning. That field is located just a block south of McGrath Park.

For the older generation, this is a time to reminisce about hard work and growing up in the region. For the younger generation, it's a chance to see and perhaps appreciate the hard work their ancestors went through to make a few extra bucks in potato fields back in those now by-gone days.

C-W Valley Coop is the proud sponsor of this year's Potato Picking Contest.



Past Winners Of The Potato Picking Contest

1994	Willie Kahler
1995	Kelly Peppel
1996	Doug Schenck
1997	Doug Schenck
1998	Harold Schenck
1999	Clay Schenck
2000	Clay Schenck and Louella Lovato
2001	Doug Schenck and Laura Johnson
2002	Louella Lovato and Doug Schenck
2003	Tie-Doug Schenck, Elmer Peterson and Louella Lovato
2004	Wayne Nosal
2005	Wayne Nosal
2006	Clay Schenck
2007	Kelly Peppel
2008	Kelly Peppel
2009	Elmer Peterson
2010	Kelly Peppel
2011	Brent Maesse
2012	Brent Maesse
2013	Brent Maesse
2014	Brent Maesse
2015	Brent Maesse
2016	Trevor Nelson
2017	Barney Czech
2018	Trevor Nelson
2019	Evan Halverson
2021	Trevor Nelson
2022	Trevor Nelson

Wagner Park Camp Ground

Barnesville, MN
218.354.2292

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- 42 water, sewer & electrical sites
- 50+ tent sites
- Picnic tables and fire rings
- Bathrooms, showers & dump station

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