

VELOCITY VIDEO CASE HISTORY

A DC VELOCITY SPEED CHALLENGE

Sweet moves

Processing sweet potatoes can be a grimy business, but rugged Toyota forklifts are well suited for tater transport.

LAST YEAR, MATTHEWS RIDGEVIEW FARMS BUILT the nation's most technologically advanced facility for processing sweet potatoes. The new 160,000-square-foot facility in Wynne, Ark., joins two others operated by this fourth-generation family business. Matthews grows its own sweet potatoes on a 2,000-acre farm and then processes and packs them along with those from other growers. About 80 million pounds of sweet potatoes pass through the facility annually.

It is rather grimy work, as dirt and dust from the dug-up potatoes cling to everything, including its lift trucks. But the vehicles in the company's fleet of 14 Toyota forklifts are designed for this type of harsh duty. They are equipped with additional filtration systems and have the ruggedness to work in extreme conditions that Toyota is famous for.

"We've been using Toyota for about five years," recalls owner Terris Matthews. He says he has tried various competitors' trucks in the past but found Toyotas well suited to this work, while providing good value. "What I like about Toyotas is that they have good engines, they are durable, and they are stout. They handle our loads well."

TRAVELING TATERS

The Toyota forklifts perform most of the transport functions within the facility. The propane-powered vehicles unload flatbed trucks containing crates of sweet potatoes brought from the fields. The wooden crates are placed into storage, where they are stacked up to eight high. When the potatoes are ready for processing, the crates are first brought to staging and then moved to a washdown area, where they are again stacked. Water is sent down from the top of the stacks through the crates to clean the bulk of the dirt that remains on the potatoes.

The washdown process creates a good bit of dust in the air and mud on the floor. The rugged Toyota forklifts have an additional filter near the engine air intake to deal with the dust.

Another feature on these trucks are fingertip controls on the armrest. In contrast to other trucks that require drivers to reach for levers, these joystick-type controls are easily accessible.

"The joystick controls and armrest set-up are very comfortable to use," explains Andy Buell, warehouse manager. "We like the fact that our drivers can use them and work day in and day out, all day long, and not get fatigued from having to reach to work the forklift."

Following the initial washdown, the forklifts then gather two or three crates at a time for travel to the automated processing systems. A

stacked load of three wet crates can weigh up to 4,000 pounds. Most loads are placed onto a pallet conveyor. This feeds an elevator that lifts the crates to a washer located about 15 feet above floor level. Some of the trucks are equipped with rotator attachments so they can also lift crates to dump them directly into the washer vat. After washing, the sweet potatoes pass through inspection and automated sorting by type and size.

PACKED AND PICKED UP

The sorting equipment gently drops the sweet potatoes into cartons or plastic shipping bins. Up to 5,000 cartons are processed daily. The packed potatoes are labeled and palletized.

A Toyota forklift then picks up the pallet for transport to loading docks.

Matthews leases its trucks from its local Toyota dealer, The Lilly Company. Two of Lilly's offices are in Jonesboro, Ark., and Memphis, Tenn. – each only an hour away. That provides a fast response for any needed repairs and regular maintenance. Matthews also rents additional vehicles through Lilly to handle the peak workload in the fall.

"They take care of our needs," says Terris Matthews. "We just run the trucks, and they do the rest."

For more information on Toyota's full-service product line of forklifts and warehouse equipment, visit www.ToyotaForklift.com/forklifts.



To see a video of Toyota forklifts in action at Matthews Ridgeview Farms, go to dcvtv.com and click on the Velocity Video on Channel 2.