By Felix Teitelbaum, GreenLeaf Editor

☐ It helps to be isolated from other potato production,☐ says Andy Leed of Starflower Farm as he unearths a few Dark Red Norlands☐ one of the 36 varieties of potatoes he grows that shoppers can expect to find soon at GreenStar.

There s no question about it, the farm is isolated. And very quiet.

When he hurls an overgrown tuber, a doe and fawn scamper off into the neighboring woods; newts creep underfoot; few cars pass.

The farm, in the hills outside of Candor, NY, grows potatoes for both seed and table.

Leed explains that the farm selevation of 1600 feet (1200 above downtown Ithaca) makes it inhospitable to the aphid a major pest and carrier of disease. It salso about five degrees cooler here. The cooler soil temperatures help potato plants accumulate more sugar in the tubers. After taking a few home, I find this for myself. (See Know Your Potato on page 6 for more on specific varieties.)

Leed is New York State sonly grower of double certified organic seed potatoes. This means that not only are Starflowers smethods certified organic by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of NY but the seed he produces is certified by the New York Seed Improvement Project (NYSIP) to carry very little, if any, disease.

In order to sell certified seed in time for the next season, this year s crops are inspected at least twice in the field, at harvest and then sample tubers of each variety are sent to Florida where they are grown out and proved to be disease-free.

In his 20 years of farming Leed has only seen the dreaded late blight (the disease that brought on the Irish Potato Famine) three times. Other pest levels are also very low. On his regular inspections of his crop, this year Leed has found only one Colorado Potato Beetle, proving the proverb,  $\square$  the best fertilizer is the farmer  $\square$  s footsteps.  $\square$ 

In order to take on a new variety and produce enough seed to sell, Leed must plan three or four years in advance.

First, Leed works with Cornell s vast germplasm repository at its Uihlein Farm in Lake Placid, NY. The lab, in order to start with a very clean sample, grows tiny plantlets cultured from the apical meristem (similar to a stem cell) found at the eye of tubers. The plants are then grown to the width of pencil leads in test tubes.

One variety Leed is working to bring back is the old-time favorite red potato, Bliss Triumph. This year, Starflower is home to a mere 15 or 20 Bliss Triumph plants. The harvest from these will not be sold next year but, if it passes certification, it will be multipled next year and sold the following year.

The work of Cornell, NYSIP, groups like the Seedsaver sexchange and small growers like Starflower is essential to preserving and improving the tremendous biodiversity of potato varieties, some 5000 worldwide.

Leed, who holds a full-time job in Cornell s greenhouses, fits farming into his evenings and weekends.

# Know your Potato

Eating local potatoes from Starflower Farm (see story on page 1) is a great way to fill up on local food. Here is a roundup of some of the varieties you can expect to find at GreenStar straight through the winter.

# **Adirondack Blue**

This popular special potato makes excellent french fries! You might be surprised though to find that when fried, the Adirondack seep-blue skin and blue flesh change to a coppery-orange hue.

#### **All Blue**

Like Purple Potatoes, All Blue Potatoes are beautifully and vibrantly colored. They also share great flavor and moist texture. Both varieties keep their shape when cooked which makes them great for potato salads. To maintain the color of these beauties, do not boil. Steam or bake them instead.

# **All Red**

Also known as Cranberry Reds, All Red potatoes look marvelous and are excellent for boiling. Because of their low starch content, these potatoes keep their color and shape well after cooking. Their red skins and intense pink insides get their color from the same antioxidants found in blueberries.

# Keuka Gold

Similar to Yukon Gold but with better flavor, these gold potatoes are very well adapted to the Fingerlakes region and do exceptionally well under organic growing conditions.

#### Carola

Another excellent golden potato, Carola has an extremely creamy texture and (in the opinion of this writer) the best flavor in a non-fingerling potato. Carola is also known to keep its new potato qualities for several months in a root cellar.

# **Yellow Finn**

These potatoes are considered a gourmet variety in Europe. Their waxiness gives way to a moist texture and a rich buttery taste that is slightly sweeter than a Yukon gold.

#### German Butterball

German butterball is a great all around potato. You can cook it anyway you like. The texture is a bit grainy, but the taste is beyond your imagination. The german butterball won first place at a Rodale S Organic Gardening Taste Off.

# **Princess Laratte**

Like all Fingerlings they really do look like fingers. This heirloom variety has less starch than average potatoes and are very versatile. Try them roasted in salads, steamed, grilled or fried. Highly sought after by chefs, these little cuties have delicious nutty flavor and due to their small size there is plenty of tender, flavorful, nutritious skin in every bite.

# 'Tater Facts

☐ The potato is the second most consumed food in the U.S., trailing only milk products. The average American eats 120 pounds of potatoes a year. That is almost 365 per person; or a spud a day.
☐ Potatoes are a nutrient-dense food which means that they are rich in nutrients but low in calories. An average medium sized potato has only 110 calories and the following percentages of US Recommended Daily Allowances:
Protein 6%   Vitamin C 50%   Thiamin 8%   Riboflavin 2%   Niacin 10%   Iron 8%   Vitamin B6 15%   Folacin (folic acid) 8%   Phosphorus 8%   Magnesium 8%   Zinc 2%   Copper 8%   Iodine 15%
☐ In addition to a few grams of dietary fiber, the average medium-sized potato also contains a significant portion of starch that is resistant to digestion and thus shares the health benefits of dietary fiber including protection against colon cancer and reduction of plasma cholesterol.
Store potatoes in dark, cool and dry place. Be sure to prune any green skin or sprouted eyes before cooking.
☐ While many of the potato☐s nutrients are found in its skin, more than 50% remain in a peeled potato.
☐ Although disease caused potato crops in Ireland to fail in what came to called the Irish

Potato Famine, many lives could have been saved if aristocratic British land owners had not continued to export grain from Ireland.

☐ The potato is said to have arrived in Ireland after the destruction of the Spanish Armada. Tubers stored in the hulls of wrecked ships washed up on shore.