

## FARMER IN THE FIELD



## WHO DOESN'T LIKE POTATOES?

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With the cold weather upon us thoughts of a warm fire and comfort foods fill our thoughts. When I think of comfort food I think of mashed potatoes and gravy, I don't think I'm alone. Potatoes have long been a winter staple in many kitchens. This starchy tubular is the fourth largest crop produced in the world behind rice, wheat and maize. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the average global citizen consumed 73 pounds of potatoes. That's a lot of spuds!

The potato was first cultivated in the mountains of Peru over 4,000 years ago. After the conquest of the Inca Empire the Spanish introduced the potato to Europe. The potato finally found its way to the United States when the governor of the Bahamas sent a gift of potatoes to the governor of Virginia.

There are over 4,000 varieties of potatoes ranging in flavor, size, color and texture. Fingerling potatoes have become popular and their petite size offers you the opportunity to add potatoes to dishes you might not have before. Purple potatoes are fun but some varieties can turn grey when cooked. This said, you may want to experiment before serving purple potatoes to your company. For culinary purposes, varieties are often differentiated by their waxiness. Baking potatoes have more starch (20-22%) than boiling (waxy) potatoes (16-18%). Potatoes will keep for a long time if stored properly. When you bring your potatoes home store them at 40-50 °F. Temperatures below 39 °F will convert potatoes' starch into sugar altering the taste and cooking quality.

Potatoes are categorized as a staple food like rice and wheat and are not commonly eaten raw and are usually sprouted or cooked before eating. Potatoes have less fat and carbohydrates and more potassium and vitamin C than the other three leading staple foods. So, curl up and enjoy a little comfort food tonight.