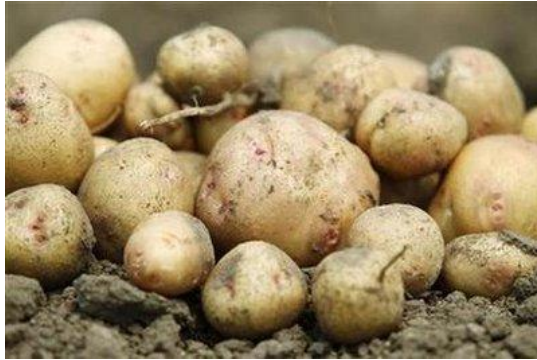


## Washington state potato booster in spuds-only protest



By Laura L. Myers Laura L. Myers – Tue Nov 30, 10:54 am ET

SEATTLE (Reuters) – The head of the Washington State Potato Commission ended a self-imposed diet of potatoes-only that he said allowed him to shed more than 20 pounds in two months.

Chris Voigt, 45, began his spuds-only regimen to protest a U.S. Department of Agriculture rule barring low-income

recipients of food vouchers under the federal Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program from using their benefits to purchase white potatoes.

And while Voigt is not recommending his diet to others as a "healthy sustainable" weight-loss plan, it did help him lower his blood sugar, cut his total cholesterol by over a third, and reduce his weight from 197 to 176 pounds, he said.

Voigt, the executive director of the state-funded Washington State Potato Commission, stands 6-feet 1-inch.

"The whole purpose of this diet is to get white potatoes in WIC," said Voigt, who lives in Lake Moses, in the heart of the state's central potato-growing region, about 180 miles southeast of Seattle.

By the time his self-imposed diet ended at midnight Monday, Voigt had consumed 400 pounds of potatoes -- about 20 spuds a day for 60 days -- and in virtually every shape and form imaginable, he said in a telephone interview.

He typically cooked up two boiling pots each night for the next day's meals and snacks: 3 pounds of mashed, 2 pounds of sliced and fried, and 2 pounds of roasted, snack-cubed red and fingerling potatoes.

"If I found something I liked, I would eat it for two days straight," he said.

Seasonings -- rosemary, thyme, oregano, dill, mustard seed, cinnamon and nutmeg -- spiced up the otherwise bland fare.

For a special treat, Voigt prepared potato gravy, mixed up with bouillon cubes and potato starch.

"In a restaurant you would send it back, but to me, it was heaven," he said.

On Thanksgiving Day, Voigt created a "tur-tato," a 5-pound chunk of mash, molded into the shape of a turkey, basted with olive oil and broiled. "When we carved away, it was tender."

USDA interim rules for the WIC program allow recipients -- usually low-income pregnant women and mothers with young children -- to use vouchers to buy "any variety of fresh whole or cut vegetable, except white potatoes."

Orange yams and sweet potatoes are permitted.

The National Institute of Medicine in Washington, D.C., recommended the exclusion of white potatoes in April 2005 to USDA for those using WIC vouchers, institute spokesperson Christine Stencel told Reuters.

"Americans consume white potatoes in ample quantities," Stencel said. "The issue is more about improving the diversity and range of vegetables."

The USDA's Food and Nutritional Service, which administers the WIC program, plans to issue a final decision on the potato-ban rule next year.

Voigt plans to celebrate his diet's end on Tuesday with a dinner feast of steak fajitas and -- he said -- roasted potatoes, topped off with apples and milk.

"I'm looking forward to eating real ice cream," he said.

(Editing by Steve Gorman and Peter Bohan)