Can we really grow potatoes on Mars?

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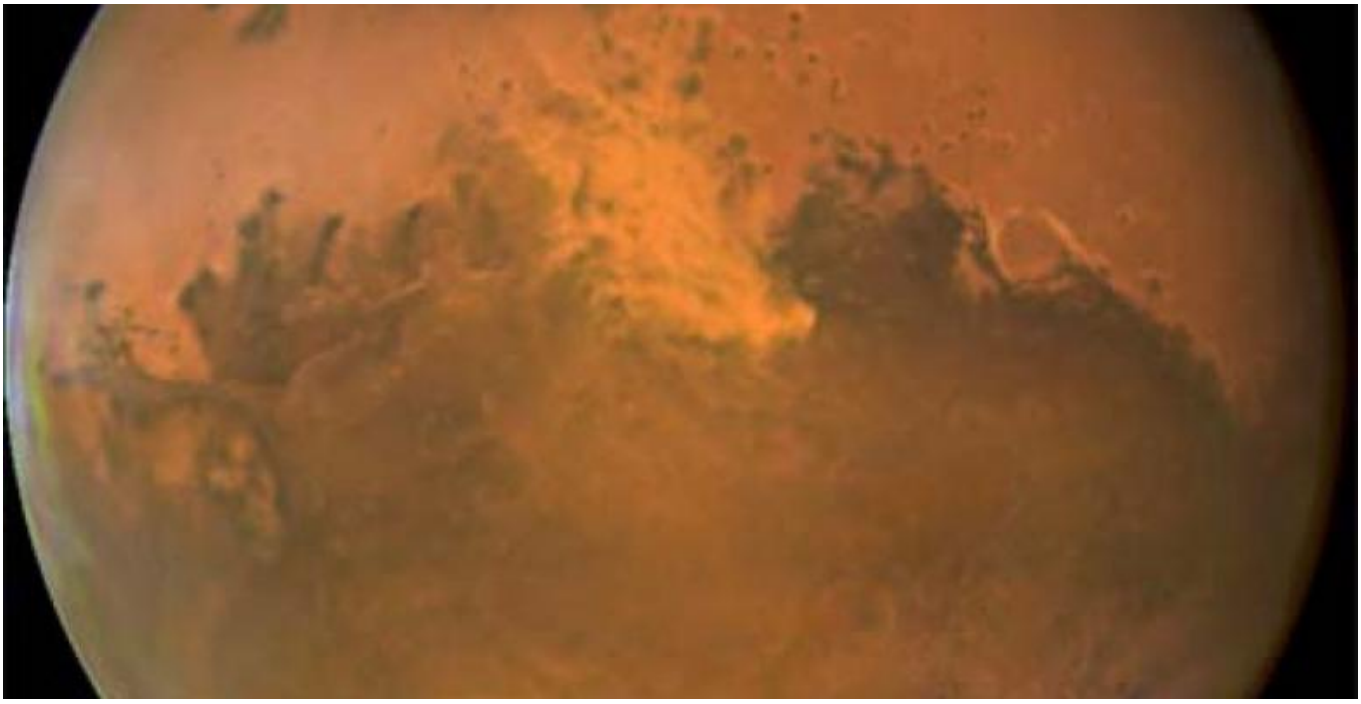

The research is seen as a major step towards building a controlled dome on Mars.

As part of a project to discover more about potatoes grown in the most inhospitable environments, tubers will be grown in a specially designed cube with dry quartz-like soil with no organic matter and subjected to a wide range of temperatures and different air pressures.

The only missing element is gravity; this is because the scientists are unable to replicate Martian gravity without the use of an international space centre, says Joel Ranck, head of communications at CIP.

The initial experiment will discover the ability of potatoes to survive in these bleak conditions; drought and saline tolerant tropical varieties have been chosen as they are the most likely to be able to endure such an environment.

If successful, subsequent trials will build more data on which varieties are the best at adapting.

The goal is to raise awareness of the incredible resilience of potatoes in the face of climate change.

Joel Ranck says: “How better to learn about climate change than by growing crops on a planet which died two billion years ago?

“We need people to understand that if we can grow potatoes in extreme conditions like those on Mars, they will be very valuable to future generations on Earth.”