



# WHY A SUGAR BEET?

Sugar beets were once grown all over northern Colorado, forming the root of a key agricultural industry that attracted both people and money to this region for decades. Fort Collins joined the “beet boom” in 1903 when Great Western Sugar Company opened a sugar factory along East Vine Drive.

Sugar beets are finicky; they require precise planting, thinning, and harvesting, and thus a large labor force. Great Western Sugar actively recruited people to Northern Colorado to work the beet fields, including Germans from Russia and peoples from the Southwestern United States and Mexico. Many of these workers lived in Buckingham, Andersonville, and Alta Vista. These three neighborhoods (Las Tres Colonias) near Vine Drive and Lemay Avenue still retain many unique historic features.

The Fort Collins sugar factory closed in 1954 after struggling with years of drought conditions, high production costs, and increased competition from cheaper sugar sources like cane sugar and corn syrup. But the sugar beet industry and the contributions of the people who worked in the fields and factories indelibly shaped the character of Fort Collins.

You can learn more about sugar beets and Fort Collins in the Beet Shack exhibit in our permanent gallery.



Great Western Sugar Factory, Fort Collins, 1920s



Loads of sugar beets at Colorado & Southern Depot in Fort Collins, circa 1905