

Fighting Poverty with Paintings and Potatoes

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Potatoes are the world's most important tuber crop, a food staple for more than a billion people. Recognizing how many people in developing countries depend on this prolific crop for their very survival, the United Nations declared 2008 the International Year of the Potato.

In the Andean region of Peru and Bolivia, where the potato was first cultivated more than 7,000 years ago, the PROINPA Foundation, a SANREM CRSP partner, is promoting academic and cultural activities showing the significance of this highly nutritious food. Within this framework, the renowned Bolivian artist Roberto Mamani Mamani has joined PROINPA in the celebration with a series of paintings titled, "Potato: An Andean treasure." The pictures are dedicated to the cultural, historic, and economic value of the potato and pay homage to the men and women who conserve and cultivate this invaluable crop. All proceeds from sale of the paintings will be used for conservation of native potato genetic diversity. Details are online at <http://proinpa.org/potato2008/>

"Preserving the amazing diversity of Andean crops, especially the potato, is critical to guarantee food security and livelihoods in Bolivia and Peru," said Jeffrey Alwang, professor of agricultural and applied economics at Virginia Tech and principal investigator for one of SANREM's five long-term research projects. "Sale of these paintings will help PROINPA with its mission of sustaining the region's biodiversity."

The potato is easy and inexpensive to cultivate, adapting well to marginal environments such as poor soil and a short growing season. The International Potato Center (CIP) in Lima, Peru, a partner in two SANREM long-term research projects in South America, reports that potatoes produce more food on less land faster than any other crop: One hectare of potatoes can yield the nutritional value of 2 to 4 hectares of grain and twice as much protein as wheat. A single medium-sized potato contains half the daily adult requirement of vitamin C, more protein than corn, and nearly twice the calcium. Potato is also low in fat. All of these traits make the potato a valuable source of nutrition and income for poor people in developing countries.