

TOP OF THE CROPS



The humble spud is in the spotlight

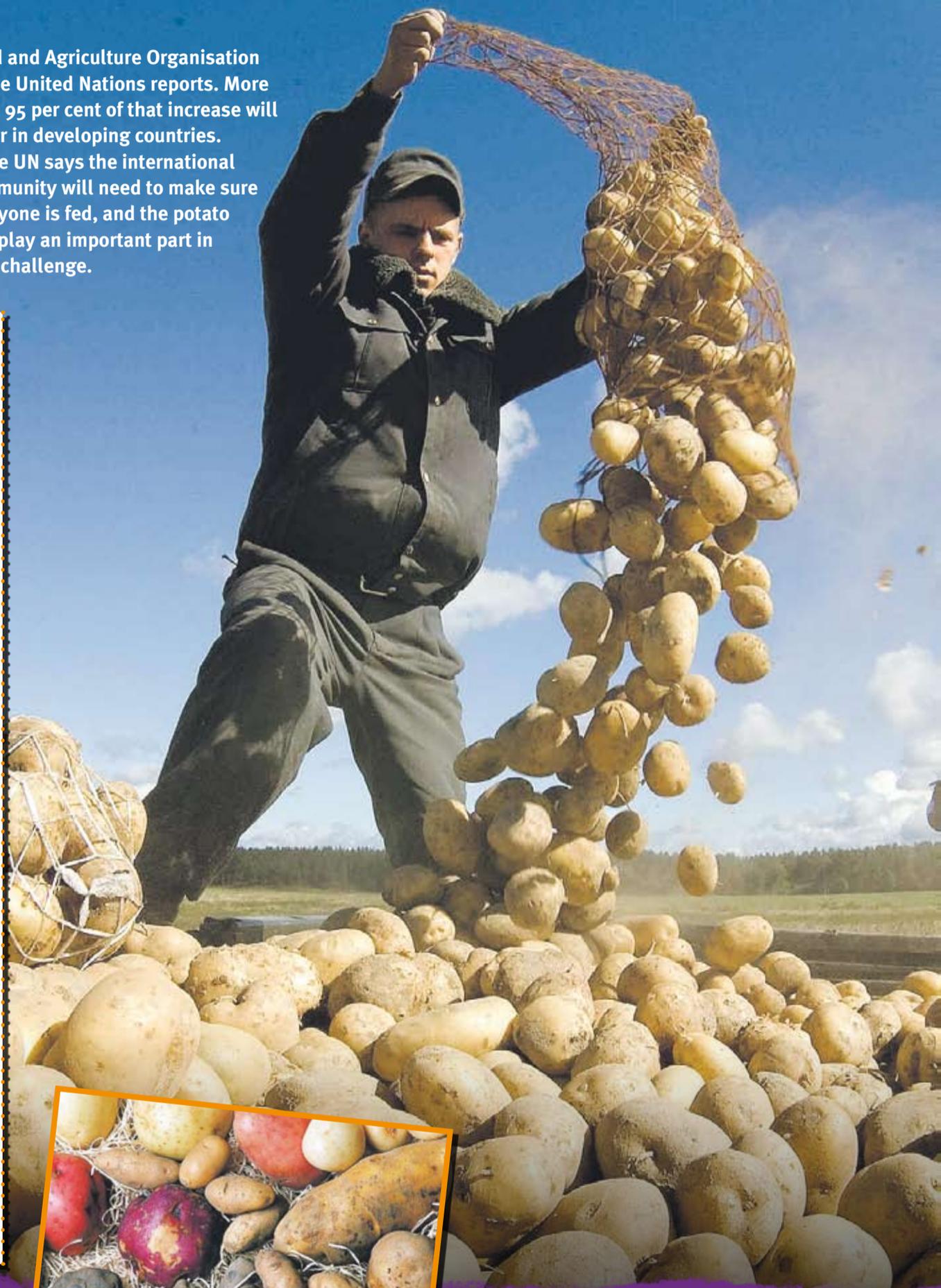
The United Nations declared 2008 the International Year of the Potato (IYP).

The global association wants to raise awareness of the importance of the potato and agriculture in general.

The world's population is expected to grow from about six billion to eight billion people by 2030, the

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations reports. More than 95 per cent of that increase will occur in developing countries.

The UN says the international community will need to make sure everyone is fed, and the potato will play an important part in that challenge.



DID YOU KNOW?

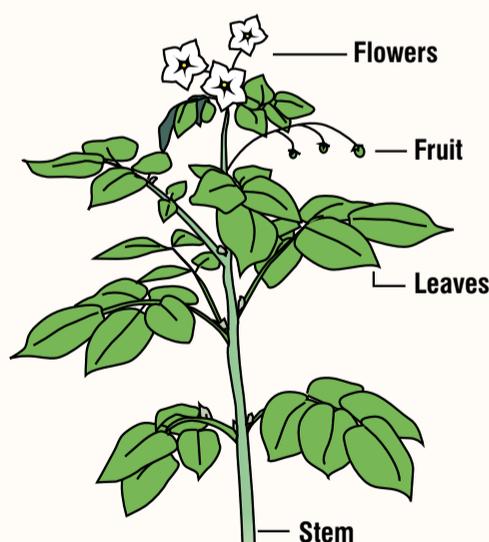
The International Potato Centre (CIP) in Lima, Peru, is selecting true potato seeds to send to a vault at the North Pole as part of an international effort to preserve key foods in case there is a global disaster. True potato seeds are found inside small, tomato-like fruits (see diagram below) on the leaves of certain potato varieties.

FAST FACTS

History: People in the Andes had been eating potatoes for about 8000 years before the Spanish introduced the vegetable to Europe in the 16th century. It's now the world's No.4 food crop. More than half of that total is harvested in developing countries.

Versatile: The potato produces more nutritious food more quickly on less land and in harsher climates than any other major crop, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations says.

Nutritious: Potatoes are rich in carbohydrates, which makes them a good source of energy. They have the highest protein content in the family of root and tuber crops. They are rich in vitamin C and potassium.



Net profit: The army in Belarus, in north-eastern Europe, often helps harvest potatoes on state-run farms (main picture). There are about 13,000 different varieties of potato (above), and (right) a bag of chips is Australia's third favourite snack.

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

- Potatoes are Australia's largest vegetable crop, accounting for about 20 per cent of total production.
- Tasmania produces about 35 per cent of the national potato crop.
- Potato consumption is declining, falling from about 68kg a person a year in 1997 to 63 kg a person a year in 2006. Ausveg Ltd suggests the fall could be a result of changing lifestyle patterns and concern about carbohydrate intake.
- Fried chips account for about 50 per cent of potato consumption in Australia.

