40 Local GW Employees Could Lose Jobs
By JAMES V. CARROLL
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As many as 40 employees of the Great Western Sugar Co. in Fort Morgan may lose their jobs if a contract agreement is not inked by the Mountain States Beet Growers Association and the Great Western Sugar Co.

Claude Fleet, communications consultant, Great Western United, parent company of Great Western Sugar, Denver, said in a telephone interview Wednesday, "I suspect the number 40 would be a realistic estimate of those to be furloughed at the Fort Morgan plant."

Fleet said the term shutdown, currently being used by the press, "is not altogether a proper or accurate description of the action being taken by Great Western. It is simply a cessation of interim maintenance and agricultural activities."

"The remainder of interim activities will continue this year as they have in the past. We are not shutting down the plants; we are only cutting down on expenses in those plants where no contract agreements have been reached," Fleet said.

"It's like the homeowner who knows his lawn is dying, yet still takes his lawnmower to the repair shop," Fleet mused. "There is no justification for us to retain our maintenance and agricultural employees at the end of the current campaign unless the company is assured there will be a new campaign next fall. Until we have contractual agreements with the associations, we have no need to continue maintenance."

Fleet said that plants where agreements have been reached will continue to retain the maintenance and agricultural workers. He said that, "Should an agreement be reached at outstanding plants, there would be no further need to furlough employees at those plants."

Fleet denied the "cessation of maintenance and agricultural activities" were linked to current negotiations with beet growers associations. "The furloughs are not a bargaining tool; they simply result from economic factors," said Fleet.

Great Western has five plants in Colorado, and 215 employees are expected to lose their jobs. Fleet said many of these employees may be apt to take early vacations in hopes that their jobs may be waiting for them on their return.

"The company will continue to absorb the cost of all fringe benefits except long term disability," said Fleet, "and we will review the possibility of an extension around the first part of May."

In other developments the Associated Press carried a story Tuesday reporting that Nebraska Attorney General Paul Douglas was in contact with the Colorado attorney general's office to discuss the possibility of anti-trust violations by Great Western.

Robert Hill, first assistant attorney general of Colorado, said he indeed had talked to Douglas concerning possible violations but had talked in general terms.

"We discussed general applications of the anti-trust laws. We reviewed in a rudimentary way the facts concerning particular aspects of the current situation in Nebraska and Colorado in reference to Great Western," said Hill. "In no way could our conversation be construed to mean an investigation is underway against Great Western. We were merely exploring the facts."

"Should a formal complaint be brought before the attorney general's office," said Hill, "we would certainly investigate the allegations."

Fleet said he had no knowledge of an investigation by the attorney general's office.

"We always try to operate within the law," said Fleet, "and until we receive word from the attorney general's office, I would not like to make any comment."