

The Western Beet Sugar Company

The making of beet sugar is preeminently the industry of Watsonville. Some years ago Claus Spreckels, the famous Sugar King, had his attention attracted to the peculiar adaptability of the rich alluvial soil of the Pajaro Valley to the cultivation of the sugar beet. The Sugar King is a man of broad mental grasp, quick to see opportunities that promise good returns for gigantic investments, and determined in action when once his judgment is formed. The chief characteristic of the man is his fixedness of purpose...

The time will come when all the sugar used in the United States—and no people approach our own in the consumption of sugar—will be manufactured between the two oceans that lap either coast of the Republic. And when that time does come, when thousands of men earn the means of comfortable life from the broad beet fields of the future, the name of Claus Spreckels will be spoken with affectionate regard and admiration for his genius, his foresight, his pluck, and his wonderful achievements. If the deeds of men who win great possessions for their peoples with the sword in the strong hand are worthy themes for the pencil of the painter and the pen of the historian and poet, how much more deserving of celebration are the achievements of him who adds to the wealth and comfort of his countrymen in untold measure, not by battle and bloodshed, but by the peaceful application of genius and sense and courage to the problems of production. If that man is a benefactor who causes two blades of grass to grow where grew but one, who shall set metes and bounds to the deservings of that man who originates a great industry, giving employment and enjoyment to many hundreds of thousands? Long, long after his mortal frame has returned to the elements from which it sprang, Claus Spreckels will be remembered as a benefactor of his kind, a useful man among men, and a citizen for whose life the Republic has cause to be profoundly grateful.

The importance of the beet sugar factory to the city of Watsonville cannot be estimated in exact figures. The plain and by no means artistic building is really the heart which pumps the life blood of the city's trade through every artery and vein of the whole community. Remove the factory, and Watsonville would be struck a staggering blow. Not that there is any danger of the factory being removed. It is in an ideal location, and there it will stay for many and many a year to come. About it are twined all the business interests of the place. From it are distributed the thousands of dollars that keep full the channels of profitable trade, that remunerate the rancher, pay his help, his store bills, and fatten his comfortable bank account. The presence of this unfailing and eager market for his products keeps up the values of the farmer's acres. The monthly wages distributed to employees find their way into the hands of business and keep alive the prosperity which does not desert Watsonville in any stress of financial or industrial depression. The beet sugar factory is the Pandora's horn, monthly shaken above Watsonville, full of all good things. It is the Nile which comes with full flood to enrich the country over which it spreads its glad waters. It is the bank against which labor draws its checks, and in which it deposits the fruits of its toil.



Factory of the Western Beet Sugar Company at Watsonville

The Western Beet Sugar Company's factory at Watsonville represents an investment of several hundreds of thousands of dollars. It handles hundreds of tons of sugar beets daily, and its average output of sugar daily is in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand pounds. It disburses monthly to employees and farmers over fifty thousand dollars. Such an amount of ready cash turned monthly into a community of a few thousand souls is certain to keep the gage of business prosperity at high mark, and explains easily why Watsonville always finds trade active and money plenty, even when neighboring towns are in the throes of business depression.

The lime rock used in the beet sugar process is brought from the inexhaustible quarries near Santa Cruz, and enormous quantities are taken at the factory. Thus an incidental industry is fostered, and a distant part of the county receives some share of the benefits of sugar making in the Pajaro Valley.

The Eastern farmer, who is tired of running behind on the "old farm," will doubtless want to know whether he can come to the Pajaro Valley and raise sugar beets at a profit. He most certainly can. The factory has never yet had as many beets as it wants. The demand is always for more. If ever the supply of beets catches up to the capacity of the factory, nothing is more certain than that the capacity would at once be increased. Land in the United States adapted to the successful cultivation of the sugar beet is comparatively limited in acreage. Meantime the consumption of sugar in the country is enormous, and increases all the time. Millions of pounds are imported annually from Cuba and the Sandwich Islands. Not until the supply of home-grown sugar equals the demand of the American market will the sugar beet market be affected by overproduction, and that time is yet a long way off.

Meantime the demand for sugar beets is incessant, and the price fixed and unfluctuating. The sugar beet crop is not subject to the violent fluctuations that affect cotton, corn, wheat and other staple crops upon which speculators keep low prices until the farmer has been compelled by his necessities to sell and then boom prices for their own advantage and enrichment. The sugar beet crop does not go through middlemen's hands at all. It is not and cannot be speculated in under present conditions. There is no long and short buying and selling, no futures, no wind sales. That is because there is never a surplus to demoralize the market and cheat the farmer. The whole crop is in constant demand. It is always short of the wants of the factories. And being raised in the immediate vicinity of the factory, and hauled for sale to the very doors of the factory, the price remains fixed, and, as a matter of course, profitable to the grower. To tempt men to use such fertile acres as those of the Pajaro Valley for the cultivation of any particular crop, that crop must be a paying one. Men would not raise sugar beets on land worth \$300 an acre if sugar beets were not a certain and profitable crop.

The manner in which the price of sugar beets is fixed is very satisfactory to growers. The beets are bought by the ton, and the price varies with the percentage of sugar the tests show the beets to possess. The price of beets showing fourteen per cent of sugar is \$4 per ton, and for each additional one per cent or degree of polarization, as it is technically called, the grower receives fifty cents per ton additional. That is to say, if the beets go to twenty per cent, the price per ton is \$7, and as careful and scientific cultivation will bring the beets to as high as twenty-two per cent of sugar, the good farmer will, as in everything else, make more beets and get a higher price for them than his incompetent and careless neighbor. The average yield of the beet farms per acre is fifteen tons, though larger yields are not uncommon, and thirty-five tons of beets have been taken by one Pajaro Valley grower from a single acre. Taking an average of fifteen tons to the acre, at an average sugar percentage of sixteen—and these are fair—the grower has a gross revenue from each acre of land of \$75. The entire cost of raising an acre of beets, including hired labor and hauling to the factory, is \$50 an acre on rented land and \$37.50 on land which the grower owns. The annual rental value of naked sugar beet land is \$12.50 per acre. It will be seen from these calculations, which are conservatively made, that the sugar beet grower can reasonably expect a certain annual net profit of \$37.50 per acre on the land put to use, if he owns his land, and a return of \$95 per acre, net profit, if he rents land from another. I do not know of any other farming in the United States which will fetch a sure annual profit as large as this.

The sugar beet land of the Pajaro Valley is not all under cultivation yet, and there are plenty of opportunities for men of small capital to come here and do well. Any of the Watsonville real estate agents will gladly furnish information concerning sugar-beet lands, and the company issues a pamphlet descriptive of the methods of cultivation, cost of

production, probable profits, etc., which will be of great value to any one who may have his thoughts turned toward California. Certainly, from the Siskiyou to the Mexican line, there is no valley in all this wonderful State in which a man can better pitch his tent and set up his household altars than right here in the valley which spreads around the city of Watsonville.

The superintendent and general manager of the Western Beet Sugar Company's factory and incidental business is W. C. Waters, a gentleman whose native force of character, shrewd business acumen and broad grasp of affairs eminently fit him for this responsible position.

Sources

- *This is an excerpt from Santa Cruz County; a faithful reproduction in print and photography of its climate, capabilities, and beauties. 1896. pp. 108–111. RAP-ed.*

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