Japanese firm hired to boost sugar production

DENVER (AP) — An agreement between Great Western Sugar Co. of Colorado and Hokaido Sugar Co. of Japan to use a Japanese enzyme process for increased sugar extraction has been announced by Great Western.

Company President George Wilbur Jr. said the signing of the agreements climaxed months of negotiations and is expected eventually to open the way to more efficient sugar production by U.S. processors.

The technique is expected to allow the company to extract the sugar remaining in beet molasses, a by-product which was previously not economical to refine.

Great Western said it is making an investment of about $1 million in Billings, Mont., to adapt the Japanese technology.

GW to increase output with new Japanese plan

By CAROL SABOE, Gazette Staff Writer

The Great Western Sugar Co. plant in Billings, undergoing a $1 million expansion, will be the first in the United States to use a Japanese originated enzyme process to increase sugar extraction from beets.

GW Sugar Co. and the Japanese government—through Hokkaido Sugar Co.—sealed the agreement this week after months of private negotiations, says GW President George E. Wilber.

THE NEW enzyme technique, developed by the Japanese Fermentation Institute, is used to extract the sugar remaining in beet molasses, a by-product of sugar production, which has been uneconomical to refine.

The final agreement, signed Nov. 1 in Tokyo and announced Monday, assigns rights to GW Sugar Co. as sole distributor and commercial representative for the process in the United States.

THE PROCESS will begin for the 1973 refining season in Billings, says Bert Swarthout, GW district general manager.

The Billings plant is now undergoing renovations to use the enzyme reactor, additional cookers and other equipment, he says. Equipment for the process will be installed next summer by plant employees.

The Hokkaido Sugar Co. has successfully demonstrated that sugar extraction from beet molasses can be increased by as much as three per cent, Swarthout says. However, the plant’s work force is not expected to increase.

“IF THE process lives up to expectations, it will make a substantial contribution to the company and to the sugar industry as a whole,” says Wilber.

Swarthout says the lengthy negotiations were unrelated to visits to Billings by officials of the Japan Trade Ministry last summer.

The pioneering effort, a first use of the new technology outside of Japan, “has opened the doors between two companies for mutual exchange of information,” Wilber says.

The Billings factory manager is now in Japan, and has been studying the technology there for the past three weeks, he says.