

## Background

According to legend the first potatoes for planting purposes in South Africa came from Holland to provide food for mariners visiting the Cape. Since then the potato industry has grown to become one of the important food providers in South Africa.

Within the South African context, the gross value of potato production accounts for about 43 % of major vegetables, 15 % of horticultural products and 4 % of total agricultural production. On average domestic potato farmers harvest about R1,6 billion's worth of potatoes per year. The latter comprise about 1 700 potato farmers (including approximately 400 seed growers) and 66 600 farmworkers.

South Africa is not an important role-player in terms of world production. Major potato producing countries, namely China (15 %), Russian Federation (10 %), Poland (9 %), India (8 %) and the USA (8 %) jointly produce approximately half of the world total. South

Africa is only ranked the 31st largest potato producer, supplying 0,5 % of the world's total production.

Processing forms a significant part of the potato industry. In 1999 processing in South Africa involved 16 % of the total potato production worth R279 million at the farmgate level. The domestic processing sector uses potatoes primarily for three main processed products, namely crisps, frozen and fresh French fries. The South African processing industry grew by about 100 % over the past five years and is still expanding. The growth in the domestic processing sector is mainly the result of changing consumer needs.

Interestingly, potatoes have fewer calories and more nutrients than rice, pasta or bread. The crop also uses water relatively more efficiently than cereals during production—about twice as efficient as wheat and four times in the case of rice.

## Domestic production

Planting of potatoes is done almost throughout the year in different regions of South Africa (Fig. 1).



### Production regions

1 Northern Province 2 North West 3 Gauteng 4 Mpumalanga 5 Northern Cape 6 Western Free State 7 Eastern Free State 8 KwaZulu-Natal 9 Sandveld 10 Ceres 11 South Western Cape 12 South Cape 13 Eastern Cape 14 North Eastern Cape

FIG. 1 Potato producing regions of South Africa

However, the months November and December are avoided because of high temperatures combined with long day lengths which are not conducive to planting. Consequently, domestic consumers have almost continuous access to fresh potatoes.

Domestic potato production is mainly under irrigation. Potatoes are produced without supplementary irrigation (dryland) only during spring and early summer plantings in regions with a temperate climate and a proven reliable summer rainfall such as in the Mpumalanga Highveld and Eastern Free State.

Potato cultivars available in South Africa can be divided into three groups according to the length of their growing periods. In the group for early cultivars (less than 100 days) Vanderplank is the most popular cultivar. The medium-growing season cultivars (100 to

120 days) form the bulk of potatoes grown in South Africa of which BP1 and Up-to-Date are the most popular cultivars at present. Together BP1 and Up-to-Date constitute almost 77 % of the potatoes grown in the country. The third group of cultivars are those with a longer growing season (longer than 120 days) such as Sackfiller, Late Harvest, Kimberley's Choice and Cedara.

Potato cultivars are utilised according to the end-use product that they are destined for. For households, firm potato cultivars such as BP1 and Vanderplank are favoured when making salads because they do not break easily but the Up-to-Date cultivar is favoured for mashing and baking because it is brittle. In the processing industry cultivars that are frequently used in the manufacture of crisps are Hertha, Pimpernel, Lady Rosetta, Fiana, Crebella and Erntestoltz. Crisps represent approximately 40 % of the total domestic processed potato products. Vanderplank, BP1,

Up-to-Date and Hertha are used in the manufacturing of frozen French fries. The manufacturing of frozen French fries represents approximately 41 % of the total processed potato products. Vanderplank, Buffelspoort, BP1 and Up-to-Date are used for fresh French fries.

On average approximately 55 600 ha are planted to potatoes annually (Fig. 2). Dryland production comprises approximately 27 % of the total area planted but contributes only 17 % towards total production.



FIG. 2 Total production and yield of potatoes (1995–2001)

## Domestic consumption, marketing and trade

The average potato production is 157,8 million 10 kg pockets per year from 55 600 ha valued at R1,57 billion. Seed potatoes account for approximately 13 %

(21,1 mil. bags) of the total potato production, exports 7 % (10,3 mil. bags) while the rest, 80 % (126,4 mil. bags), is for consumption (Fig. 3).

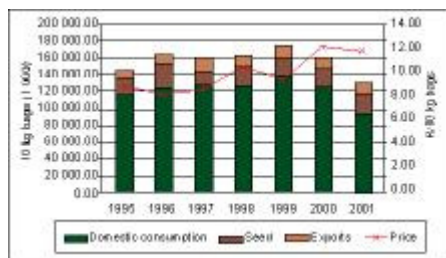


FIG. 3 Potato balance sheet (1995–2001)

Although statistics recorded potato imports into the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU), the quantity imported to South Africa is negligible.

Important export destinations are Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Mauritius. Trade opportunities for the potato industry are encouraging because African states south of the Sahara are increasingly turning to South Africa as a food source.

About 65 % of the total table crop is distributed through the fresh produce markets while the remaining 35 % represents direct sales from farmers to consumers (Fig. 4).

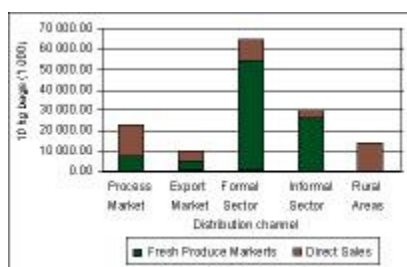


FIG. 4 Distribution channels of the total table potato crop (1995–2001)

## Important stakeholders

Potatoes South Africa is an industry-related organisation that, through its affiliates and linkages with other organisations, supports the potato industry to perform optimally by rendering services such as the organisational function, product and market development, communication, advertising, research and information. The services are financed by means of a voluntary 12,4c-levy per 10 kg pocket sold, as well as income derived from management services to several organisations and interest earned on investments.

Of special interest is that:

- The Potato Certification Service ensures that high-quality planting material is locally available by supervising and administering registrations to ensure that seed potato growers meet requirements with regard to certain bacterial diseases and viruses.
- Product Control for Agriculture (PROKON) ensures consumers have access to quality products by providing the processing sector with guidelines on how to comply with consumer needs in terms of quality, size, packaging and cultivars.
- Potato Exchange (Pty) Ltd develops and expands the local and foreign potato markets.

ARC-Roodeplaat Vegetable and Ornamental Plant Institute has the mandate to do research and transfer of technology on potatoes, vegetables and ornamentals. Potato research is undertaken for clients in the fields of crop science, cultivar development, plant protection and biotechnology. Potato research and transfer of technology is planned in conjunction with the Research Committee of Potatoes South Africa. Potato South Africa then funds the approved projects according to the requirements of the ARC.

Representative body	Organisation	Web page	Telephone number
Producers	Potatoes S.A	<a href="http://www.potatoes.co.za">www.potatoes.co.za</a>	+27 12 323 1696
Research	ARC-Roodeplaat	<a href="http://www.arc.agric.za">www.arc.agric.za</a>	+27 12 841 9611

## Acknowledgements

The following institutions/organisations/ persons supplied most of the information on which this brochure is based or contributed to verifying the facts:

- Potatoes South Africa
- Directorate Agricultural Statistics of the Department of Agriculture
- Agricultural Research Council (ARC)—Roodeplaat Vegetable and Ornamental Plant Institute.

January 2003

Published by Department of Agriculture  
Obtainable from Resource Centre, Directorate Agricultural Information Services, Private Bag X144, Pretoria 0001,  
South Africa