

GROWN IN WASHINGTON POTATOES – 2014

GROWN IN SOUTH AMERICA: Potatoes have been food for mankind for thousands of years, traveling the globe from civilization to civilization, country to country. Ancient drawings tell of their cultivation and harvest by the Incas around 2000 B.C. in the high elevations of the Andean Mountains of South America. Amazingly, thanks to the cold climate of their high altitude, the Incas preserved their spuds by the earliest known form of freeze-drying.

When the Spanish Conquistadors didn't find the gold and silver they were looking for in the late 1400s and early 1500s, they quickly cornered the local potato market. Potatoes were soon a standard supply item on their ships. The Spanish noticed that the sailors who ate papas (potatoes) did not suffer from scurvy. Scurvy is a disease associated with too little vitamin C in the diet. Potatoes have a lot of vitamin C, easily preventing scurvy.

INTRODUCTION TO NORTH AMERICA: European immigrants introduced potatoes to North America several times throughout the 1600s, but they were not widely grown for almost a century. Not until 1719, when Irish immigrants brought the potato to Londonderry, New Hampshire, were potatoes grown on a large scale. Again, potatoes were slow to gain popularity. However, as the popularity of potatoes began to grow in America, Thomas Jefferson gets credit for introducing “french fries” to America when he served them at a White House dinner during his presidency in 1802. While serving as minister to France Thomas Jefferson sampled them in Paris and brought the recipe home.

Seeking to improve the “Irish potato”, a self-taught American horticulturist, Luther Burbank, took the first step with a new variety that he found grew three times more tubers of a better size than any other potato variety. After testing his new variety, Burbank marketed the seedling he called the Burbank to the West Coast in the late 1800's. A more disease-resistant mutation of the Burbank was discovered a few years later in Colorado and was named the Russet Burbank. Today, several varieties of the Russet are some of the most popular potatoes!

Potatoes are now the most important vegetable in the world and, not surprisingly, America's favorite vegetable. We eat 126 pounds per person per year, as baked, roasted, mashed, fried and more! Today potatoes are grown all through the United States—if only in home gardens in some places--and in about 125 countries throughout the world.

POTATOES IN WASHINGTON: Widespread potato production in Washington state is a relatively recent phenomenon. Currently potatoes in Washington are grown primarily in eastern Washington and the Skagit Valley. The climatic conditions, rich volcanic soil, availability of water and long growing season result in Washington State producing the world's highest potato yield per acre. Though the number of commercial growers number approximately 300, together they plant more than 160,000 acres annually, harvesting averages of 30 tons per acre, twice as much as the average yield in the United States. Washington State produces 20 percent of all U.S. potatoes.

In eastern Washington lack of sufficient rainfall and irrigation was resolved with the development of the one million acre Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. The Project's main goals were to provide cheap and dependable hydro-electric power and a constant supply of irrigation water to growers. Though the Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River was completed in 1941, irrigators had to wait until 1949 and 1950 for enough water to irrigate their fields. Outside the Project, individual growers have developed another one-half million acres of well-irrigated land.

In the Skagit Valley growing region between Seattle and the Canadian border, the mild marine climate and rich soil create perfect conditions for red, white and yes... blue potatoes.

In 1982, to better address the geographic aspects of shipping from a far western location, Washington packers formed an association to negotiate more favorable freight rates with carriers. Better rail rates were also gained. Today, Washington potatoes are shipped to all parts of the United States and exported to the world marketplace.

At least nine out of every ten Washington potatoes are marketed outside of Washington State, with a significant portion of these going to overseas markets. Japan purchases approximately 65 percent of the french fries made from Washington potatoes that are exported each year.

One of the largest, most comprehensive, potato research programs in the United States is financed by the Washington State Potato Commission. Scientific research is done in conjunction with universities, the USDA, and private contractors. Currently, the WSPC invests more than \$500,000 annually in research projects and advocates for additional millions in federal and state legislative funding.

Washington State potato growers take pride in the high standards they have set for growing the perfect potato. They know they are stewards of precious resources. The Washington State Potato Commission is proud to say that Washington potato growers have been recognized with national awards for environmentally friendly and efficient use of water and fertilizers. These growers are among the nation's leaders in adopting sustainable crop management and new production techniques.

POTATOES AND ENVIRONMENT: Potato growers throughout Washington state are working in concert with the environment. Our growers are leading the industry in identifying ways to protect the land, water, and air so their fields and our lives can be as healthy as possible.

Today Washington state potato growers are using less water than ever before to grow some of the highest yield producing harvests. They are incorporating the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that uses decision based tactics to target only the harmful pests when needed to avoid the broad spectrum use of pesticides. Growers are using technology like never before that allows them to use machinery as efficiently as possible to help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere. In addition, our region is fortunate to have clean sources of energy generation. All of these elements combine to keep our state's growers carbon footprint lower and yields higher than other region of the world.

These innovative steps and the many others they are taking, show the passion Washington state potato growers have for the environment. Their efforts demonstrate their desire to ensure Washington grown potatoes are a sustainable commodity for generations to come. By doing so they are assured our industry will continue to benefit future communities and affordably and nutritiously help feed our world's growing population.

POTATOES AND ECONOMY: In a recent study by Washington State University (WSU), the potato industry was shown to have a \$4.6 billion economic impact and responsible for 23,500 jobs in the State of Washington.* 99% of the potato farms throughout Washington state are family owned businesses whose owners have deep roots in their communities.

Beyond the growers, there are many other groups that play a major role in the economic impact the industry has on the State of Washington. These groups include the seed companies, shippers, processors, packaging companies and transportation companies just to name a few. They use machinery, trucks, fuel, financial services and other goods and services that support local companies and businesses. This helps to improve things like the roads we all drive on, the schools our children and grandchildren attend and overall help strengthen our local economies.

POTATO NUTRITION: It's quite amazing what an unassuming tuber can contain. Within its red, yellow, purple, white or brown protective exterior, a potato can provide much of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of a number of vitamins and minerals.

For example, potatoes have about 620 mg of potassium-that's more than a banana. Potassium is essential to the body because of its role in attaining optimal muscle performance and improving the nerves' response to stimulation. Iron, essential in helping the body convert food to energy as well as resist infection, is also present.

One would expect potatoes to have minerals, as they spend their life underground. But potatoes are also a great source of vitamins, even supplying vitamin C, which is essential to help maintain healthy connective tissue and heal wounds. The many varieties of Washington potatoes are also good sources of B vitamins, helping the body make healthy red blood cells and amino acids.

Potatoes contain no fat or cholesterol and minimal sodium. What they do have is natural fiber in the skins, all those vitamins and minerals and great flavor. And a six-ounce potato contains 2 grams of highly digestible protein, almost as much as half a glass of milk, making it a great foundation for a whole meal.

Because of the variety of potato colors, shapes, sizes and textures and their versatility as recipe ingredients, you can have potatoes for breakfast, lunch or dinner (or all three) and support the daily fruit and vegetable servings recommended for good health and nutrition.

THE HEALTHFUL POTATO: Misinformation and misconceptions regarding the nutritional value of the potato abound. In fact, an average (~5.3 oz) potato with the skin contains:

- 45% of the daily value for vitamin C
- 620 mg potassium, comparable to bananas, spinach and broccoli
- trace amounts of thiamin, riboflavin, folate, magnesium, phosphorous, iron and zinc
- all for only 110 calories and no fat.

And potatoes with the skin on are an excellent source of fiber. In fact, with 2 grams of fiber per serving, a potato equals or exceeds that of many "whole" grain products-whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta and many cereals.

Despite the popular notion, the majority of nutrients are not found in the skin, but in the potato itself. Nonetheless, leaving the skin on the potatoes retains all the nutrients, the fiber in the skin and makes potatoes easier to prepare.

Tarragon Potato Salad with Shrimp

- 1 lb. Washington red potatoes
- 1 tablespoon white wine
- ¾ lb. peeled and deveined medium shrimp
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 cup grape or small cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 ribs celery, thinly sliced
- 1/3 cup thinly sliced green onions
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Scrub potatoes with vegetable brush under cold running water. Cut into ½-inch cubes. Place in 3-quart saucepan and add cold water to cover. Over high heat, bring to boiling, then reduce heat to medium-high and cook until potatoes are tender, about 10 minutes. Drain potatoes. Place in large bowl. While warm, add wine and toss to mix.

Meanwhile, toss shrimp with 1 teaspoon oil. Coat a grill pan or skillet with cooking spray. Over medium-high heat, heat for a minute or two. Add shrimp and cook until opaque, about 2 ½ minutes per side. Add shrimp to bowl with potatoes. Add tomatoes, celery, green onions and tarragon. In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining 5 teaspoons oil, vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper. Pour dressing over potato mixture and toss well. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes four servings.

Nutritional Analysis per serving: 23 calories, 14 g protein, 22 g carbohydrates, 8 g fat, 1 g saturated fat (33% of calories from fat), 107 mg cholesterol, 3 g fiber, 727 mg sodium