

## **Ed McKay a Potato and Commission Pioneer**

Ed McKay was an original member of the Washington State Potato Commission. He grew potatoes in Prosser and then in the Columbia Basin near Othello.

“We needed an organization to deal with the state and other entities,” Ed said about forming the Commission. “We were competing with Idaho. They had a commission and we needed the organization to help the industry with marketing and advertising to help sell more of the Washington potatoes.”

Potato harvesters were relatively new in the early 1950s, and Ed’s family was instrumental in bringing them to the Basin.

“In 1956 the first harvesters arrived. My brother Martin McCullough in Othello brought in the first two harvesters,” Ed said. “They were tag-alongs that attached to the tractors.

“There was a man on the tractor and a man on the left side of the machine to work the controls and five or six people on the back end standing on a platform to pull vines and rocks. The machines came out of Shelley, Idaho.”

This innovation brought about quite a change from the back-breaking way potatoes were being harvested.

“Before that, a digger would take two rows and lay the potatoes on the ground,” Ed said. Each picker would pick up two rows of potatoes using a picker’s belt with two hooks from which hung a burlap sack.

“Pickers would put four rows of potatoes into one windrow of filled sacks and the truck could go down the center and the pickers would throw the sacks on the truck.”