

# POTATOES AND KUMARAS

WHAT is it that the average New Zealander, faced with the problem of overweight, considers cutting out of the diet? The humble potato! The origin of this belief that the potato is fattening is a mystery and, in fact, it has no foundation. The potato contains almost no fat, and one pound of potato contains less starchy material than one pound of bread. Potatoes, just like any other food, will increase weight if over-eaten. In reasonable amounts, they never fatten, and good reducing diets always allow a serving of potato each day. Everybody in normal health should have a serving of potato daily, and teenage children should have a bigger serving than grown-ups.

What makes the potato occupy a daily place in the balanced diet? It is really a modified stem, a storage house from which the new plant emerges. That new plant demands energy, vitamin B and C, and iron, amongst other things. The potato keeps them all ready in the tuber, and so becomes an energy and protective food for us. In Europe, winter and spring epidemics of scurvy were common until the potato was introduced. The Irish suffered scurvy throughout their land whenever blight spoiled the potato crop, until, in modern times, transport and refrigeration have enabled substitution where foodstuffs are short or cannot be grown.

You will be surprised, I'm sure, to learn that potatoes compare favourably with wholemeal bread as far as vitamin B factors are concerned. Seven ounces of potato has the same energy value as two and a half ounces of wholemeal bread, but the potato contains as much, if not more, vitamin B1. It also has enough vitamin C to prevent scurvy, beating the bread here, bread having none of this vitamin.

The potato is a protective food, valuable for vitamin C and iron, and providing some vitamin B1 and energy. You will lose a lot of that vitamin C and iron, of course, if you soak peeled potatoes in water before cooking, or peel too thickly. Thick peeling can rob you of half the potato's iron content. Peeled potatoes should be popped into already salted, already boiling water, should be cooked with the lid tightly on, and not kept long on the hot plate after draining. If you remember all these points your boiled potatoes are a valuable food. You are sure of full value when you bake potatoes, for the minerals and vitamins lie just beneath the

This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, ZA, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy-Director-General of Health

skins. In humble Irish homes, there used to be a custom of speeding the parting guest by presenting a potato baked in its jacket, hot from the embers. It was a nutritional gift in reality.

Kumaras are becoming something of a luxury. They grow only in the warmer districts of our land, they take more time and labour to grow than the potato, are not so easy to store or distribute because they bruise so easily and spoil. These factors make them a dearer vegetable than the potato. To offset this, there is slightly more nutritional value in the kumara. Instead of the starch of the potato for energy, the kumara has sugar. The kumara has more vitamin C and is richer in some minerals. The New Zealand pale coloured or white varieties do not have much vitamin A, the yellow overseas varieties having plenty. In energy value the kumara is twice that of the potato, so fat folk had better stick to potatoes. A diabetic person, in calculating for a restricted diet, has to remember to use only half as much kumara as they would potato.

The potato and the kumara served at the same meal is a common New Zealand custom. A slim family can enjoy this in care-free fashion. Where the family has some members with overweight tendencies, there should be the thought that both together should equal only what the daily serving of potato would have been—somewhat less, in fact, because the kumara is richer in carbohydrate. But do eat your daily serving of potato, and occasionally of kumara, without fear of fattening therefrom. You cannot really afford to do without it. In these cold months, from your potato serving you derive heat and energy, iron and vitamin C, so important when green vegetables are either in short supply or costly, with some vitamin B thrown in for good measure.

In the last war, Great Britain had to depend greatly on the potato for keeping the wolf from the door, but the nation neither fattened nor suffered in health. You can keep quite well nourished on potatoes, milk, and other vegetables if you have to. In your household the potato should have its daily place in the balanced diet, a generous serving at least once, giving a double serving to teenagers.

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every proposal that would take control of my own corner out of my own hands.

If it is a fact, as I believe it is, that the human race must remain in contact with land to be healthy and happy, there is no case for private ownership that descends from father to son. But I cling to my title deeds and wonder into whose hands to pass them to keep them most secure. If there is not enough land for everybody, or for those who want their share, and if the quantity can never be increased dramatically even by revolutions in production, no one should occupy more than he can use and improve, and if he is not making a good use of what he has he should be dispossessed. But even in old age life would be barren and bleak for me if I lost my few acres and my few sheep. If I were a young man the way to them would be over my dead body. I can't

justify the single ownership of big flocks or huge estates, but the results often justify them, and they are sometimes easier to defend than the cramped holdings of poor men like myself who have not the resources to farm properly.

I can see nothing ahead, as far ahead, that is, as I can see events clearly, but the present contradictions and the present compromises: some increase of pressure on the big areas, but not too much; some easing of the problems for land seekers, but nothing sensational there either; a better understanding between town and country; more generosity by owners of land and more responsibility by those who seek to enjoy it without working for it and paying for it—a few changes in all those directions, but no revolutionary changes until we are more ready for them mentally and morally.

(To be continued)

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 16, 1957.

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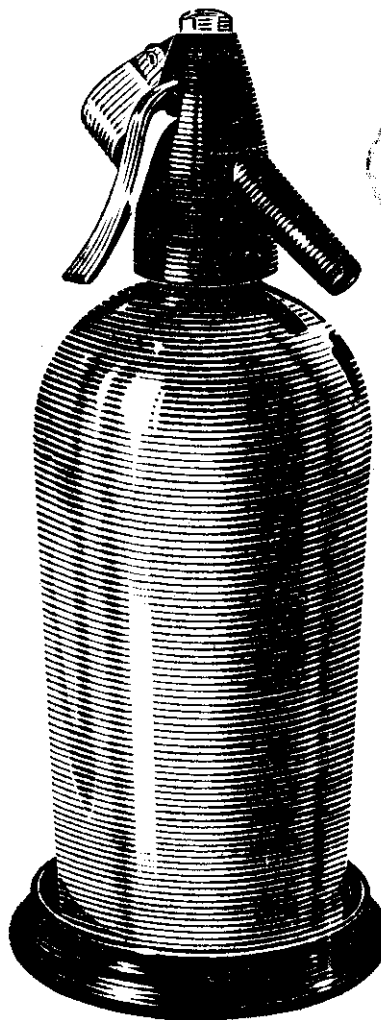


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