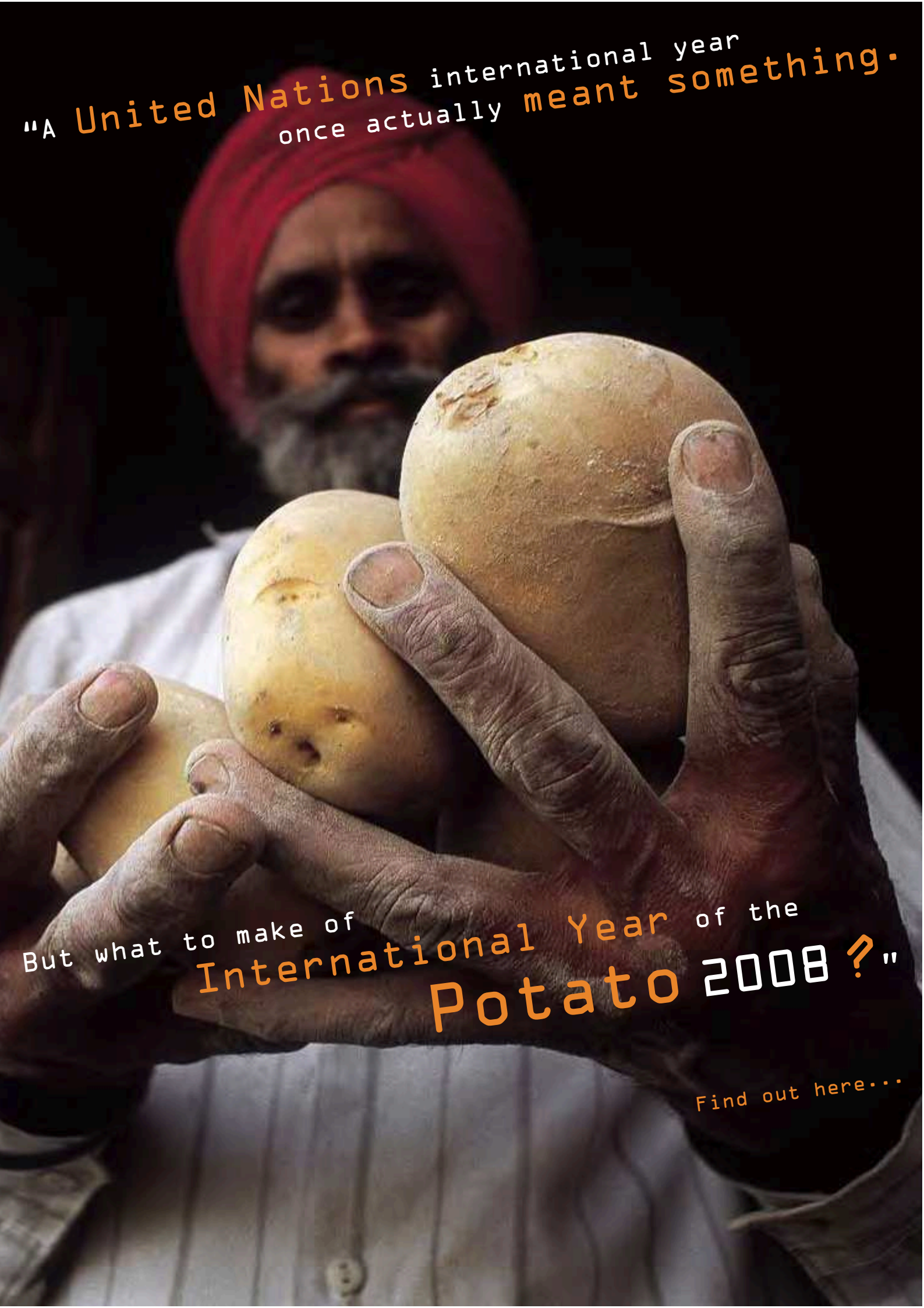


"A United Nations international year
once actually meant something."



But what to make of
International Year of the
Potato 2008 ?"

Find out here...

Over the next three decades,



the world must increase food and agricultural production by an estimated 60 percent to meet the needs of its growing, and rapidly urbanizing, population. It must do so using production systems that minimize negative impacts on the environment, while contributing to the livelihoods of the world's rural and urban poor, who currently number more than one billion people.

The potato will be crucial to meeting those challenges. Fast-growing and high yielding, potato is the world's fourth largest food crop: an estimated 315 million tonnes were produced in 2006.

The potato is an important source of food, employment and income in developing countries, where output has more than doubled over the past 15 years. Researchers are tapping the potato's potential for further productivity gains, especially in marginal farming areas unsuitable for other crops.

But increasing production will depend on improvements in the quality of planting material, farming systems that make more sustainable use of natural resources, and potato varieties that require less water, are more resistant to pests and diseases, and resilient enough to face future climatic variations.

Global changes

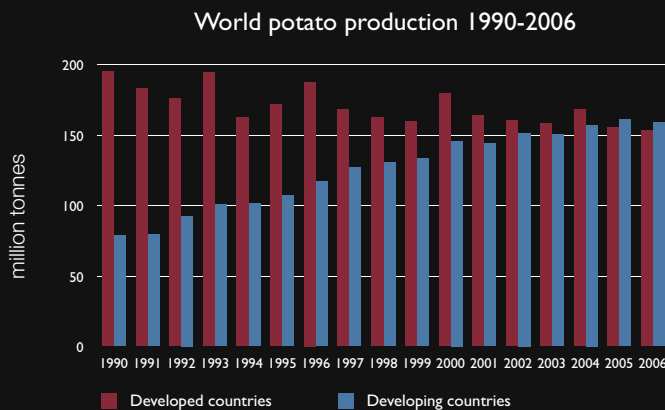
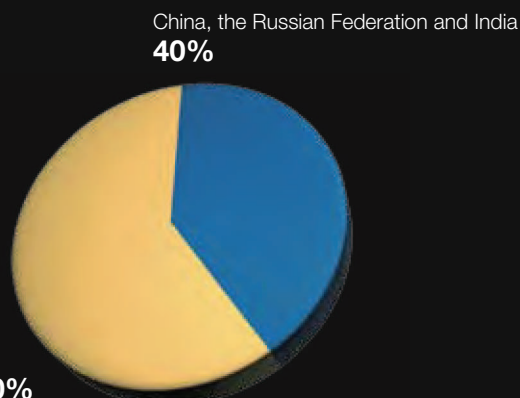
Until recently, most potatoes were grown and consumed in Europe, North America and the former Soviet Union.

Since the 1990s, production has expanded dramatically in Africa, Asia and Latin America – from less than 80 million tonnes in 1990 to a record 161.5 million tonnes in 2005. Today, more than 40 percent of the world's potatoes are grown in China, the Russian Federation and India.

© FAO/Franco Mattioli



World potato production



Source: FAOSTAT

The International Year

of the Potato will focus global attention on the key role of potato – and of agriculture in general – in fighting hunger and poverty, contributing to sustainable development, and safeguarding our natural environment.

Achieving the first of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals – to reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger – depends on agricultural development that benefits the small-scale farmers who constitute most of the world's poor and undernourished. The International Year will highlight the contribution that potato is already making to development and food security.

Ideally suited to places where land is limited and labour abundant, potatoes have become an important staple and cash crop for millions of farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The potato's high energy content and ease of production have also made it an important component of urban agriculture, which provides jobs and food security for some 800 million people.

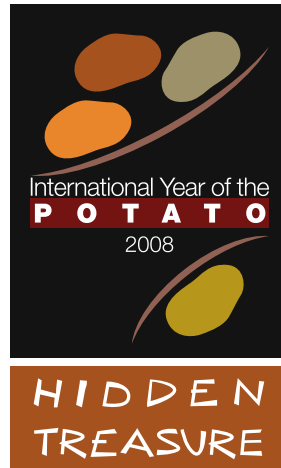
Extending the benefits of potato growing to other areas depends on action to improve farmers' access to

extension, credit, planting material and other supplies, agro-processing and markets. It will often require intensification of production on very small plots, which could increase pressure on land and water, and create ecological imbalances that favour pest and diseases.

For these reasons, the International Year will promote a shift to potato-based farming systems that use clean, reliable seed potato, pest-, virus- and drought-resistant varieties, improved plant nutrition, and integrated pest management that reduces the need for hazardous agro-chemicals.

The raw material for new varieties needs to be drawn from the totality of potato genetic resources, including thousands of Andean varieties developed over millennia. At present, farmers worldwide are adopting a narrow range of high-yielding varieties that promise higher production and profits. In many communities, that has led to a loss not only of traditional varieties but also of cultural identity. The International Year will stress the need to harness the full power

of potato biodiversity in order to increase food production sustainably. It will promote a renewed commitment to conserving the potato gene pool and concrete steps to ensure that developing countries have the capacity to utilize it.



Why potato?

A truly global crop. Potatoes are grown on Peru's mountains, the plains of Northern Europe, China's Yunnan plateau, Rwanda's equatorial highlands and subtropical lowlands in India.

Potatoes feed the hungry. They are a primary source of energy for many of the world's poor. Per unit area, potatoes produce more food more quickly, on less land, than any other major crop.

Potatoes are good for you. Besides carbohydrates, the potato has one of the highest protein contents among root and tuber crops. It contains just 1 percent fat and is rich in vitamin C.

Demand for potatoes is growing. Potato production is booming in the developing world, with good potential for further gains in production and consumption.

Fast growing, high yielding

In temperate climates, an irrigated hectare can yield 35 tonnes of fresh tubers within 120 days of planting. Farmers in the tropics can harvest up to 25 tonnes within 90 days from the same area.



"Potato is on the frontline in the fight against world hunger and poverty."

Jacques Diouf

Director-General, FAO

IYP 2008 : just the beginning...

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is implementing the International Year of the Potato in collaboration with governments, the International Potato Center, the United Nations Development Programme, other centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system, international organizations, NGOs and the private sector.

The aim is to engage the entire "potato community" – from farmers to scientists and policy-makers – in activities that promote potato production, processing, consumption, marketing

and trade, and to champion the role of agriculture in addressing malnutrition and hunger, poverty, water scarcity, climate change and other issues of global concern.

The International Year is the first step in a continuing process. In the short term, it will help raise awareness and support for activities related to the potato. By promoting the creation of International Year of the Potato National Committees, the Year will also act as a catalyst for long-term, country-driven potato development programmes around the world.

Road map

Work on the International Year of the Potato has four stages:

2006 Planning

consultations with partners, resource mobilization, formulation of an action plan, creation of an advocacy and communication team

2007 Launch

official launch at United Nations headquarters in New York, developing information materials, planning events

2008 Celebration

information dissemination, activities at national, regional and global levels, and an international conference

2009 Follow-up

impact evaluation, final report to the UN General Assembly, support to activities by the international partners

Initiative from Peru

The potato originated in the Andes of South America. So it was appropriate that the initiative for an International Year of the Potato came from the Government of Peru. In November 2005, FAO adopted Peru's proposal to focus world attention on the importance of potato for food security and poverty alleviation. One month later, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the FAO resolution and declared **2008** as **International Year of the Potato**.



Cover photo: Alejandro Balaguer, © International Potato Center (CIP).

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