

# Beyond 2008

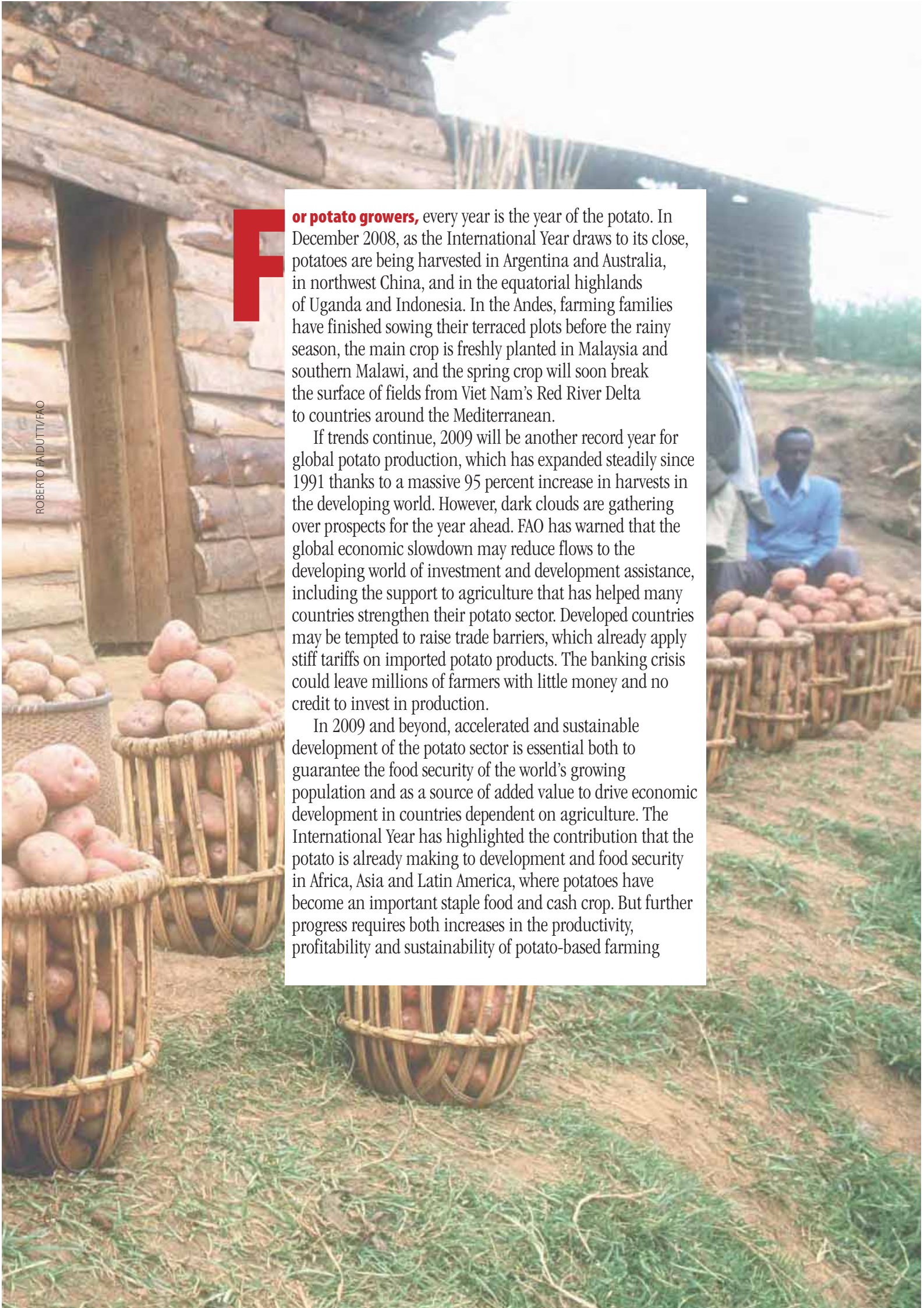
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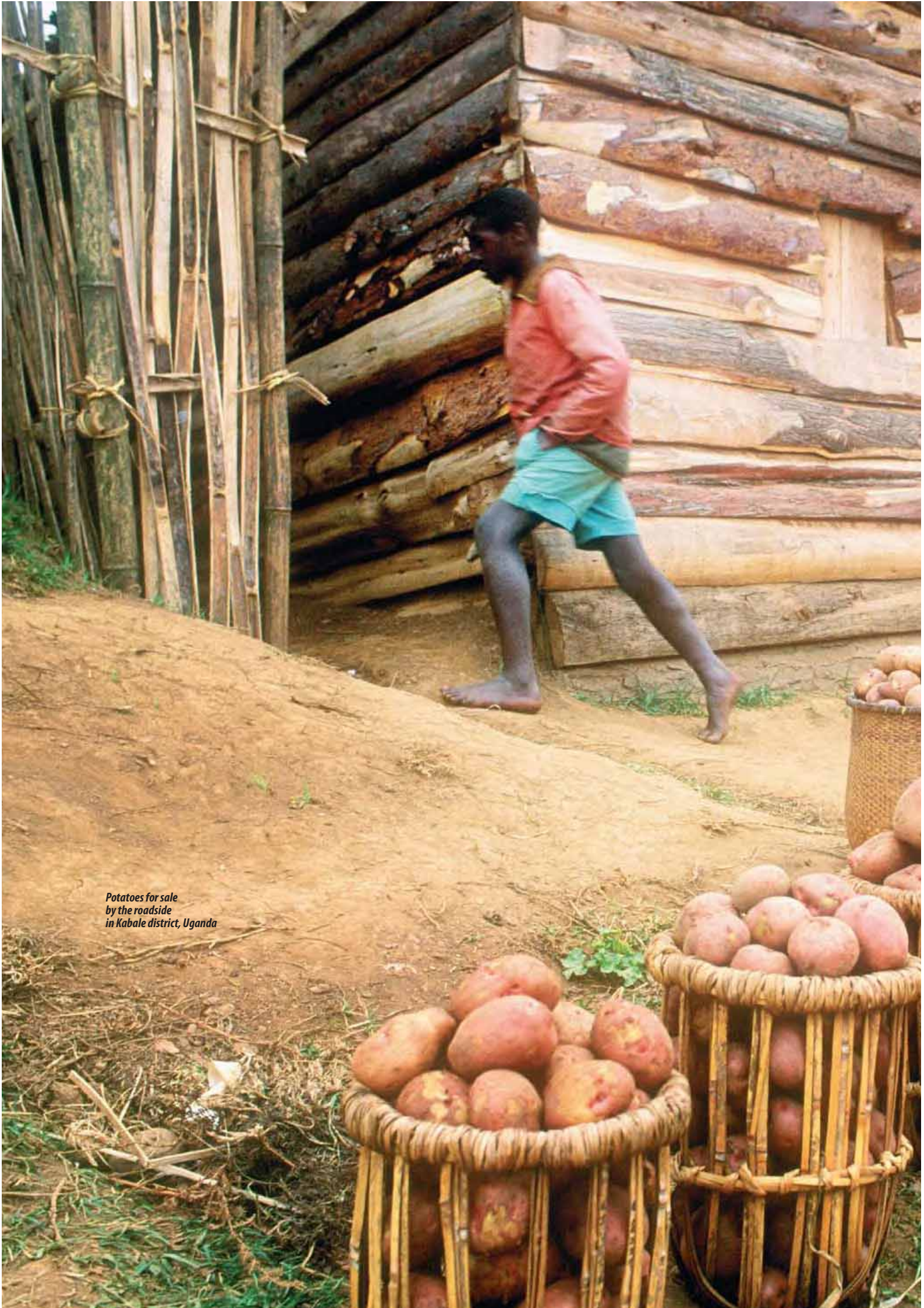


**F**or potato growers, every year is the year of the potato. In December 2008, as the International Year draws to its close, potatoes are being harvested in Argentina and Australia, in northwest China, and in the equatorial highlands of Uganda and Indonesia. In the Andes, farming families have finished sowing their terraced plots before the rainy season, the main crop is freshly planted in Malaysia and southern Malawi, and the spring crop will soon break the surface of fields from Viet Nam's Red River Delta to countries around the Mediterranean.

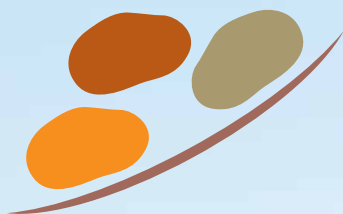
If trends continue, 2009 will be another record year for global potato production, which has expanded steadily since 1991 thanks to a massive 95 percent increase in harvests in the developing world. However, dark clouds are gathering over prospects for the year ahead. FAO has warned that the global economic slowdown may reduce flows to the developing world of investment and development assistance, including the support to agriculture that has helped many countries strengthen their potato sector. Developed countries may be tempted to raise trade barriers, which already apply stiff tariffs on imported potato products. The banking crisis could leave millions of farmers with little money and no credit to invest in production.

In 2009 and beyond, accelerated and sustainable development of the potato sector is essential both to guarantee the food security of the world's growing population and as a source of added value to drive economic development in countries dependent on agriculture. The International Year has highlighted the contribution that the potato is already making to development and food security in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where potatoes have become an important staple food and cash crop. But further progress requires both increases in the productivity, profitability and sustainability of potato-based farming





*Potatoes for sale  
by the roadside  
in Kabale district, Uganda*



134 \* International  
Year of the Potato 2008  
*New light on a hidden  
treasure*

systems, and a stronger commitment by the international community to agricultural and rural development.

The “Cusco challenge” (*page 113*) launched by the International Potato Center underlines the urgency of framing a new, vigorous research-for-development agenda. Potato science at the service of the poor will help boost potato yields in the developing world by providing improvements in the quality of planting material, potato varieties that are more resistant to pests, diseases, water scarcity and climate change, and farming systems that make more sustainable use of natural resources. The raw material of those new varieties must be drawn from the totality of potato genetic resources, which includes thousands of Andean varieties. Needed is a renewed sense of responsibility for conservation of the potato gene pool, as well as concrete steps to ensure that developing countries have the capacity to utilize it.

Extending the benefits of potato growing also requires action on a wider front. The best strategy for achieving the first of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals – to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – is agricultural development that benefits small-scale farmers, who constitute most of the world’s poor and undernourished. As the United Nations’ lead agency for agriculture and rural development, FAO will be a key partner in that process – advising on policies and strategies to modernize the potato sector, sharing its extensive knowledge of potato farming systems, promoting appropriate technology for sustainable intensification of production, and forging links among decision-makers, producers, processors and marketing chains.

The International Year of the Potato has helped raise awareness of the potato and support for its development. Beyond 2008, IYP will serve as a catalyst for potato development programmes worldwide that can make a real contribution to the fight against hunger and poverty.



*New light on a hidden treasure:  
early morning harvest near  
Buenos Aires, Argentina*