



منظمة الأغذية
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للأمم المتحدة

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粮食及
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Продовольственная и
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Organización
de las
Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

CONFERENCE

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EVALUATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE POTATO (IYP, 2008)

1. Resolution 4/2005 was adopted during the Thirty-third Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in November 2005. This resolution led to the Declaration by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, at its Sixtieth Session in December 2005, of 2008 as the International Year of the Potato (IYP) in order to focus world attention on the importance of the potato in providing food security and alleviating poverty.
2. The resolution, submitted by the Government of Peru and co-sponsored by the Latin American and Caribbean Group of Countries (GRULAC), invited FAO to facilitate the implementation of the IYP, in collaboration with governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research centres (CGIAR) and other organizations of the United Nations system, as well as non-governmental organizations and private sector stakeholders.
3. The FAO Plant Production and Protection Division (AGP) led the IYP implementation process in collaboration with the FAO Communication and Information Division (KCI) and the FAO Internal IYP Task Force members. Guidance for the implementation of IYP was provided by an Informal International Steering Committee, established as an *ad hoc* group of partners including Permanent Representatives to FAO, major international research organizations – the International Potato Center (CIP) and Bioversity International – and selected civil society and private sector organizations.
4. At the biennial Conference of FAO in November 2007, Member countries noted with appreciation that FAO was reacting with commitment to the UN General Assembly's invitation to play a lead role in facilitating the implementation of the IYP and endorsed the need for more extra-budgetary financial resources to support the IYP Secretariat and ensure the success of IYP 2008 both at country and regional levels.

5. IYP implementation at a time of rising staple food prices proved timely. This report describes IYP achievements, at national, regional and international levels. This report looks beyond 2008 and provides suggestions for consideration by the international community, institutions and policy-makers on how to stimulate efficient and productive sustainable potato-based systems and potato industries that are essential for economic development and for an improved quality of life for much of the world's population; an essential element for attaining the UN Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger and poverty.

6. The potato should not be looked at in isolation but within the framework of the complexities of rural societies, agriculture and food systems. Its products and associated festivals and traditions have great significance for the world's cultural heritage. Potato cultivation and post-harvest activities constitute an important source of employment and income in rural areas and for women in developing countries. It adapts to a wide range of uses: as a food security crop, as cash crop, and as a source of starch for many industrial uses. However, a number of constraints directly affect potato production and potato-based systems, including lack of good quality planting material and of potato varieties that are more resistant to pests, diseases, water scarcity and climate change, and to farming systems that do not make optimum use of natural resources. Responding to these challenges is essential for sustainable development of the potato sector, for long-term food security, human nutrition and poverty alleviation.

7. The International Year of the Potato ended on 31 December 2008. However, for the billions of people who choose potato as a staple food and for millions of farmers who produce it, every year is the "year of the potato". The positive effect of the year's activities will continue to be felt. IYP partners have broadened their networks. Governments and donors have enhanced awareness of the need to support new potato initiatives. A vast number of publications that grew out of IYP events in 2008 are now available, and the IYP Web site will continue to provide a global audience with information on the International Year and the potato.

8. The Governments of Ireland, Spain, Italy and Switzerland and private sector partners, McCain Foods Ltd and Simplot Company, among others, contributed generously to the multi-donor IYP Trust Fund. Total pledges and contributions (in cash and kind) amounted to about US\$1 million.

9. ***Raising awareness, interest and understanding.*** In the area of raising awareness, interest and understanding of the constraints and opportunities related to potato production, consumption and marketing, activities have involved farmers, farmers' associations and congresses, NGOs, the private sector, civil leaders and policy-makers. More than 300 activities have been carried out, including national conventions, scientific conferences, seminars, training courses and school events. IYP has been promoted through radio and TV campaigns and programmes, scientific and popular press articles, brochures, calendars, press briefings and many other promotional activities. NGOs and the private sector played an active role in observing IYP as well as many segments of civil society. Ministers of Agriculture and related ministries as well as senior officials in several countries participated actively in promoting IYP, and their ministries contributed generously to the cause. Potato festivals contributed considerably to promoting and disseminating activities in potato-growing areas. They included educational activities, music concerts, dance performances, art exhibits and culinary demonstrations, often with the participation of national embassies and dignitaries.

10. ***Information generation and dissemination.*** Communication was an important part of the implementation of IYP. FAO, through its IYP Steering Committee and in collaboration with CIP, helped mobilize action to stimulate interest in potato-related issues through the formulation of a concept paper. The paper included a communication plan which was shared with all FAO member nations, along with guidelines for national organizing committees, both of which were posted on the Internet. Through the plan, the Steering Committee at FAO developed and promoted communication and information material in several languages. The purpose of the conceptual framework of the implementation of IYP was to facilitate success by transforming communication

ideas into action and integrating and facilitating the coordination of the communication efforts of the International Year and linking communications with resource mobilization.

Some 20 countries and several organizations initiated major communication and information exchange activities. The IYP secretariat produced and disseminated briefing materials that were distributed at the official launching ceremony for IYP, held at UN headquarters in New York on 18 October 2007, and at the sessions of the FAO Conference, Council and Committee on Agriculture (COAG). Senior managers of the FAO Agriculture Department accepted invitations from major print media, radio and television chains for interviews on issues, challenges and options for sustainable potato production as well as on the expected impacts of IYP implementation.

A key part of the IYP implementation strategy was the official Web site, www.potato2008.org, which recorded some 800 000 visits during the year. The Web site contains more than 900 pages of information in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. More than 60 000 other Web sites had links to the IYP site and it rated highly in Internet searches on “potato”.

As part of IYP’s broad communication and public outreach programme, the secretariat also published an end-of-year review describing the achievements of the International Year and providing detailed information on the potato. In addition, an end-of-year celebration was held at FAO headquarters in December. It included CIP’s travelling exhibit, “Odyssey of the Potato”, the winning entries the IYP Photography Contest, paintings by Japanese artist Tadayuki Noguchi, and displays in French and Italian. The secretariat organized a visit to the exhibition by more than 350 schoolchildren from the Rome area. Through the guided tour, entitled *Coltivare per crescere* (“grow to grow”), they learned about the potato’s history, its nutritional benefits and social and cultural significance, and about agriculture in general.

11. **National committees and events.** A key objective of the International Year was the creation of national committees that would promote IYP observance and, in developing countries, lay down the foundations for long-term potato development programmes. During 2008, with assistance from more than 20 national committees, thousands of scientists, researchers and policy-makers, as well as students, NGO representatives, business leaders, industrial potato growers and family farmers gathered in meeting rooms, convention halls and universities around the world to participate in the conferences, seminars and workshops organized for IYP. The meetings addressed the latest results in potato research and development and the importance of technology and biotechnology in potato production, and provided a chance to debate future directions in the production and trade of potato. The meetings also provided an opportunity for participants to expand their professional networks. Along with the scientific- and policy-focused events were the festivals and cultural events designed to raise awareness with the widest audience possible. IYP implementation extended from research labs and ministerial meetings to classrooms, museums, tourism offices and, of course, farmers’ fields and the kitchens of more than a billion homes.

12. **Global events.** All FAO member nations had the opportunity to observe the International Year through their Regional Conferences in 2008. The IYP Exhibit (pop-up, chronoexpo, posters, brochure, factsheets, plastic potatoes and videos) and background materials on IYP were presented at each of the five FAO regions: Near East (Cairo, March), Africa (Nairobi, June), Latin America and the Caribbean (Brasilia, April) and in Europe (Innsbruck, Austria, June). Other major global IYP events included:

- IYP Launch and Side Event – UN Secretariat (18 October 2007),
- Potato Exhibit - UN Secretariat and FAO Council and Conference (October – November 2007),
- Potato Science for the Poor – Challenges for the New Millennium. Cuzco, Peru (25-28 March 2008),
- Potato Global Conference – New Delhi, India (December 2008),

- IYP End-of-year celebration (12 December 2008) and Potato Exhibition – at FAO, Rome, Italy (December 2008 - January 2009).

The full IYP calendar is available on the IYP Web site at: www.potato2008.org

13. ***International dialogue on challenges and opportunities for the potato.*** The outcomes and recommendations of the IYP global events were taken to major international meetings of potato scientists and professionals, including:

- 3rd International Late Blight Conference organized by CIP under the auspices of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, held in Beijing, China, on 3-6 April 2008,
- Southeast Asia Potato Conference organized by FAO in Bangkok, Thailand, on 6 May 2008,
- 17th Triennial Conference of the European Association for Potato Research (EAPR), held in Brasov, Romania, on 6-10 July 2008,
- “Improving International Potato Production” Conference hosted by the Scottish Crop Research Institute, held on 8 August 2008 in Dundee, Scotland,
- International Workshop on Strengthening the Potato Value Chain in developing countries jointly organized by the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) under the auspices of FAO in Rome, Italy, on 10-12 November 2008,
- 23rd Congress of Latin American Potato Producers’ Association (ALAP), held in Mar de Plata, Argentina, on 30 November-5 December 2008,
- 7th World Potato Congress held in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 22-25 March 2009.

14. ***World Photography Contest.*** The IYP World Photography Contest “Focus on a Global Food” was conceived as part of a broad outreach campaign. The competition highlighted the role of the potato as a source of food, employment and income in developing countries. It sensitized society through photographs illustrating the importance of potato in the fight against hunger and poverty. More than 2 000 entries from 90 countries qualified for the contest that was judged by a panel of professional photographers and potato experts.

15. ***Recommendations.*** The implementation of IYP confirmed that potato will continue to play an increasingly important role as a global food crop, and billions of people around the world will continue to depend on potato as a staple food. The sustainable increase of potato production – a key to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger and poverty – will require continuing reflection and debate on issues and challenges facing potato-based systems and their environments. The joint FAO-CIP Global Potato Conference held in Cuzco, Peru, in March 2008, produced recommendations for potato development in three distinct economic typologies in the developing world, as outlined in the World Bank's *World Development Report 2008*:

- ***Agriculture-based economies:*** Economies still dependent on agriculture, mainly in Africa, are characterized by a concentration of poverty in rural areas where potatoes are grown for home consumption first and then for sale to local markets. A priority for these countries is research and technology sharing to support a sustainable productivity revolution and to link producers to domestic and regional commodity markets. To increase productivity, research-for-development needs to provide breakthroughs in overcoming intractable problems, such lack of clean seed potato, diseases such as late blight and viruses, and storage problems.
- ***Transforming economies:*** In many countries of Africa, Asia and the Near East, potato systems are characterized by very small, intensively managed farms and by a widening rural-urban poverty gap. The challenge for those countries is to manage intensive systems sustainably, increasing productivity while minimizing health and environmental risks. Increases in agricultural productivity is a practical strategy for alleviating poverty in countries such as China, which has named potatoes specifically as a vehicle for poverty reduction, and in India, which also has declared its intention to double potato output in the next five to 10 years.
- ***Urbanized economies:*** In the urbanized economies typical of Latin America, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, where agriculture plays a reduced economic role, the challenge is to ensure the social and environmental sustainability of potato-based systems, and to link small

potato producers to new food markets. In many countries, potato output has increased significantly over the past three decades, but increased productivity has been transformed into income. Innovative programmes are needed to connect small-scale potato growers to urban markets, both domestic and international. That involves developing new product-based market information systems, integrated pest management and improved post-harvest management.

In all regions, appropriate government policies to support sustainable potato development will be required to promote the development and use of improved potato varieties and technologies. The provision of infrastructure and accessibility to inputs, credit and other incentives in order to facilitate farmers' adoption of recommended practices is equally important.

16. ***Beyond the IYP 2008.*** The International Year of the Potato has helped raise awareness of the potato and support for its development. In particular, it has highlighted the contribution that the potato is already making to development and food security in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where potatoes have become an important staple food and cash crop. But further progress requires both increases in the productivity, profitability and sustainability of potato-based farming systems and industry, and a stronger commitment by the international community to agricultural and rural development. Beyond 2008, IYP will serve as a catalyst for potato development programmes worldwide that can make a real contribution to the fight against hunger and poverty.