

The Things You Eat!

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With the global market becoming more accessible every day, with such services provided by the early East India Trading Company from Britain and now FedEx and UPS that span the globe, one can see the produce and product from all over the globe at their local markets. Take for instance the now common yet diverse potato. The potato has been taken for granted in American culture and is cultivated throughout the United States and the world. The largest American producers of the beloved potato are Idaho, Washington, Wisconsin and Colorado. These states and other combine to produce 45.6 Billion pounds of potatoes each year. China is the leading producer with 20% of the market in export.

When looking at the potato market there are many different varieties that are produced for consumption. Potatoes are categorized by shape, size, texture and color. Some of the most common types of potatoes that are produced on a large scale are Desiree, fianna, kipfler, king Edward, Pink eye, Red Pontiac, Russte Burbank and Spunta.

One may wonder where the potato came from and how it made its journey to the table. Originally cultivated in Peru and Chile, remains have been found coming from the 5th Century B.C. The potato was found in jars for storage during wars and famine and dried as travel food and for stews. So who was the first to spread potatoes across the globe? The Spaniards, in the 1500s, when traveling to Central and South America looking for gold. They brought the hardy tuber to Spain and soon found a benefit of eating them when the sailors did not acquire scurvy. Potatoes are jam packed with vitamins that are a necessary for preventing scurvy, which is the lack of vitamin C; scurvy is most noticeable by the swelling of gums and reopening of previously closed wounds. This affliction was common for sailors in the 1500s.

Soon after its introduction to Europe via Spain, Europeans gave the tuber mixed reviews. It was consider the cause for leprosy, impotence and soil degradation by many nations including France, Germany, Belgium and Austria. Only in the early 18th Century did the potato make it back to the Western Hemisphere to the Americas. The potato was introduced into early America many times through out its history. It became popular is Idaho due to its early planting by a Presbyterian missionary Henry Harmon Spalding. He setup a mission to bring Christianity to the Nez Perce Indians. His attempt to convert them from hunting and gathering society to an agricultural one failed at first. The introduction of the potato later was a success and soon after that the potato became a staple in their diet. Although its farming was discontinued due to the massacre the Indians laid upon the people in a nearby mission.

Another tragic event that involved the potato was the well-known potato famine of Ireland, which was from 1845-49 when a disease swept through the potato crops leaving 9 million starving Irish without a stable source of food. This famine caused nearly a million people to die and more than half the population to immigrate to The United States and Australia.

Later in 1872, Idaho potato farming started to grow with the introduction of a hybrid potato created by Luther Burbank. His attempt to create a more hardy Irish potato was a success. It eliminated the potato famine and in selling his patent hybrid he was able to move to Santa Rosa, California where he setup nurseries and hybrid farms to create further generations of potatoes.

The potato is an amazing crop with a rich history. Most Americans take the tuber for granted along with the beef in their stew and hamburgers. It has caused and cured death and disease while influencing a large exodus of people. More information is readily available on the Internet. The information on this column was found on the following websites.

<http://whatscookingamerica.net/History/PotatoHistory.htm>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/ukfs_news/hi/newsid_7231000/7231148.stm

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potato#Philippines>