

Chip of the new block

A new variety of potato will add crunch to your crisps

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AT SHIMLA'S Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI), director S.K. Pandey is giving final touches to a presentation that will make an appearance at a Udaipur workshop on September 8. The excitement is palpable. A new potato variety that will cater to the specific needs of the Indian food processing industry—mainly potato chips—will be released at this three-day workshop to be organised by the Indian Potato Association.

The yet to be named variety is said to be an improved version of all existing ones, including Kufri Chipsona-I and Kufri Chipsona-II—the potatoes that are generally being used by the processing industry because of their low sugar and high dry content.

The search for this new look potato took eight years, both in lab and field trials. "The potato chips industry needs varieties with more than 20 percent dry matter and reducing the sugar level," says Pandey.

Other qualities that the industry looks for are shape, size, colour, flavour and texture. The new variety, Pandey hopes, will gain the affection of the processing industry. He hopes farmers will embrace it too considering that it has a significantly high yield—upto 30 tonnes per hectare—and a long shelf life.

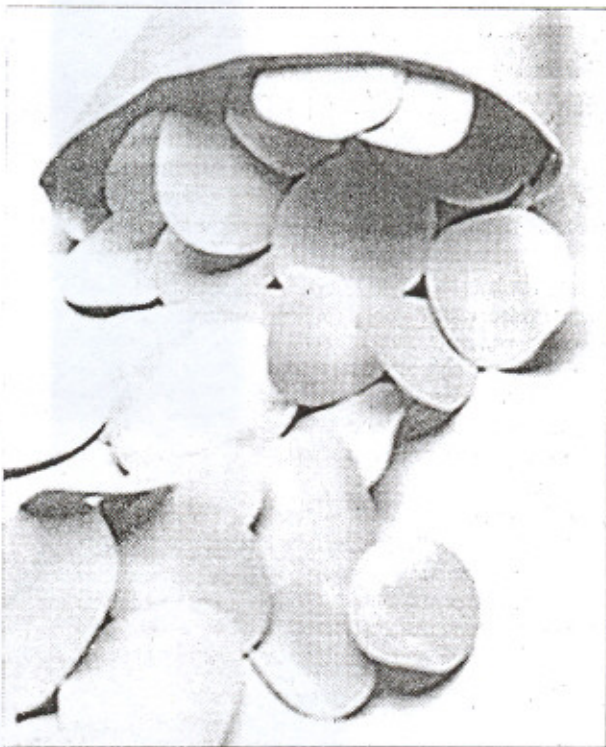
At present Kufri Jyoti and Kufri Lauvkar and three hybrid varieties—Kufri Arun, Kufri Shailja and Kufri Pushkar—are also used for chips and french fries. These new hybrid varieties can be grown in Tamil Nadu and Kerala—states not known for potato cultivation.

The CPRI director, meanwhile, says that though the processing industry in India has a long way to go,

still it spells hope for farmers. Despite being a fast growing sector in the world potato economy, only five percent of the country's potato production is consumed by the processing industry. In countries like the US, 56 per cent of the potato produce goes to the processing industry. In Netherland it is 55 per cent, Germany 40 per cent and UK about 30 per cent. In India where the processing industry is not so firmly entrenched, frequent

Till date, the CPRI has released 38 varieties of potatoes for different climactic zones in the country. The area under potato cultivation has increased to 1.2 million hectares but productivity is still low—1,800 to 1,900 per hectare as compared to countries like Holland and the US which have varieties with very high yields.

Yet, some states like Punjab, UP, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and



potato gluts trigger huge losses for farmers. The problem of storage for this perishable crop is a big challenge for India.

Now, says Pandey, potato processing has provided hope to farmers who have no storage facilities and face ruin in the times of a bumper crop. "We are gearing up to meet such a challenge. Only those varieties of potato are being developed which are fit for processing and have useful nutrient and a longer shelf life."

Rajasthan have made significant contributions in potato cultivation. Farmers in Punjab, UP and Maharashtra in fact get two crops a year. The Lahaul valley in Himachal has become famous for potato seed production.

"We are working on some projects to inject valuable nutrients, especially proteins in the potatoes. Simultaneously, there is research on to control bacterial infections and make new varieties disease resistant," says Pandey.