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Chips, chips, glorious chips

Chips are a firm favourite in many parts of the world. But unlike some other countries, we make and eat our chips in a variety of ways: from chunky to skinny; as an accompaniment or on their own; with vinegar, brown sauce, tomato ketchup or even mayonnaise.

Our long term love affair with the humble chip is believed to have first begun back in the 1790 s in France although it was not until the 1860 s that fish and chip shops began opening across the UK. Nowadays, an astonishing 277 million portions of chips are sold in UK fish and chip shops every year.

Wilma Kane, Proprietor of Wilma s Plaice in Castledawson said: Offering value for money and a quality product with a feel good factor, fish and chips are a national institution which have survived the test of time. The aroma of fish and chips is something most people find hard to resist; even with the credit crunch, it s a small luxury that people can still afford.

Robin McKee of the Ulster Farmers Union Potato Committee said: The best variety of potato for chips is the Maris Piper and these are generally imported from Cambridge for our local chip shops; the sunshine in that part of the country tends to produce potatoes which are ideal for frying.

While there are literally thousands of different varieties of potatoes grown around the world; there are approximately 80 varieties grown commercially across the UK. Our expectation is therefore that we will always have plenty of potatoes; however, the reality of this could be different.

Robin McKee said: The severe weather last winter caused great difficulties for many potato growers, which has resulted in heavy crop loss. At present farmers are still committed to growing potatoes; the first yield of this year s crop wasn t good due to the heavy rain, however, the new crop is looking well and their quality is good, so hopefully we will have a good harvest.

A range of skills are required by those who grow our potatoes; these include: aware of the general cultural practices for vegetable production; management of problems such as pest, disease and weed control; irrigation; harvest and post-harvest treatment of different vegetables; and even marketing strategies for different vegetables.

So the next time you re enjoying some chips think of the growers, those highly skilled individuals who provide us with some of the most wonderful food in the world.

Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries represents the production horticulture industry, and works to help secure and improve the future of businesses by ensuring that those working in the industry have the right skills for the job at hand. If you are interested in finding out about a career in the sector, information is available at www.afuturein.com and relevant course information at www.lantracoursefinder.co.uk. Alternatively you can call 0845 707 8007 for further assistance.

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CREDIT FOR PHOTO:

Wilma Kane, Proprietor of Wilma's Plaice, Castledawson

EDITORS NOTES:

" Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries represents the interests of approximately 20,000 businesses in Northern Ireland which employ around 63,000 employees (approximately 9% of the workforce).

" Lantra is an employer-led organisation which is licensed by the UK government to drive forward the skills, training and business development agenda for the 17 industries in the sector. The industries represented are: agricultural crops; agricultural livestock; animal care; animal technology; aquaculture; environmental conservation; equine; farriery; fencing; fisheries management; floristry; game and wildlife management; horticulture, landscape and sports turf; land-based engineering; production horticulture; trees and timber; and veterinary nursing.