

## Africa: Potato production, 2007

country	area harvested (hectares)	quantity (tonnes)	yield (tonnes/ha)
Algeria	90 000	1 900 000	21.1
Angola	120 000	615 000	5.1
Benin	10	30	3.0
Burkina Faso	850	1 700	2.0
Burundi	10 000	26 693	2.7
Cameroon	45 000	142 000	3.2
Cape Verde	230	3 800	16.5
Central African Republic	390	1 000	2.6
Chad	5 200	28 000	5.4
Comoros	35	500	14.3
Congo	500	4 300	8.6
Democratic Republic of the Congo	20 000	92 000	4.6
Egypt	105 000	2 600 000	24.8
Eritrea	2 500	16 000	6.4
Ethiopia	73 095	525 657	7.2
Kenya	120 000	800 000	6.7
Lesotho	5 600	96 000	17.1
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	10 000	196 000	19.6
Madagascar	38 000	225 000	5.9
Malawi	185 000	2 200 402	11.9
Mali	4 100	90 000	22.0
Mauritania	430	2 200	5.1
Mauritius	550	13 000	23.6
Morocco	60 000	1 450 000	24.2
Mozambique	6 200	80 000	12.9
Niger	420	4 200	10.0
Nigeria	270 000	843 000	3.1
Réunion	230	5 300	23.0
Rwanda	133 000	1 200 000	9.0
Senegal	600	12 000	20.0
South Africa	58 000	1 972 391	34.0
Sudan	15 708	263 900	16.8
Swaziland	3 000	6 000	2.0
Tunisia	24 550	350 000	14.3
Uganda	93 000	650 000	7.0
United Republic of Tanzania	37 000	240 000	6.5
Zambia	1 050	14 500	13.8
Zimbabwe	2 250	36 000	16.0
<b>Africa</b>	<b>1 541 498</b>	<b>16 706 573</b>	<b>10.8</b>

## Top producers, 2007

<b>1</b> Egypt	<b>7</b> Nigeria
<b>2</b> Malawi	<b>8</b> Kenya
<b>3</b> South Africa	<b>9</b> Uganda
<b>4</b> Algeria	<b>10</b> Angola
<b>5</b> Morocco	<b>11</b> Ethiopia
<b>6</b> Rwanda	

## Africa

*Potatoes arrived late in Africa, around the turn of the 20th century. In recent decades, production has been in continual expansion, rising from 2 million tonnes in 1960 to a record 16.7 million tonnes in 2007. Potatoes are grown under a wide range of conditions – from irrigated commercial farms in Egypt and South Africa to intensively cultivated tropical highland zones of Eastern and Central Africa, where it is mainly a small farmer's crop.*

### 1. Egypt



The potato was introduced to Egypt during the 1800s, and large scale cultivation began during the First World War, when British colonial officials encouraged its production to feed their troops. After the war, however, expansion of potato growing was hampered by the poor quality of imported seed and by farmers' inexperience with the crop.

All that has changed: since 1961, Egypt's irrigated potato production – concentrated in the Nile River delta in the north – has expanded at a rate of more than 5 percent a year. Between 1990 and 2007, annual output rose from 1.6 million tonnes to some 2.6 million tonnes, making Egypt Africa's No. 1 potato producer.

Egypt also ranks among the world's top

MOSTAFA MOFTAH



*At a potato sorting factory in the Nile Delta, Egypt*

potato exporters – in 2004, exports totalled more than 380 000 tonnes of fresh potatoes and 18 000 tonnes of frozen potato products, destined mainly for markets in Europe.

### 2. Malawi



Potatoes came to East Africa in the 19th century, brought by missionaries and European colonialists. But the crop did not become important to Malawians until the 1960s, when production reached around 60 000 tonnes a year.

Now Malawi is sub-Saharan Africa's biggest potato producer, with a 2007 harvest of 2.2 million tonnes. The potato is grown mainly in highland areas in the country's southern and central regions, the most suitable areas being at altitudes of between 1 000 and 2 000 m and with more than 750 mm of annual rainfall. In parts of the



**Potato market  
in Kasungu, Malawi**

southern region, farmers can grow two crops each year. Potatoes are often planted with maize and beans during the main October-March season.

Only a tiny proportion of Malawi's potatoes is exported. Annual consumption has more than tripled over the past 15 years to a high 88 kg per capita.

### 3. South Africa



Dutch seafarers heading for East Asia probably brought the potato to South Africa in the 1600s (it is thought sailors encouraged potato growing at ports of call so they could re-supply with fresh tubers during ocean voyages).

South Africa's potato output has grown strongly over the past 15 years, from 1.2 million tonnes in 1990 to a record 1.97 million tonnes in 2007. In the same period, the potato farming area actually declined, from 63 000 ha to 58 000 ha. Most potatoes are grown on relatively large farms,

increasingly under irrigation, with yields averaging around 34 tonnes per hectare.

South Africa boasts a sophisticated seed potato industry and – thanks largely to the country's rapid rate of urbanization – a vibrant potato processing sector, which utilizes some 250 000 tonnes of potatoes per year, mainly for frozen French fries and crisps. Annual potato consumption is around 30 kg per person.

### 4. Algeria



After the introduction of *Solanum tuberosum* to Algeria in the mid-1800s, potatoes were grown mainly for export to French markets. By the time of national independence from France, in 1962, farmers were harvesting on average 250 000 tonnes a year, with about one third marked for export.

Since then, the potato has become an increasingly important crop for domestic consumption, with production in 2006 reaching a record 2.18 million tonnes. Potato

is grown over an area of 90 000 ha, and can be planted and harvested somewhere in Algeria in virtually any month of the year.

The main fresh potato growing areas are along the Mediterranean coast, where a mild climate permits year-round production. Potatoes are also grown at elevations of 500 m in hills and valleys between the coast and the Atlas Mountains, and in high plateau areas. Annual potato consumption in Algeria has increased from 35 kg in 1990 to around 57 kg in 2005.

## 5. Morocco



The potato was probably well established in Morocco before the country became a French protectorate in 1910. Over the following century – and particularly since independence in 1956 – production has expanded strongly, rising from about 150 000 tonnes in 1961 to a record 1.56 million tonnes in 2006. In the same period, yields grew from 10 tonnes per hectare to more than 26 tonnes.

By sheer weight, the potato is now Morocco's third biggest crop, after sugar beets and wheat, and second only to tomatoes among exported vegetables, with more than 40 000 tonnes shipped to Europe in 2005.

Except for a brief period during the winter months, potatoes are grown year round. Production of fresh potatoes is concentrated along the Atlantic Coast north and south of Casablanca, where a modified Mediterranean climate provides very favourable growing conditions. Potatoes are also grown in high, rugged parts of the Atlas mountains, at

elevations of more than 3 000 m. Moroccans consume an average of 42 kg per capita of potatoes a year.

## 6. Rwanda



The potato arrived with German soldiers and Belgian missionaries in Rwanda in the early 20th century. Today, *ibirayi* – derived from *uburayi* (“that which comes from Europe”) – is the country's second most important crop after plantains and, in the sub-Saharan region, Rwanda is the third largest potato producer.

Since 1961, Rwanda's potato output has risen from less than 100 000 tonnes to 1.3 million tonnes in 2005. The harvest in 2007 was only slightly smaller. Potatoes grow well in several parts of the country – mainly above elevations of 1 800 m – and some areas grow two crops a year. Most of the potato sector consists of small family farms that intercrop potato with beans and maize, and yields average almost 10 tonnes per hectare.

The potato underpins Rwanda's food security. Annual consumption is a very high 125 kg per person, making potato the country's second most important source of calorie intake after cassava.



## 7. Nigeria



In the potato world, Africa's most populous country, Nigeria, stands out: it is the fourth biggest producer of potato in sub-Saharan Africa, and has almost as much land under potato as Germany. Potato output has grown sevenfold over the past decade, reaching 840 000 tonnes in 2007.

The main potato growing area is the Jos plateau, where altitudes ranging from 1 200 to 1 400 m and summer temperatures that rarely exceed 35°C make for a temperate climate well suited to potato production. However, productivity is constrained by a lack of suitable varieties, and high land and labour costs. In fact, Nigeria records one of the world's lowest average potato yields, little more than 3.1 tonnes per hectare.

Potato consumption is also very low, at around 3.2 kg per capita per year. However, Nigeria's taste for potatoes, especially in rapidly growing urban areas, is increasing: since 2000, imports of raw and processed potatoes have risen from less than 9 000 tonnes to 40 000 tonnes a year.

## 8. Kenya



Introduced to East Africa by British farmers in the 1880s, the potato has grown in importance – both as a staple food and as a source of farmer incomes – over the past 30 years. Measured by quantity harvested, it now ranks as the country's No. 2 food crop, after maize, with production in 2007 totalling around 800 000 tonnes.

The potato in Kenya is grown mainly by

small scale farmers, many of them women, although some larger-scale growers specialize in commercial production. Cultivation is concentrated in highland areas of from 1 200 to 3 000 m above sea level.

Nearly all of Kenya's potatoes are consumed locally, at an average rate of almost 25 kg per capita a year. *Kiazi* is relished not only by the rural people who grow them, but by higher-income urban dwellers as well. While in some African countries potato is considered a "poor person's food", in Kenya it is considered a high quality and prestigious food item.

## 9. Uganda

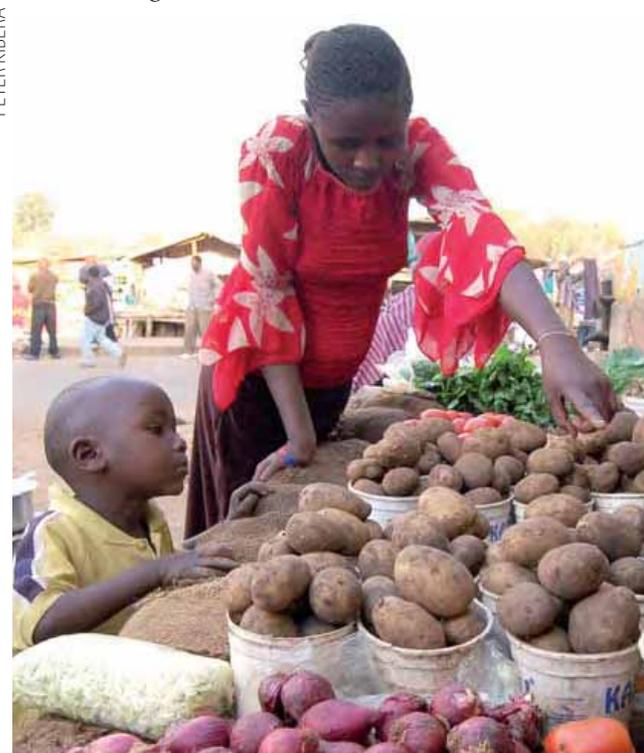


Potato cultivation reached Uganda early in the 1900s, thanks probably to missionaries from the Congo. By mid-century, the tubers were widely grown in the country's cool highlands – in fact, the plant was so prolific in some areas that it was regarded as a weed.

In the 1960s, the Ugandan Department of Agriculture launched a potato development programme that helped boost average yields to 10 tonnes per hectare. Potato output topped 350 000 tonnes in the 1970s, but dropped sharply during the widespread civil strife of the following decade.

Potatoes are  
popular in Nairobi

PETER KIBERA



Since 1990, potato production has rebounded, rising from 224 000 tonnes to a record 650 000 tonnes in 2007. In the same period, the area under potato tripled to an estimated 90 000 ha. Almost half of the national harvest comes from the intensely farmed Kabale highlands, which lie at 2 000 m above sea level, some 400 km southwest of Kampala.

## 10. Angola



During the early 16th century, ships from Portugal took both potato and sweet potato to what was to become Portuguese West Africa. While sweet potato was widely adopted by local farmers, potato growing was confined to the Bié Plateau, where altitude and the Antarctic ocean current produce a moderate climate.

When Angola gained its independence in 1975, the country's annual potato production was about 32 000 tonnes, most of it grown in the highlands of Huambo province.

Production stagnated during the ensuing 27 years of civil war but boomed once peace was restored. FAO data shows that between 2002 and 2007 the area under potato tripled and total output more than doubled, from 260 000 tonnes to a record of 615 000 tonnes.

Annual potato consumption is estimated at 15 kg per capita and is expected to grow rapidly with urbanization. However, production is constrained by low average yields of 5 tonnes per hectare, high post-harvest losses and dependence on imported seed potato. To satisfy demand, Angola also imports potatoes from South Africa.

## 11. Ethiopia



A German immigrant is credited with introducing the potato to Ethiopia in 1858. Over the following decades, farmers in Ethiopia's highlands began cultivating the new tuber – known as *denech* – as an “insurance policy” against cereal crop failures.

Among African countries, Ethiopia has possibly the greatest potential for potato production: 70 percent of its arable land – mainly in highland areas above 1 500 m – is believed suitable for the potato. Since the highlands are also home to almost 90 percent of Ethiopia's population, the potato could play a key role in ensuring national food security.

At present, potatoes are still widely regarded as a secondary crop, and annual per capita consumption is estimated at just 5 kg. However, potato growing is expanding steadily: FAO estimates that production has increased from 280 000 tonnes in 1993 to around 525 000 tonnes in 2007.