

At 9,000 feet of elevation, you had to be a very experienced and a pretty darn good farmer in order to be prosperous here in the Divide area. Some of the crops that were grown successfully here were hay, oats, barley, sweet clover, rye, potatoes, cabbage and lettuce. The mountain farmer had to know not only what to plant, but when to plant it and how to rotate those crops.

Potatoes, lettuce, and oat hay were sure bets for the local farmer. But when the prices were low, it paid off for them to augment their income with poultry and a few range cows to better survive the winter. This permitted the high-altitude farmer to carry on with financial success.

Some area farmers also supplemented their income with dairy farms.

Here in Divide at the George Johnston Ranch, Mr. Johnston and his two sons Ernie and Glenn would milk 30 cows every day, all

by hand of course, while Mrs. Johnston and her daughter Gladys would bottle it. Then before Glenn and Ernie got to school each day, they made milk deliveries to Woodland Park and GMF's. George Johnston's grandson Jerry, still operates that same ranch today.

It was in the 1920's when successful head lettuce crops were established in Divide where their crop was known as "Pikes Peak Lettuce" and in 1922 the Pikes Peak Lettuce Growers Association was formed.

This lettuce when properly grown had firm, compact heads with little or no waste when prepared for the table. It was all grown without irrigation which made Divide one of the few places in Colorado that grew under those conditions. The soil here was tilled in the fall of the year so it would catch the spring moisture. The average planting date in 1922 was May 20<sup>th</sup>.

Harvesting was best done in the early morning when the heads were cool and crisp. Using a regular butcher knife, they would cut just below the head in such a way that the leaves were left intact. They would put the cut heads into a field crate right away and then on to the packing shed where it was trimmed, graded and packed into shipping crates with crushed ice and at once loaded into refrigerated railroad cars. Divide lettuce was shipped all over the country particularly back east to cities like NY and Chicago. When the Pikes Peak lettuce was Grade A, it was unsurpassed by any other head lettuce grown in the United States. You can also see that ice production was an important part of the lettuce farming here. Fortunately, one of the other industries in Divide was the harvesting of ice that was kept in the local icehouse.

Potatoes were an all-around food at tables not only in Colorado, but across the nation and were known as the “apple of the earth”. They were appreciated by both rich and poor.

With great success in growing potatoes here, Divide farmers had an abundance of the crop. So much so that in 1931 during the Dust Bowl Days, Divide farmers sent a whole train car load of potatoes to drought stricken residents of Lynn County, Texas.

Here is an excerpt of a thank you letter sent to the Divide farmers:

*March 17, 1931; I hasten to thank you and the tender hearted people who have so generously furnished us this car of potatoes.*

*They will give relief to many a hungry mouth, and especially under fed children who have suffered from the 3 year drought.*

*Respectfully, Mrs. Stephen, American Red Cross*

The lettuce and potato industries declined in the 1930s, but some farmers continued for a few years both during and after WWII.

Some of the 12,000 World War II POWs at Camp Carson, now Fort Carson, were part of the Divide potato story. In an interview, local resident Naomi Markus recalled that in 1945 her family would go to Camp Carson to get German POWs to help harvest potatoes.

So why a Potato Soup Supper? You take some potatoes and milk, and you have the making of potato soup. You add a nice lettuce salad with some bread and toss in some local history and you have the makings of a Ute Pass Historical Society Potato Soup Supper served at the historic Divide Community Center!