



**Press Release**  
**Association of Communities of the Potato Park**  
(for immediate distribution)

16 January 2024

**Peru's Potato Park Condemns False Claims by US Genome Giant Illumina**  
**Studies Restitution for Damaging Falsehoods and Cultural Misappropriation by Illumina**

Leaders of Peru's *Parque de la Papa* (Potato Park) have condemned Illumina, the US gene sequencing giant, for falsely claiming that the Potato Park will collaborate with the company to sequence 1,000 or more traditional farmers' varieties of potato from Peru's Sacred Valley of the Incas, the heartland of Quechua indigenous culture.

Illumina's false claims were evidently first made last week at the International Plant & Animal Genome conference in San Diego, California, where the company announced funding for a Peruvian scientist who has no affiliation with the Potato Park. The claim that the Potato Park will participate in the Illumina sequencing project was then repeated today in a press release on Illumina's website.<sup>1</sup>

*"Illumina's assertion that it will 'work in concert' with the Potato Park to sequence indigenous potato varieties is categorically false."* said Santos Jancco Palomino, the President of the Association of Communities of the Potato Park, *"In fact, we consider Illumina's project to be biopiracy, and we wholly oppose it and other misappropriation of indigenous farmers' gene sequence information."*

*"Despite the falsehoods about us on Illumina's website,"* continues Jancco, *"in reality we have received only one communication from the company. In that e-mail, Illumina did not ask about potato sequencing. Instead, it wanted to use images of our people and their farms on its website, as if we were ignorant peasants who would be 'honored' to be used and unable to comprehend Illumina's actual intent."*

But the people of the Potato Park are not Illumina's fools and will explore legal options if the company does not immediately desist from its false claims and cultural misappropriation. The Park is demanding that Illumina withdraw the sequencing project, correct the public record, and make an immediate apology to the Park and its people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.illumina.com/company/news-center/feature-articles/greater-good-winner-2024.html>

*“We are known the world over as defenders of indigenous peoples’ rights and biocultural resources, and we are deeply proud of our honorable reputation” says Ricardina Pacco, a Potato Park community leader and potato traditional knowledge expert, “Illumina’s suggestion that we would be traitors to ourselves and our indigenous brothers and sisters are slanderous and damaging. That American company is dragging our good name through the mud by saying that we will hand over our potato diversity to big capitalists. That unethical company must immediately withdraw these false claims and its project, correct the public record, and make an apology.”*

Illumina’s partner in the sequencing project is Héctor Cántaro Segura, a professor at La Molina, Peru’s agricultural university in Lima, to whom it presented the award last week in San Diego. But the Potato Park has never heard of Cántaro Segura and, oddly, he does not appear to have significant experience studying potatoes.

*“Illumina says that it is working with this Lima professor to sequence 1,000 potato varieties from the Sacred Valley of the Inca,” says Mariano Sutta, Indigenous Researcher, “We know of companies trying to steal native potato gene sequences, but we’ve never even heard of this man, which suggests to us that he is just a convenient proxy for Illumina’s interests.”*

Located in the center of origin of the potato in Peru’s Sacred Valley, the five farming communities that comprise the Potato Park are known worldwide as a leading example of the integration of culture and values with the preservation of agricultural genetic diversity. The biocultural territory of the park both protects and develops potato varieties, and the identity and cultural vibrancy of the small Quechua farmers that live there.

Illumina, with over US \$4.5 billion in revenues in 2022, develops and sells gene sequencing equipment and tests, including a potato diversity panel that it calls a “GeneSeek Genomic Profiler.” The test was initially developed over a decade ago with public funding and relying primarily on common Northern hemisphere commercial potato varieties. Since the initial potato genome test was released, Illumina has sought to add greater diversity to it by identifying variations in more diverse potato varieties. The test is not in its expanded fourth version. Thus, in addition to the commercial biopiracy in agricultural products that could result from Illumina’s sequencing the Potato Park’s varieties, the diversity that is identified can be incorporated into Illumina’s commercial “GeneSeek Genomic Profiler” product.