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Hunger Game – Brainstorm Report

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Hunger Game: Brainstorm Report

This report was written after a brainstorm session that focused on the game concept of the Hunger Game application for Ireland's Great Hunger Museum in Hamden, CT.

The document will be used for discussion, and to base a prototype design document on in a next phase.

We selected four concepts that came out of the brainstorm. They were put in our recommended order. As it stands, *Concept 1: Food Distributor* would our top pick, as it is linked to various themes of the Great Famine, has a connection with today's world, is easy to balance and expand on, and requires a modest amount of artwork.

For every concept, the ideas and mechanics we consider most interesting for discussion will be marked as such.

Any of the graphics in this documents are sketches or illustrations to demonstrate the concept and are by no means an indication of the visual style.

Concept 1: Food Distributor

Summary

In this prototype, you take turns feeding a child living in 1845 and its similar-looking present-day descendant. Both characters are dealt cards with food items and cures that are present in that time frame. Both influence each other in different ways.

This game illustrates that healthy (or unhealthy) food wasn't always as easy to obtain as it is now. It also references migration to larger towns and the US, showing the impact on both the migrant and the descendants.

Description

In this game, the goal is to keep both characters alive. The time or turn limit can be set or changed.

The characters have a general health bar, and a dashboard indicating the level of Fat, Carbs, and Proteins. These values will influence the general health bar and could cause certain illnesses and diseases. A 'recommended intake zone' and 'danger zones' will be visualized.

- As long as your intake is inside the recommended zone for each of the three bars, your Health goes up.
- If it goes below or above the recommended zone for any of the three bars, Health goes down.
- Different diseases and illnesses can come up depending on whether you're at or above the recommended zone. These will affect your Health even more.
- Viral diseases will occur randomly, or are induced by a card.

Both characters get a hand of cards, randomly dealt out of a deck of cards. These cards could contain food items, actions, and other items.

Every set number of turns, the present-day descendant can choose to play a card or transfer it to its ancestor.

The 1845 child makes choices that influence the condition of the present-day descendant.

If the 1845 child is very ill, its descendant will not be there, blocking you from transferring cards.

If a card is played, it will be replaced by a new card.

1845 cards include:

- *Potato*. Eat to increase Carbs.
- *Blighted potato*. Eat to increase Carbs. 20% chance to get illness.
- *Watery Soup*. Eat to increase Proteins. 20% chance to get illness.
- *Corn*. Rare card. Eat to greatly increase Carbs, but decrease Proteins.
- *Scavenge*. Chance to get an extra card, but small chance to lose a card permanently.

2018 cards include:

- *Hamburger*. Increases Fat, Carbs, and Proteins.
- *Sweet Smoothie*. Greatly increases Carbs. 1% chance to get illness.
- *Vaccine*. Can be used to prevent viral diseases.
- *Pill*. Can be used to cure illnesses.

- *Wash*. Can be used to prevent bacterial diseases.

Extension: Location Changes (*recommended*)

- The 1845 child can get cards to move to the capital or to the US. If it has moved, its descendant will also be there, changing scenery.
- Daily conditions will differ in every location, and you will also get different cards.
- Such cards include:
 - *Move to Dublin*. All stats decrease by 75% of their maximum, but you get a new set of cards and you may get the *Migrate to US* card.
 - *Migrate to US*. All stats decrease by 75% of their maximum, but you get a new set of cards and blighted potato cards / *Move to Dublin* cards are removed from the game.
- Additional extension: A migration scene could be played on a boat. Here, the chance to get a disease and die is really high. An ‘end of day screen’ after death could convey facts such as people that died on the boats after reaching their destination, as the hospitals were too full and people were required to stay on the boats.

Extension: Random Events (*recommended*)

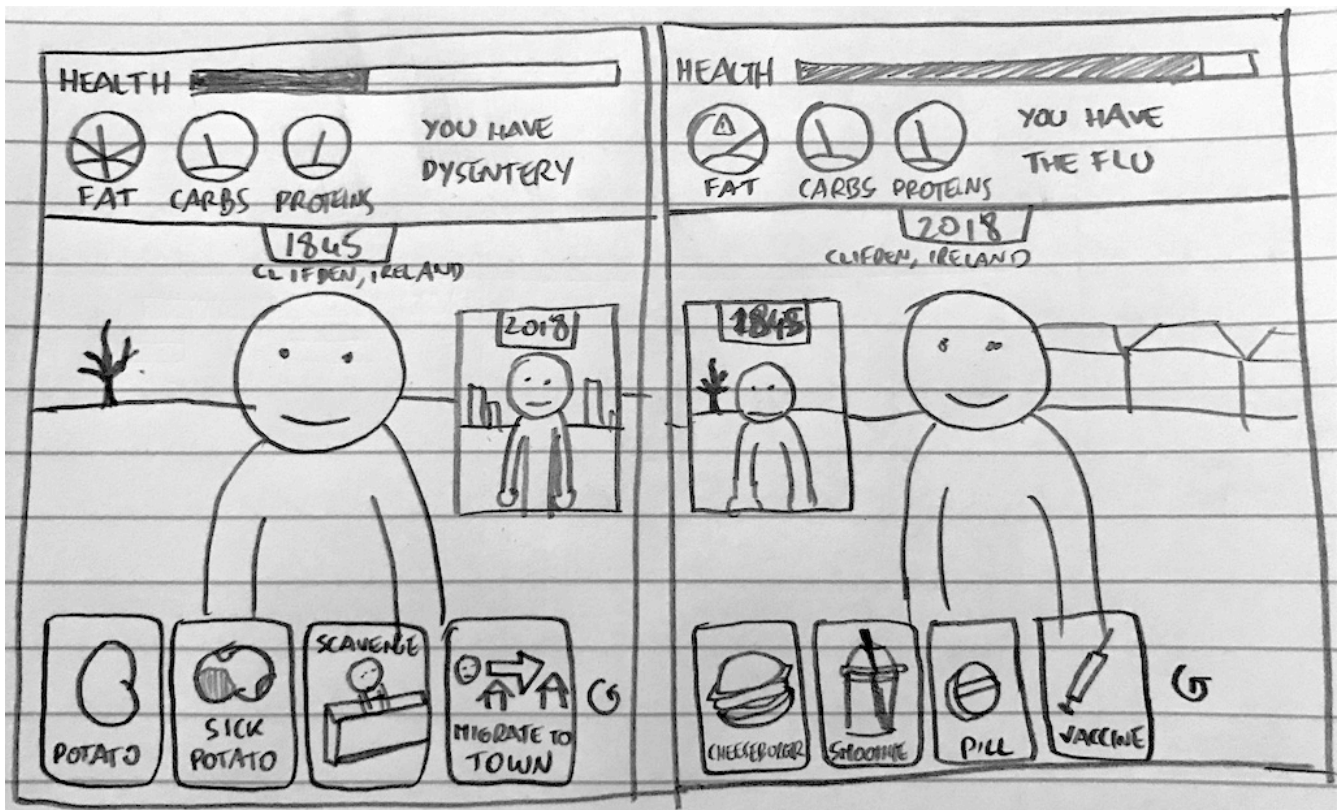
- Random events could occur after every turn, influencing the player’s status and cards.
- Example events: Viral outbreak, Great Fire, Robbed, Forced to to back to a previous location.

Extension: One Day

- The game would revolve around a daily schedule. You have to fill up the fat/carbs/protein bars to the recommended zone each day, starting from 0 at the beginning of each day. At the end of the day the bars impact the health bar and any introduced diseases could be mentioned in an ‘end-of-day’ report.
- A day could be represented by for instance 7 cards, with the first card played at sunrise, fourth card at noon, and seventh card at sunset.
- The day’s progress could be reflected in the background artwork. Other than a graphical influence, there would be none.

Extension: Five Years

- You play one day out of each of the 5 years of the hunger. Each day (and thus year), you have different cards.
- After the ‘end of day’ screen, an ‘end of year’ screen is added, to briefly explain what happened in the year, explaining why certain cards are removed from the game and why other ones are added. For instance, the low-nutrient soup could be added in a certain year, and the move to the US could be added at the very end, keeping the focus on Ireland.



Concept 2: Village Timeline Explorer

Summary

In this short linear adventure, you explore a village throughout time, seeing its decay and changes over time, and restore it in the end. This passing of time will be represented spatially: If you walk to the right of the village, time will pass. You cannot go back in time, so walking back left is limited.

This game illustrates the deterioration of places and circumstances throughout the Great Famine period. Even if you meant it well and tried to help people, it was difficult to stop the decay.

Description

The village is one screen high and several screens wide. You start at the very left of the village.

By walking right, time will pass. There's a limit to walking back left (much like in some old platform games), so you cannot go back in time.

Along the way, you can pick up items and talk to villagers.

During the game, the player will learn facts about the famine by talking to the villagers, reading posters, inspecting items, et cetera.

The game is divided into sections. At the beginning of every section, a villager will request items that you can pick up in that section. The items will be related to social realities of the great famine. For example, in one section the villager asks you to collect potatoes from post-harvest fields. In another example, you need to collect wood and rope to make wooden crosses.

At the end of the section, the same villager will appear again, much older. He or she will give you gold hearts, depending on how many items you picked up.

If you scavenge and steal items that are important for the village in the section, there will be more deterioration and less people you can do errands for later in the timeline. This will get you less gold hearts.

At the end, when the town is on the verge of being completely abandoned, you bundle your earned hearts and revive the town.

Extension: Changing Ending Scene (*recommended*)

- How much the town is revived in the ending scene depends on the number of gold hearts collected.
- If you did not collect enough gold hearts, the town will go to waste, and it will show a field, hypermarket, or industrial environment on the same location in present day.
- An animation could show the development until today.

Extension: After collecting the items and talking to the villager again, a minigame is played using the collected items. You can get extra gold hearts by performing well in the minigame.

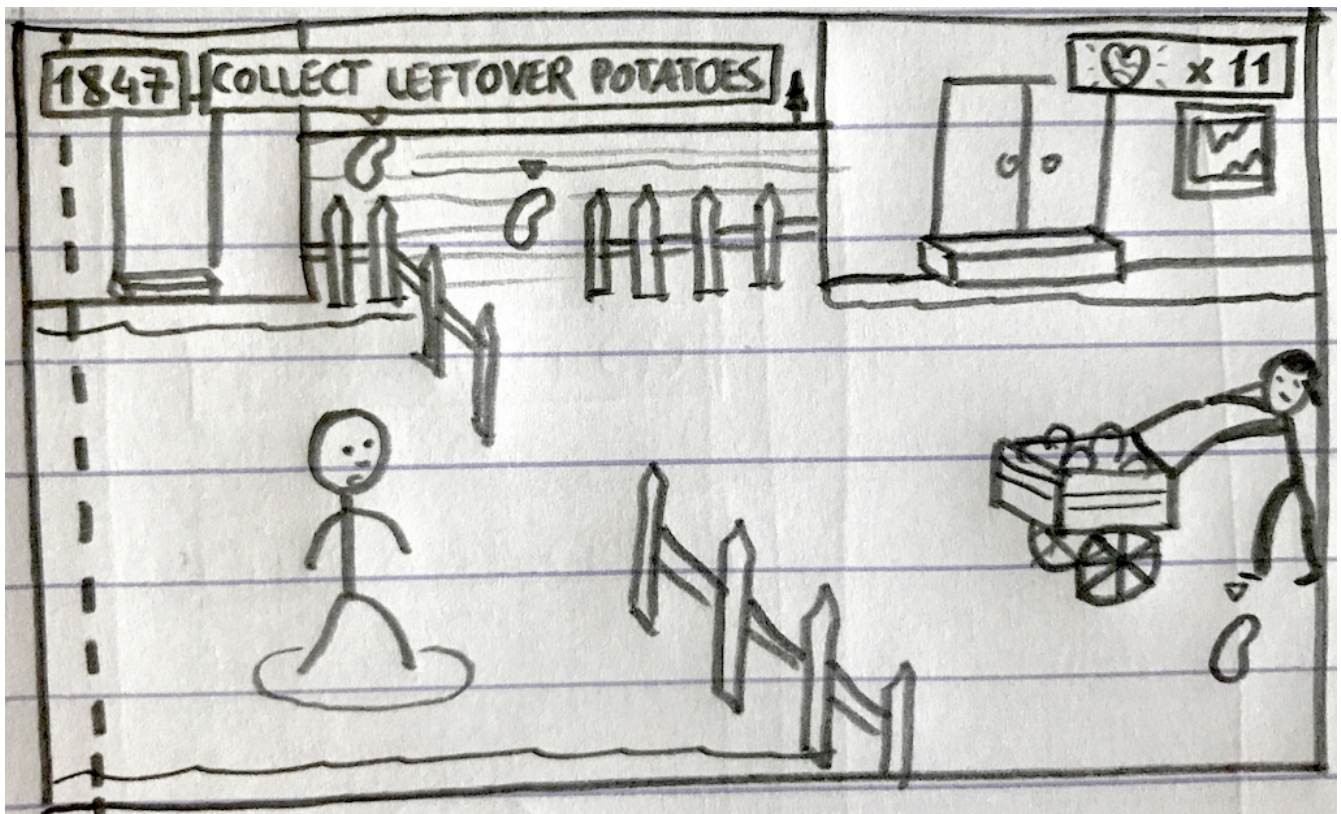
- Collected potatoes: run around and distribute them to people until time runs out.
- Soup: run around and distribute them to starving people until time runs out.
- Wooden crosses: Put them on the people's graves until time runs out.
- Note that in all minigames, gameplay will be the same.

Alternative: Short & Simple Version

In this version, the player walks to the right automatically. Along the way, the player can interact with items, people and buildings if he/she passes by and taps the item.

Depending on the actions that the player took and the items he or she collected, the ending will be different.

The idea is that the player can replay the game (or watch someone replay it) and see different outcomes.



Concept 3: Potatoes vs Blight

Summary

In a game with elements taken from the popular mobile game [Plants vs. Zombies](#), the player tries to fight off the potato blight. The player can plant new potato plants to fight back, but if they get infected, they turn to the player instead. Farmers can be sent to the enemies to remove them from the field, but you only have a limited number of them!

This is a more playful take on the Great Famine. It illustrates the powerlessness of farmers to stop the blight.

Description

In this game, the player needs to survive until 1852. To do that, he or she has to make sure that no infected potato plant reaches the left side of the screen. Also, he or she needs to have at least one healthy potato plant and one living villager.

The playing field is a wide grid seen from a top-down perspective.

The left side of the grid is the 'healthy side' of the playing field. A few rows of potatoes are planted in the left part of the grid. Your 'army' consists of the following units:

- A healthy potato plant, which will produce a moving potato every now and then to spawn a new healthy potato. The potato rolls to the right, but also downward or upward, and stops after a random time duration, or upon contact with an enemy unit. They will make Grim Reapers disappear on impact.
- Farmers that can move horizontally towards the blighted side and remove infected potatoes. They can be called back, and be killed by grim reapers. The player has only a limited number of them – if they die, they will not return.

The right side of the grid is the **blighted side**. At the start, it already contains enemies, or can spawn them from the right edge such as the following:

- Infected potato plants that can infect potatoes from adjacent tiles. After a certain stage of decay has been reached, such a plant will potatoes that move left or up/down and grow new sick potatoes if they explode.
- Grim reapers that can move to the left and kill the farmers if they reach one.

The game is not turn-based but 'real-time'. There is a timeline that slowly progresses from the year 1845 to the year 1852. Each year more or less corresponds to one minute (this is adjustable).

You can plant a new potato plant only adjacent to another healthy potato plant. Healthy potato plants can only spawn next to sick ones through potatoes that roll onto an infected one.

The number of potatoes you can plant is limited, and increases when successful actions have been taken (such as eradicating blighted potatoes). You can only plant potatoes on a row where a farmer is not removing potatoes.

Extension: Shooting potato plants

- Alongside the regular potato plants, there could be shooting potato plants that fire potato rockets horizontally towards the right side every now and then.

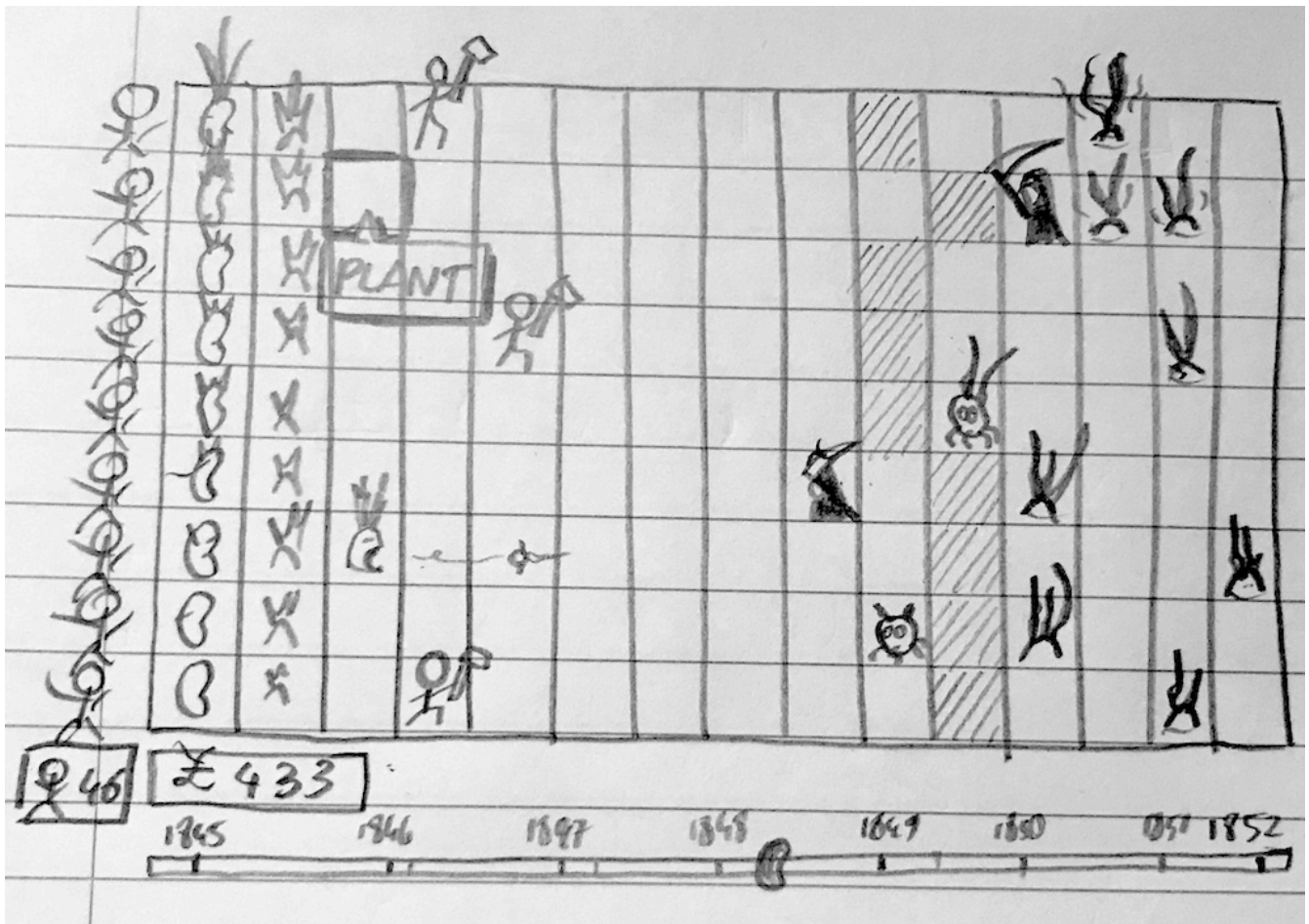
- Shooting potato plants do not produce potatoes.

Extension: Potato Robbers

- Starving people that move to the left and steal healthy potato plants could also be featured as an enemy unit.
- These robbers could be scared away by farmers and shooting potato plants.

Extension: the game could be money-based.

- For every healthy potato plant you have, your money increases slowly. You also get money for removing infected potato plants.
- To plant a new potato or upgrade them to shooting ones, you need to pay money.



Visual notes:

- The grid itself does not have to be visualized.
- A possible visual style for this game could be the 'stained glass' style of the An Gorta Mor window (see image below).



Concept 4: Farming through the Famine

Summary

You play an Irish potato farmer who has to survive from 1845 to 1852. Place your crops strategically so they won't be easily affected by the blight, eradicate infected crops and eat enough potatoes so you make it to the end.

This game illustrates the importance of potatoes in Ireland before and during the Great Famine – and how a monoculture could be disastrous for a nation.

Description

The goal is to keep your health (HP) above zero from 1845 to 1852. A timeline will keep track of the current year you are in.

The game is not turn-based but changes over time, with 'ticks' (changes) for every month.

Next to health, you also have money. Your starting money is 500 pence, and is spent to keep up your HP. Restoring your HP a little will cost 50p.

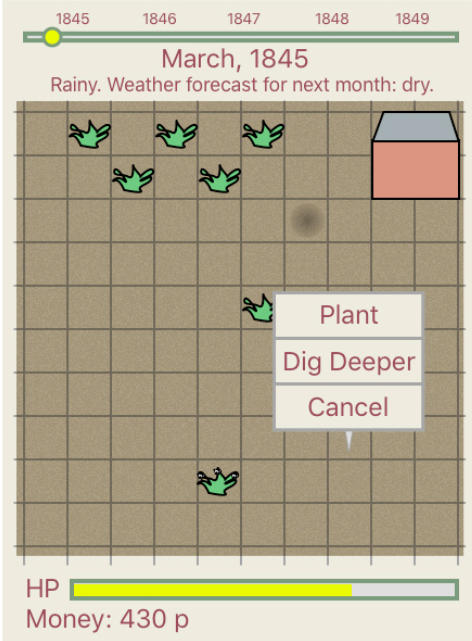
You can earn money by farming potatoes. Planting and harvesting will decrease your HP a bit, however.

On a game field, you can plant a potato plant on a tile. However, if it is planted next to a plant affected with the potato blight, it will also become infected when it rains.

The plant will grow for at least 4 months. They can be harvested in June, August and October.

Can you see affected crops before harvesting? 🐛

Harvests in June, August and October (so 24 in total)



The screenshot shows a game interface with a timeline at the top from 1845 to 1849. The current date is March, 1845, with a weather forecast of 'Rainy. Weather forecast for next month: dry.' Below the timeline is a 6x6 grid representing the farm. Several green potato plants are visible, some appearing to be affected by blight (indicated by a dark grey shadow). A house icon is in the top right corner of the grid. A context menu is open over one of the plants, with options: 'Plant', 'Dig Deeper', and 'Cancel'. At the bottom left, there is a 'Harvest' button with a 'Cancel' option below it. At the bottom right, there is a 'Sell (500p)' button with a 'Cancel' option below it, and a house icon next to it. Below the grid, there is an HP bar (yellow) and 'Money: 430 p'.

Selling your house will decrease your HP by 10 every month.

Every month, there will be a chance that an event happens to a potato plant:

- There's a small chance that a new potato will get the blight without being next to an infected potato.
- There's a chance that it rains, causing an affected potato to spread the disease to potatoes in adjacent tiles after the rain is gone.
- There's a large chance an extra potato will be buried deeper after harvest (but 1 in 2 chance

that it's infected). You need to do an extra action to expose these potatoes.

You can only see which crops are affected after harvesting.

This is an example for costs and earnings for every action:

- Plant a potato seed – cost: 2HP – earnings: nothing
- Surface harvest – cost: 1HP – earnings: -1 pence to 10 pence
- Dig deeper – cost: 3 HP – earnings: -1 pence to 5 pence
- Eat – cost: 50 pence – earnings: full HP
- Sell your house – cost: nothing – earnings: 500 pence

If you sell your house, your HP will go down by 10 every year.

The game will be balanced as such that you eventually have to sell your house, but that you could survive if you arrange and harvest the potatoes strategically.

Extension: Changes over time (*recommended*)

- To make the concept more varied, the situation could change over time. These elements could be introduced:
 - Parts of the field could become graveyards, with the gravestones blocking patches that could previously be used for potato farming.
 - Scavengers could enter the field, stealing potatoes.
 - You need to beg for money and have less time to plant or harvest potatoes.
- The game could be split up in various chapters, maybe one for every year. Every chapter could focus on a specific event.

Extension: You can burn crops. You can select a tile to start a fire on, and all adjacent crops (infected or not) will be burnt and useless. The fire will spread until all crops adjacent to each other are burnt. Usage of this feature would be limited.

Extension: Other crops like corn could be planted, but it would be more costly.

Extension: HP could be tied to nutritional requirements (eating enough healthy potatoes, eating different things).