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## Williams & Sons Honored at Annual Potato Festival

Cold Ozark Mountain winters prompted farmer Fred Williams and his wife Lois to pack up the family and head west to California nearly 70 years ago.

Upon settling in the Perris Valley, the Williams family found success as potato and onion farmers and truckers who hauled the produce of other growers to the railroad, where the harvest was shipped to all parts of the U.S.



Perris historian Katie Kayes introduces Fred Williams during a ceremony honoring the family for its contribution to Perris Valley agriculture.

Through four generations, Williams & Sons has been a mainstay in Perris, helping establish the community as one of the region's agricultural hubs. For their contributions, the family was honored June 14 during the annual Potato Festival, part of the Rods & Rails festival.

"You and other farming families have established the strong roots of Perris and made it what it is today," said local historian Katie Keyes.



Generations of the Williams family attended the June 14 event in which their family was honored for its role in raising onions and potatoes and trucking the produce to market.

Fred Williams, grandson of the family patriarch, accepted the kudos from the Perris Valley Historical and Museum Association. More than 20 members of the family were on hand.

"This is not about me," Fred Williams said. "It's about honoring my grandparents and the kids. I'm very proud that our family has been so honored."

Fred Williams said that once establishing themselves in the Perris Valley, his grandfather purchased all the seed potatoes for regional farmers. Fred Williams passed the trucking business to his son, Paul, and nephew, Jim. He inherited Williams and Sons as a third-generation owner and passed the business to his son, Ryan, and nephew, Scott.

Along the way, the Williams' mechanized the harvesting process, almost eliminating backbreaking manual labor. When the family took up onion-growing in 1986, they did so in a big way, working as many as 1,600 acres with packing houses in Imperial, Lancaster and Bakersfield. There were times when the Williams' onion growing-operations produced 25,000 50-pounds of red, white and yellow onions a day. The harvest was shipped throughout the world.



Williams & Sons Trucking remains active in the agriculture industry today.

Fred Williams, who graduated from Perris High School, said he looks back with fondness on the days when the City prided itself on its agricultural lifestyle. It was a good place to grow up.

"Very family-oriented and friendly," he said.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch said he remembers the Williams family as having the last operating potato shed in the City in the 1970s. The shed was located on C Street north of Fourth Street, the current site of the Metro-link transit center.

Busch praised the hard-work and enterprise of Perris Valley farmers, calling them "the backbone of our community for decades."

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