

'Mr. Spud' runs an efficient farm



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He drives around in a white pickup with as license plate that says MR SPUD.

And this past week, Carl Hoverson was honored as grand marshal for the 2012 Potato Bowl celebration.

This man was cool as a cucumber showing his offices at Larimore, N.D., on the first day of the harvest Thursday. There were massive trucks moving in and out of the warehouse area. There were clouds in the afternoon sky, and Hoverson was talking to his drivers.

"The rain will hit in about three minutes. I don't want any wet potatoes in the warehouse," he said.

The man is a multitasker. He is on top of things. He is outwardly calm and collected.

Working with him year round is a crew of around 40 at Hoverson Farms in Larimore. This time of year, during harvest, the numbers swell to more than 200, including workers who come up each year from Texas. They are digging with 24 harvesters on about 5,400 acres of potatoes. They are shipping the spuds out and putting some in storage in a mammoth building that smells like earth and potatoes.

To Hoverson, there is nothing like the unique smell of freshly-harvested potatoes in piles.

The harvest lasts about 30 days. During the harvest, they live in campers or at the motel in Larimore that is owned by Hoverson Farms. At Hoverson Farms, they have use of a gleaming steel kitchen where they can prepare food.

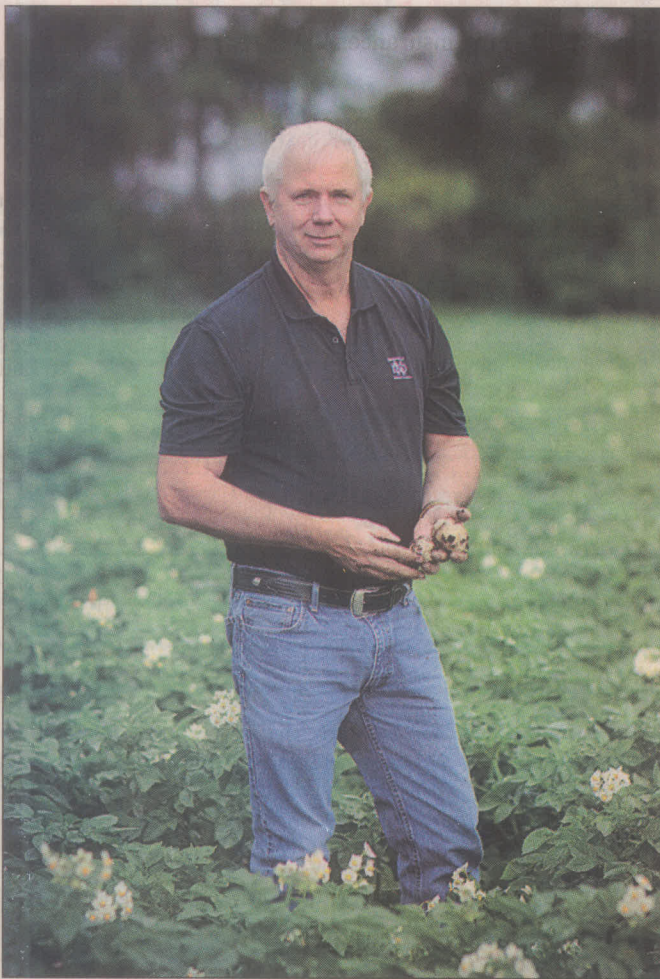
To Hoverson, the harvest helpers are not people who work for him. They are people who work with him. And he insists that makes a difference.

Looking good

This year, prospects are good for the harvest of russet potatoes grown on the Larimore farm. They are potatoes that go into Simplot and turn into fries in Grand Forks. They go out to other markets.

It is quite likely that the French fry you eat in a McDonald's store came from Hoverson Farms.

Hoverson, who grew up on a farm near Manvel, N.D., has expanded his farming operation through the years. He was 20 when his father, Odin Hoverson, died. So, he went



submitted photo

▲ Potato farmer Carl Hoverson of Larimore, N.D., was the grand marshal for Saturday's Potato Bowl parade in Grand Forks.

full force into farming. He had two years at UND studying engineering and one year at North Dakota State University, where he still works with experts on potato development.

Earlier this year, Hoverson was named president of Northern Plains Potato Growers Association.

Over the years, Hoverson's farming ventures have steadily expanded. His two sons, Michael and Casey Hoverson, are farming with him. And between Hoverson and "the boys" they are raising potatoes and other crops on 23,000 acres of farmland north of Larimore.

Potato factory

Hoverson Farms just off the U.S. Highway 2 rest stop at Larimore is a vast, well-organized potato factory. It has grown and prospered for the past 20 years using irrigation.

The equipment moving up and down the rows and hauling the product for market or storage is mind boggling. You shudder when you hear the cost of that equipment.

At the same time, Hoverson points out that agriculture keeps all kinds of auxiliary businesses in business. The towns around the fields are alive because of the related activity.

they turn out russets, they also plant other potatoes and experiment with new varieties of potatoes.

The future is out there. The past is part of Carl Hoverson. He treasures Indian arrows and things like an old flat iron that have been found on the land. He notes that much of his potato land is located over what is known as the Elk Valley Aquifer. He has a flag flying high over his well-ordered offices at Hoverson Farms.

"Potatoes are the core of our business," he said, "but we also raise corn, soybeans, sugar beets and seed canola."

When the harvest is finished in October, the work is not finished. There are trucks to service, equipment to repair... The list is endless.

Hoverson is more than committed to his potato empire — he seems passionate about it as he takes visitors into a storage warehouse.

His eyes scan the vast building with mountains of potatoes. He weaves his pickup in between the lineup of equipment as he checks out details with supervisors.

The warehouses are kept at 48 degrees year round. The potatoes are carefully coddled. Hoverson checks and double checks the operation.

These days, they are running 15 hours a day. They start at 6 a.m. and go until 9 p.m. When it's dark, the lights go on. There's a calm feeling of assurance as the spuds begin their journey from the fields.

Hoverson watches. He waits. He has a calm, quiet reaction to each situation.

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