

## When the chips are down ...

**Theme:** Harvest, food sustainability

**Country focus:** Bolivia

**Aim:** to show how a community living in difficult conditions is working to overcome problems of food production with the help of an organisation supported by Christian Aid.

**Materials/preparation:**

- Some plastic cutlery, a packet of Pringles, a potato.
- A tub of worms (optional!)
- *When the chips are down ...* PowerPoint presentation, available from [www.christianaid.org.uk/learn](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/learn)

### Assembly presentation

**1. Show the potato, Pringles and cutlery** and ask the pupils which one is the odd one out? Explain that it's the Pringles, as a 2008 UK court case stated that Pringles were not to be identified as a potato product. As for the cutlery, companies are able to produce biodegradable cutlery made from starch, which comes from potatoes ([www.vegware.com/products/cutlery.html](http://www.vegware.com/products/cutlery.html)).

*This year is the Year of the Potato. That fact may have passed you by but we only need to look at the sales of potato products – such as crisps and chips – to realise that potatoes are still one of our staple foods, and it is the same worldwide. In many ways potatoes can be good for us! Raw potatoes contain a small amount of fibre, vitamin C, vitamin K, foliate and a few other B vitamins, calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, copper, manganese and selenium. But when cooked, the potato loses a lot of its goodness.*

*A diet based mainly on potatoes is not a healthy one. We know that we need a nutritionally balanced diet to remain healthy and develop.*

*Potatoes remain the staple food of a billion people worldwide, and that is the case in the community of Chillca Palca in Potosi, Bolivia.*

**2. (Show PowerPoint slide 2)** *This is Adela Calla. She is 15 years old. She lives in the community of Chillca Palca, about 4,000 metres above sea level, high in the Andes in Bolivia. If I asked you where your food came from, what would you say – a supermarket? Your local*

*shop or market? Your family allotment? For Adela the answer to the question would be that it comes mainly from her family's small plot of land that they have for growing food, and keeping animals to sell or rear for meat. The climate and poor quality of the soil make it difficult to grow food in Chillca Palca, and the staple diet is potatoes. Adela eats about 15 potatoes a day – morning, lunch-time and evening.*

**3. But life has improved for Adela. And that is because of these. (Show PowerPoint slide 3 – greenhouse)** *Any idea what this is? It's a greenhouse. It doesn't look like the greenhouses we have in this country because the materials we use would not be suitable in Chillca Palca. This greenhouse has no glass, and it has walls made of mud bricks. The Centre for Private Enterprise (CIPE), a local organisation backed by Christian Aid, taught the people of Chillca Palca how to prepare strong foundations for the greenhouse, and has advised them on the structure of the greenhouses. The roof is made of thick plastic sheeting and wood or rocks are used to hold the plastic down.*

*Water is very precious and scarce at times. As the sun shines it gets very hot in the greenhouse and water collects on the walls and on the inside of the roof. It's possible to harvest the water that collects there and then use it to water the plants. Vegetables would grow well in these conditions, but the soil had to be improved. And that's where these came in handy – worms!*

**(Show the worms if you have them or the slide from the PowerPoint 4.)** They produced good-quality compost, which helped Adela's family grow vegetables and improve the potato crop. You can see Adela here in her greenhouse with the thriving vegetables. **(Show PowerPoint slide 5)**

4. Adela has learnt how to look after the plants. She says, 'I get rid of the weeds and plant the seeds. It's good to have the greenhouse because it gives us vegetables, which are good for us.' They eat the vegetables but also sell them, which brings in vital income for the family. The potato crop has improved because of the compost and means that the family has enough potatoes to eat all year round.

5. I'm sure you've been asked about your future career plans. Adela has plans! She enjoys school, even though it's a journey that takes an hour each way. Adela is good at maths, and hopes to go to university to study economics. Her elder sister, Eugenia, wasn't so lucky. Before they had the greenhouse the family were often short of food and income, and so Eugenia decided to go to work as a domestic help in Cochabamba, a large city over 8 hours car journey away. She was not treated well and didn't enjoy her life there. The extra income and food produced in the greenhouse has improved life for this family. 'My sister is going to study,' said Eugenia. 'She won't have to work like me. I don't want my sister to suffer.'

## Reflection

At this harvest time let's reflect on the goodness that comes from the food we eat. Let's reflect on the benefits that come from being able to eat good, fresh food. Let's remember those who are not able to grow or buy food for their families. Let's reflect on how we can help change this and make life fairer for the poorest communities across the world. Let's think of Adela and Eugenia and the families in their community, who now get help from CIPE and Christian Aid, to grow their way out of poverty.

Amen.

## Action

For students who are inspired by the assembly and want to make a difference, here are some ideas:

- Visit the Potato Council website for details of how to grow your own potatoes - [www.potatoesforschools.org.uk/](http://www.potatoesforschools.org.uk/)
- Visit [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk) for details of Christian Aid's work in Latin America and the Caribbean and the global food crisis.
- Go to [www.christian-aid.org.uk/learn](http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/learn) for further resources for teachers.
- Play *The Poverty Challenge* simulation game. See [learn.christianaid.org.uk/News/ournews/Poverty.aspx](http://learn.christianaid.org.uk/News/ournews/Poverty.aspx)
- Have a Potato Day at school in conjunction with the school's catering staff – there could be different types of potato on the menu, a lunchtime potato quiz, a recipe competition.
- Watch this space! Further potato-related classroom activities, ideal for use at Harvest time, will be added to Learn at the beginning of September 2008.