



Production area

United States
North West Washington State

Producer
Presidium Seed Producer

Pure Potato
Lynden WA
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Slow Food®

Makah Ozette Potato

The **Slow Food international** organization involving more than 100,000 people from 153 countries on five continents-promotes taste education, fights for the preservation of agricultural biodiversity, organizes events and publishes books and magazines.

Slow Food **Presidia** are local projects that work to protect small-scale producers and to safeguard quality artisan products. Their objective is to guarantee a viable future for local communities by organizing producers, searching out new economic outlets and raising the profiles of tastes and regions.

The **Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity** promotes and coordinates over 300 Presidia in the world.

Presidium coordinator

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Printed on recycled paper
ENG062009 - Photo: Claire Bloomberg-www.bloombergphotography.com



Slow Food Foundation
for Biodiversity

A Potato With a Past

In the 1980's an unknown fingerling potato was recognized to be a staple in the diet of Pacific Coast Native Americans of the Makah Nation. The Makah occupy the region around Neah Bay, Washington, that is the most northwesterly point in the lower forty eight states. Tribal lore reported that this potato had been used by these people for about 200 years. The Makah had named this potato the Ozette after one of their five villages located around Neah Bay. All potatoes originated in South America and it was thought that all potatoes now in the Americas were first taken to Europe by Spaniards before they came to North America with the European colonization. However in 2004 phylogenetic analysis conducted at Washington State University provided evidence that the Makah Ozette potato (*Solanum Tuberosum Group Tuberosum*) was certain to have been imported directly from South America. How did this happen? After their conquests in South America, the Spanish began a mission to further



The Presidium

The Presidium has been established by Slow Food Seattle in partnership with the Makah Nation, Full Circle Farm, Pure Potato a laboratory which develops and produces potato seed, the USDA Agricultural Research Station in Prosser, WA, and the Seattle chapter of the Chefs Collaborative.

In the early development of this project Slow Food Seattle developed a scheme for the Convivium to buy the potato seed and distribute to local home gardeners and small-scale farmers and in return the Convivium had a stake in a percentage of the commercial crop to use at events and to recoup the initial investment. This effort stimulated demand and demonstrated a market for the potato.

Because of all the presidium's promotional efforts, the Makah Ozette potato seed is in high demand. The presidium's aims are to increase regional seed production, increase the number of small commercial growers who will become Presidium members, and continued promotional activities that will bring this potato to many tables. Furthermore, the Presidium hopes to establish a laboratory at the Neah Bay School to further engage the Makah Nation youth in the propagation of their namesake potato.

establish their empire on the western shores of North America. In the spring of 1791 they established a fort at Neah Bay and as was the custom, a garden was planted that surely included potatoes they brought directly from South America via Mexico. Over the winter of 1791 the Spanish found the weather conditions in the harbor too severe to maintain their ships and they abandoned the fort. The Makah people, who were in need of a carbohydrate source, likely found volunteers of this rather weedy plant left in the garden of the abandoned fort. They quickly adopted the potato and became its stewards, growing it in their backyard gardens. Not until the late 1980's was this potato grown outside the Makah Nation. To date there has been limited commercial production of this potato, although it is now grown by a few small farmers. Interest in the Makah Ozette is increasing. The firm flesh and creamy texture of this thin-skinned knobby potato and its unique nutty, earthy flavor are appreciated by home cooks as well as chefs.



Drawings: Lisa Brandt-www.osageillustration.com

