

DPRK EYES POTATOES AS ANSWER TO FOOD SHORTAGES

The North Korean 'Labor Newspaper' has introduced potato production as the answer eyed by international organizations and individual countries to what it describes as the worsening worldwide food crisis caused by skyrocketing grain prices.

The paper, a publication of the Workers' Party, ran an article on April 20 titled, "Rising Interest Regarding Potato Production," in which it described the situation caused by worldwide food prices that have been rising quickly since January. The article reported that in the case of "most countries", 25-40 percent export taxes were being levied on flour, corn, rice, beans, and other important grains in order to build up domestic grain reserves.

The article went on, "In order to break free from the worsening food situation, international institutions and a variety of countries around the world" are looking for solutions, and among these, potatoes are receiving much attention. The paper also pointed out that the United Nations labeled this year 'International Potato Year'.

North Korean authorities have been actively promoting potato farming for more than ten years in an effort to resolve the serious food hardships. It appears that through articles such as this, giving a full account of a global food crisis while stressing the importance of potatoes, the government is trying to present food shortages as a global issue, rather than a crisis only in North Korea, while at the same time instilling a sense of the importance of potato farming in the minds of North Korean citizens.

In October 1998, Kim Jong-il visited the town of Daehongdan, Ryanggang Province, North

Korea's most productive potato cropping region, and took the opportunity to establish a potato research center. While potato processing plants were established in each region, increasing potato production, the establishment of a research center for the development of potato-based foods also added to the push to turn the potato into a staple food in the diet of North Koreans.