

Beet Plan Draws Fire Of Growers

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GREELEY, Colo. — Members of the Mountain States Beet Growers Marketing Association have been voting overwhelmingly against ratification of the purity committee formula.

The purity committee formula is a proposed method of paying farmers for sugar beets based on the extractable amount of sugar per given weight of beets rather than the actual proportion of sugar in the raw beet.

Great Western Sugar Co., the principal buyer of beets grown by Colorado and Kansas growers, instigated the plan. Disagreement over how to apply a purity formula and what to use as a data base figured importantly in the 1976 contract impasse that led to intervention by Gov. Dick Lamm and resulted in a reduction of beet plantings last year.

MOUNTAIN STATES Beet Growers in Colorado and around Goodland, Kan., had voted 475 to 33 against acceptance of the purity committee formula by the end of last week with only a few locals still to be heard from.

Growers in the Sterling, Colo., area and in Nebraska are scheduled to vote Monday on the formula but a large majority in the association already have spoken against the controversial proposal, according to Steve Reynolds, executive secretary of the association based in Greeley and Washington, D.C.

But members of the Mountain States Beet Growers of Montana voted 147 to 23 to accept ratification of the purity committee formula, and Wyoming growers also approved a modified formula, Reynolds reported.

What this means, Reynolds said, is that the growers of Montana and Wyoming have a contract with Great Western Sugar Co. for the next two years, but the far more numerous growers of Colorado and Kansas don't. Nebraska farmers have their own association.

"THE REASON that we could not accept it is that the 1976 data on harvested purity is suspect because it is either abnormally high for average sugar-beet purity or the testing procedures are not valid," Reynolds said.

The consensus among many observers close to the farmers is that the rejection of the formulas devised by the broad-based purity committee may herald tough negotiations between the farmers and Great Western for a new contract.

Growers maintain that if the proposed purity formula were adopted this year the standard line for purity could be too high for subsequent years and that in this case payments to the beet producers would be too low. "It is not that we disagree with the payment on the basis of purity quality, it's that we cannot accept test data that is at best questionable," Reynolds said.