

The San Luis Valley secret to potatoes

Colorado has unique climates perfect for growing many types of fruits and vegetables. One such vegetable grown here is the potato, and the second largest fresh potatoes region in the United States is in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. Colorado has a long history of growing potatoes, dating all the way back to the 1800s.

The San Luis Valley is located between the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo mountain ranges in south-central Colorado. Nutrient rich soil comes from the valley's history as an ancient lake bed and annual snowmelt from the surrounding mountains provides pure water. This along with 350 days on sunshine is the secret this valley holds to growing happy potatoes.

Being in a high altitude protects the potatoes from pests and disease. The many days of sunshine and minerals in the soil provide sun soaked nutrients for

the potatoes. Farmers take growing very seriously and are always using the latest technology to ensure potatoes safely get from the field to your plate.

The San Luis Valley boasts about 150 hard working farmers and 20 different warehouses that pack and ship out potatoes across Colorado and the whole United States. Potato farmers always try to save water and have other good agricultural practices to make sure they are growing quality vegetables. The San Luis Valley raises nearly 60,000 acres of potatoes, enough to feed nearly 17.5 million people each year.

The San Luis Valley takes pride in the potatoes they grow so much, they host a Potato Festival every September to celebrate the growing season. The festival includes food and craft vendors, potato farm tours, a free concert, and of course all the delicious ways you can eat potatoes.



A field of potatoes in the San Luis Valley



Loading potatoes in a truck.



Potatoes being sorted by hand.

Farming is in my blood...Farming is just who I am

Hello, I'm Coulter Myers and I live on a 1,165-acre farm where we raise 665 acres of fresh market potatoes, along with 560 acres of malt barley, mostly for Miller Coors Brewing Company. I've grown up on the farm and have been working with my dad since I was born, well maybe not that day, but pretty close.

I've loved farming since I was young and can't wait to someday have a permanent place on the family farm when I get the opportunity after college. I will be the fifth generation on my farm. My favorite part of farming is riding in the equipment, even operating it with the help of my dad or grandpa.

I have two younger brothers who also want to help on the farm. Sometimes one of us will go with my grandpa and one with my dad. It helps that my brother Corbin really prefers the potato trucks and I like to ride in the tractors; they are my favorite. I really like to watch the air seeder plant barley in the spring.

There is always something to do on our farm. Sprinklers have to be checked and started. Tractors need ran, trucks need cleaned out. Our potato harvester is huge and takes a lot of work to keep it running right. I'm always ready to go and help with anything that lets me go on the farm. I can already feel farming in my blood.

I am in my second year of 4-H and show market lambs. They take a lot of time and work. I practice showing



Coulter Myers standing on a tractor.

them almost every day. They have to be exercised by running them. They are fed special feed rations to make them gain the proper weight and muscle. The local fair is where I will show them in market class and sheep showmanship. I have learned a lot about how to feed and show lambs and look forward to having success at the fair. I've learned that you never win the show on show day, you win with the work you do at home.

As you can see with four generations of strong farmers guiding my way, farming is just in my blood!

By Coulter Myers, 10, Center

Love living on the farm



Ellaree Rockey standing near a potato field on her farm in Center, Colorado.

My name is Ellaree and I am 11 years old. I live in Center, Colorado on a potato farm. Center is located in the middle of the San Luis Valley. I also show pigs and steers at the county fair. I love living on the farm and showing livestock. Sometimes it is a lot of work, but the work pays off. I will tell you more about how living on the farm is fun and a great opportunity for me.

Our farm is a third-generation farm and we grow specialty potatoes and potato seed. Specialty means they are all different colors. Our most popular potato are fingerlings. Fingerlings are longer and skinnier than regular potatoes.

On the farm I do lots of fun work with my dad and uncle. One of my favorite things to do is to help drive the tractors. Another one of my favorite things to do is to clean out the ditches when the water gets turned on in the spring. I also really like to go into the field and check on

the potato plants to see how they are growing. When we harvest the potatoes from the fields, I get to help sort them. We rotate the crops we plant in the field from year to year. Rotating crops improves soil and plant health. One crop in the rotation is a cover crop that cows get to eat. Another crop we grow is Quinoa. When the Quinoa plants bloom and turn purple it is fun to take pictures because it is so pretty.

When I get older I want to come back and help run the farm. When I come back and run the farm I want to buy more land for the potatoes. I also want to raise pigs so the kids in 4-H and FFA can buy their pigs from me to show. I want to come back to be the next generation that works on my family's farm.

I think people who don't live on farms should visit a farm so they can see how people in rural areas live. I like when we give tours of our farm. I have friends who live in the city who always want to come to the farm to learn and have fun in the country.

I have been showing livestock for four years. It is really exciting to show pigs and steers. Even though it is a lot of work, I am doing

something that I love. I show my animals at a couple of jackpot shows, which are practice shows, and at the county fair. The county fair is the big show. I work all summer to be able to show my animals. Every day I tie up my steers, wash and brush them, and put them in a barn where they stay cool. The pigs get walked every day for exercise and I also feed them to make them grow. I really like showing pigs; they are my favorite. Being able to show livestock is one of the best things about living on the farm.

Living on a farm is educational, fun, and exciting. Even though I can not go to the mall or big things in the city, living on the farm is the best because I get to do many other things like drive tractors and show animals. I love living on the farm.

By Ellaree Rockey, 11, Center



Ellaree with one of her pigs at a show.

How do potatoes get to your plate?



Madeline Mitchell standing on a potato truck at her farm in Monte Vista.

Have you ever wondered where potatoes come from? My name is Madeline and my family grows potatoes in the San Luis Valley of Colorado.

It all starts from seed potatoes. Potatoes are unique because you can plant potatoes and not "actual seeds." First, we have to cut our seed with the seed cutter. Then we need to prepare the soil. Next, we plant the seed in the fields.

Throughout most of the summer we have to start and stop sprinklers every day. Watering and fertilizing are pretty much the most important thing for the crops. When the potatoes reach the end of their growing season, it's time to kill the vines. Killing vines is also important because it toughens up the skins for harvest.

Once the vines die (which takes a while) it is time for harvest. The first step is pretty simple. We take the digger and the harvester to the first field you want to harvest. To pick which field we want to harvest we have to make sure the potatoes skins are tough enough and that it is not too wet and not too dry. Now it's time to start harvest.

Harvest is a time of early rising and going to bed late. Each day is a long day of the harvester following the digger. The harvester can't do its job without a potato truck because the truck carries the potatoes. When they get to the warehouse they get bagged and then shipped to the stores. Finally, somebody buys them, cooks them, and boom they're right there ready for you to eat!

It all starts from seed potatoes. Potatoes are unique because you can plant potatoes not "actual seeds."

I hope you enjoy potatoes as much as I do. I also hope you learned a little bit about farming. I love farming with my dad, grandpa, and uncle and I am pretty sure I will never be a city girl.

By Madeline Mitchell, 9, Monte Vista

Potatoes are as good for your body as they are for your taste buds

In addition to the dozens of ways to enjoy potatoes, they are also packed with nutrients your body will enjoy too.

One medium sized potato is just 110 calories with zero fat, sodium, and cholesterol, and is also gluten free. The fat in potatoes may be low, but for vitamins, it's quite the opposite!

Potatoes contain 45 percent daily value of vitamin C, and other vitamins and minerals such as thiamin, riboflavin, folate, magnesium, phosphorous, iron, and zinc. Potatoes also contain a great amount of carbohydrates, which is important fuel for your brain and muscles.

In the San Luis Valley alone, there are more than 70 different varieties of potatoes grown. Below is just a small list of ones you can enjoy today

Russets: Are the most common variety grown in Colorado. They have an oval shape with brown color. Their earthy flavor and light texture and are ideal for fluffy mashed potatoes.

Yellows: Have a variety of sizes and are usually long shaped. They have golden skin and yellow or golden flesh. They have a rich and buttery taste great for grilling or roasting.

Fingerlings: The perfect bite sized potato! Fingerlings come in fun colors like red, orange, or purple and have a nutty and buttery flavor that is delicious in pan frying or roasting.

Reds: Red potatoes have a lovely red or rose skin with a firm and smooth inside. This sweet flavored potato is perfect for salad, soups, and stews because they maintain their shape while cooking.

Other (colorful) varieties: Some unique potatoes you might not spot everywhere are ones like Purple Majesty, Mountain Rose, and Kennebec. These potatoes have a deep purple and blue skin and firm flesh great for roasting or baking.

In addition to good nutrition, the potato is one of the most diverse vegetables and can be enjoyed in hundreds of dishes across the world.



Fingerling potatoes



Russet potatoes



Red potatoes



Yellow potatoes



Other potato varieties

The Facts

Most of the materials in landfills is food (22%). That's more than metals, plastic, paper, or electronics. People are also surprised to know that about 40% of the food farmers and producers work hard to get to our plates is lost or wasted. The USDA Agricultural Research Service estimates that most food wasted by consumers is fruits and vegetables (39%), followed by dairy (17%), and then meat (14%).

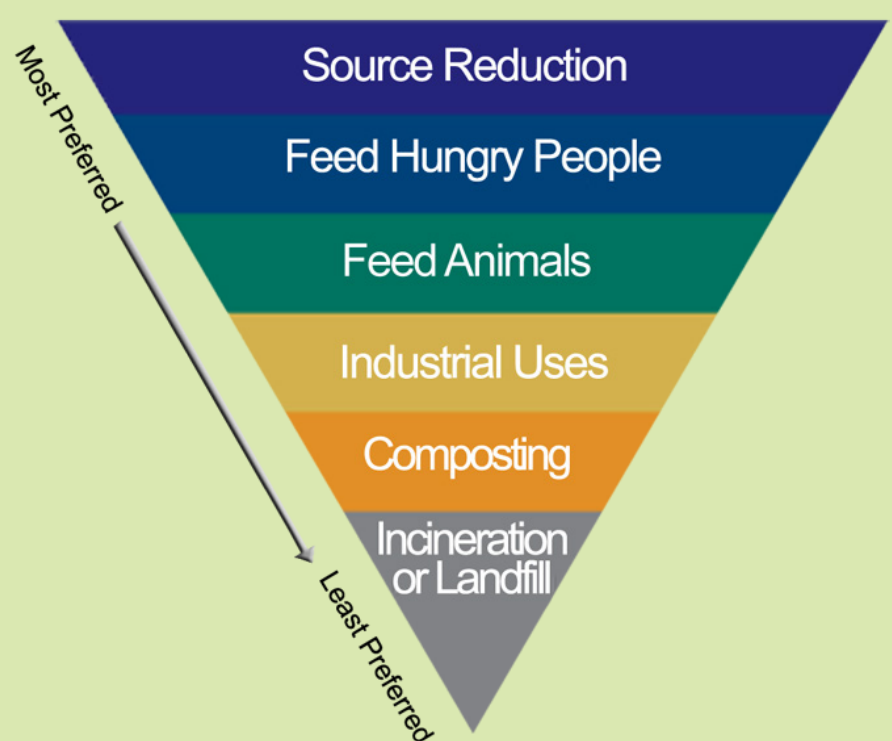
Federal Initiative to Keep Food Out of Landfills

A few years ago, the USDA and EPA announced the first ever national goal to prevent food loss and waste by 50% by 2030. In 2010, the USDA estimated that about 220 pounds per person go to waste, so the goal aims to reduce waste by half to 110 pounds per person. Food loss and waste presents many opportunities for collaboration across the food system, including connecting farmers to consumers and bridging the urban-rural divide.

Food Recovery Hierarchy

The Food Recovery Hierarchy provides a menu of options for reducing food loss and waste. In general, the top tiers are more preferred environmentally speaking, while the lower tiers provide fewer environmental benefits. However, every community is different and strategies can be customized to fit each situation, organization, and region.

Food Recovery Hierarchy



Tips for Home

What can YOU and your family do at home?

Tip #1: Store It! - Find out the best place for storing fruits and veggies. Sometimes it's outside the fridge, like with potatoes. Keep spuds in a cool, dark place and see additional tips on the next page.

Tip #2: Wash It When You Use It! - Wash fruits and vegetables just before you use them, not before you store them. This will help them stay fresh longer.

Tip #3: Plan It! - Plan your weekly meals before going to the store.

Tip #4: Eat It! - Plan an "eat the leftovers" night each week.

Agriculture is key to our future

Agriculture is a way of life, an opportunity, and the key to our future. My name is Ashlyn Rockey, I'm fourteen and I live on a family potato farm in southern Colorado. I feel very blessed to live on a farm.

It has given me many opportunities, such as being involved in 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA.) These organizations have taught me important life lessons and given me the type of education that you can't find in the classroom. I have gained many friendships – friends that have turned into family. I have learned how to work hard for what I want and to keep my head up when it is hard. I have been honored to be mentored through this and have become a mentor. I enjoy teaching other kids to keep their heads up in the face of failure, guiding them when life gets tough, and laughing with them when it is great.

Agriculture is the key to our future. You don't have to live on a farm or in a farming community to enjoy the benefits of agriculture.

Agriculture is everywhere and in everything. It's not just the food that farmers and ranchers produce for your table on a daily basis. It is so much more than that.

It is a community of people working hard and together to bring you the best quality products they can. It is about all of the kids across the nation who are blessed enough to be involved in something like 4-H or FFA, learning and growing as we go. Finally it is all of us, anyone who buys or sells products, that is involved in agriculture.

It is our future and I hope to continue to be involved and blessed by such opportunities in the field of agriculture in the future. I hope to continue to mentor and educate other youth on the importance of agriculture and what it has in store for each of us. I can proudly say that my family and I are very blessed to be a part of this great adventure and are so glad that you are a part of the adventure with us.

By Ashlyn Rockey, 14, Center



Ashlyn Rockey showing her pig.

Potato Storage Tips

When properly stored, potatoes can last much longer than other vegetables. Before storing your potatoes, sort through them and remove any potatoes with broken skins, bruises or other visible damage. These will rot faster and negatively impact your undamaged potatoes. Use the damaged potatoes within a day or two, cutting out the unattractive parts.

- Store potatoes in a cool, dark, well-ventilated area, protect from direct light
- Do not store in unventilated plastic bags
- Storage between 45°F to 50°F is ideal
- Potatoes will last 1-2 weeks at room temperature and several months at 45°F-50°F
- Storing potatoes exposed to excessive light will cause them to turn green and develop a bitter flavor
- If the potato has developed green, that section can be removed before cooking
- It is best not to wash potatoes before storing
- Do not refrigerate or freeze potatoes. At temperatures below 42°F the starch will begin to turn into sugar.
- Check your potatoes periodically for signs of spoilage such as greening, sprouting or rot. One rotten potato will infect others around it, so removing any deteriorating potatoes will make the rest last longer.

Creamy Colorado Potato Fudge

Servings: 64 pieces

Ingredients

- 3 (1 ounce) squares unsweetened chocolate
- 3 tbs. butter
- 1/3 cup mashed, unseasoned Colorado potatoes
- 1/8 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 pound powdered sugar, sifted
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts

Instructions

Melt chocolate and butter in top of double boiler. Remove from heat. Add potatoes, salt and vanilla. Mix well. Blend in sugar and mix thoroughly. Add nuts and knead until smooth. Press into buttered 8-inch square pan. Cool in refrigerator before cutting.

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ColoradoKids

is produced by
Denver Post Educational Services
Executive Editor: Dana Plewka
dplewka@denverpost.com
CK Editor: Mike Peterson
coloradokidseditor@gmail.com
We welcome your comments.

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Denver Post Educational Services
101 W. Colfax Ave.
Denver CO 80202
(303) 954-3974
(800) 336-7678



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