

# From humble spud to a feast fit for a king

By Phillip Crafford, Plaas Media

**T**he potato is a versatile stalwart in the vegetable rack. Most of us believe that a potato's uses end the moment it sprouts an eye or develops a bad spot. However, this is not the case as potatoes fall under the no-waste category of vegetables.

To celebrate the humble spud and showcase its versatility, Potatoes SA hosted a potato festival at the University of Pretoria's Eat@UP facilities on 8 March this year. The event was hosted in conjunction with the University's Faculty of Culinary Sciences.

## The star of the show

Gert Bester, chairperson of Potatoes SA, welcomed everyone to the event. Bester said that the organisation



Lerika Potgieter (right), a Master's student in consumer science, discussing the evening's menu. She designed the menu along with her supervisor, Dr Hennie Fisher (left), using five different potato cultivars and according to no-waste principles.

has long-established ties with the university when it comes to potato research.

The evening's menu was compiled by Lerika Potgieter and Dr Hennie

Fisher. Potgieter is a consumer science student who is doing her Master's study on the concept of no-waste in potatoes under the supervision of Dr Fisher. They explained how they designed the evening's menu based on no-waste principles using various potato cultivars. Potgieter explained that her research focusses on using all the parts of a potato in cooking, such as using potato skins to make a non-dairy milk alternative or using it as a canape.

Dr Carmen Muller, a researcher at the University who was involved in a number of potato research projects, added that the public is unaware of the exact shelf-life of potatoes and how to use it economically. The perception is that a potato is spoiled when it is bruised and should be thrown away while in fact the spot can simply be cut out.

## Potato research is never complete

Prof Lise Korsten, a professor in plant pathology at UP, shared the history of the University's potato research



The evening's menu was a feast for the senses. Clockwise, the starter was a lightly curried potato soup with a savoury potato cracker. The second course was a potato spaghetti Caesar salad, followed by a potato Wellington. The meal ended on a high note with potato doughnuts served with vanilla potato ice-cream and iced coffee with potato milk.



*From the left: Some of the speakers and attendees were Prof Martin Steyn and Prof Lise Korsten, both from the University of Pretoria (UP), Dirk Uys, research manager at Potatoes SA, Prof Hettie Schönfeldt and Prof Barend Erasmus of UP, Sanette Thiant of the Potato Certification Service, Prof Jacque van der Waals of Citrus Research International, and Dr Carmen Muller, also of UP.*

which dates back to 1905. She also described the history of potato consumption which can be traced back to 6 000 BC when spuds were foraged in the Peruvian Andes. The role of potato research in the modern age is to find plausible solutions to potato diseases and food security. Korsten suggested the introduction of spud stations at universities or

street vendors as an alternative to conventional take-aways.

Prof Martin Steyn, also of UP, said that between 15 and 25% of yields are spoiled due to diseases and/or harvesting. He also referred to the debate on whether to wash potatoes prior to market introduction. With fresh water becoming scarcer by the day, Steyn said that the potato industry

must continue to cultivate more water-efficient potato cultivars. This will assist with food security and ensure the industry's sustainability in future. 🍌

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