

Ice Reefers and the GFX
Contributed by Steve Sandifer

Ice Reefers and the GFX
Fresh for Your Health
ATSF promotional film, circa 1955

Trains featured were:

- GFX, all year train, out of Bakersfield or San Bernardino to Kansas City & Chicago.
- CTX, all year train out of San Bernardino to Dallas, Houston, and Galveston.
- BTX, all year train out of Bakersfield to Dallas, Houston, and Galveston.
- PVX, seasonal Palos Verde Valley Express from Blythe California to Chicago.
- SRX, seasonal Salt River Valley Express from Phoenix to Chicago with connection at Clovis to the Texas Express.
- HAX, seasonal Hereford -Amarillo Express to Chicago.

Details of the Potato harvest of late spring and early summer were used as an example.

Before harvest, projections were made concerning the size of the crop which is primarily in Kern County, (Bakersfield) CA. Based on estimates, cars were stockpiled beginning a month before the harvest to a total of 7,000-8,000 cars. Planners insure that cars, engines, and crews would be available. In May, harvest began.

125 packing sheds served 700 - 1000 shippers in Kern Co. These were switched 2-3 times per day so that the average packer could ship up to 15 car loads per day. Up to 10 trains of potatoes ran out of Bakersfield each day in the peak season.

Bakersfield had icing machines as did the major icing cities by 1955. It took 1-1/2 minutes to fill the bunker with 11,300 pounds of ice per car. Working together the machines completely iced a train at an average of 30 seconds per car. Cars would be iced 5 times by the time they reached Chicago.

From Bakersfield the train went to Barstow for inspection and crew change. 16 crews were needed before reaching Chicago. Needles was the first re-icing. It took 45 minutes to re-ice the train. From there it went to Belen, NM, for icing again. Some cars might have been pulled at Belen for other destinations (diversions). Some cars on the train contained product which had no buyer when it left California. In the two days it took to reach Belen, a buyer may have been found and the cars diverted to other trains. The train was re-iced again at Waynoka and then Argentine (4th time). Other cars might be diverted at Argentine. The train arrived at Corwith on the evening of the 5th day. From there some cars were delivered locally, while others moved to eastern roads to continue their journey.

Link to YouTube video (external website):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSEcyhVuGtY>

