

Why are potatoes important?



The International Potato Center (known by its Spanish acronym CIP) is a research-for-development organization with a focus on potato, sweetpotato, and Andean roots and tubers. CIP is dedicated to delivering sustainable science-based solutions to the pressing world issues of hunger, poverty, gender equity, climate change and the preservation of our Earth's fragile biodiversity and natural resources.

www.cipotato.org

CIP is a member of CGIAR. CGIAR is a global agriculture research partnership for a food secure future. Its science is carried out by the 15 research centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.

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The potato originates in the Andean highlands where farmers first domesticated the tuber crop near Lake Titicaca, in the southeast of Peru, approximately 8000 years ago. Spanish explorers brought the potato back to Europe in the 16th century and ever since then its popularity has grown around the world. Today the potato is the **third most important crop** in the world in terms of food consumption, after rice and wheat, and hundreds of millions of people in developing countries depend on potatoes for their survival. More than 156 countries produce potatoes and more than a billion people worldwide eat them on a regular basis.

According to UN projections, the world population will reach the 8 billion mark by 2050. The UN expects that more than 95% of this increase will occur in developing countries, where the pressures on earth, water, and other natural resources are already intense. **The potato produces more food on less land faster than any other major food crop** and, as a result, potato crops are an excellent alternative for farmers who need to feed growing populations with limited areas of crop land. One hectare of potatoes can yield a crop with a food value of more than four hectares of grain. Potatoes also yield twice the protein per hectare of wheat.

Potatoes are **rich in protein, calcium and vitamin C** and have an especially **good amino acid balance**. A single medium-sized potato contains about half the daily adult requirement of vitamin C; other staples such as rice and wheat have none. Boiled, it has more protein than maize, and nearly twice the calcium. Potatoes are a valuable source of nutrition in many developing countries, contributing carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals to the diet of millions. Research is underway to increase the vitamin content of modern potato varieties, using biotechnology to boost the micronutrient level in the tubers.

Farmers harvest potato crops in the tropics within 50 days of planting - a third of the time it takes in colder climates. In highland areas of southern Asia, the potato is emerging as an off-season crop; planted in rotation with maize, it brings **relatively high prices** at the market. Similarly, across other areas of the world, the potato's importance as a winter cash crop is rising considerably.

The high nutrient content, ability to adapt to marginal environments, relative ease of cultivation, and low cost and high productivity are attributes that make potatoes one of the principal **and most important sources of food and income** for underprivileged citizens of developing countries around the world.