

Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa

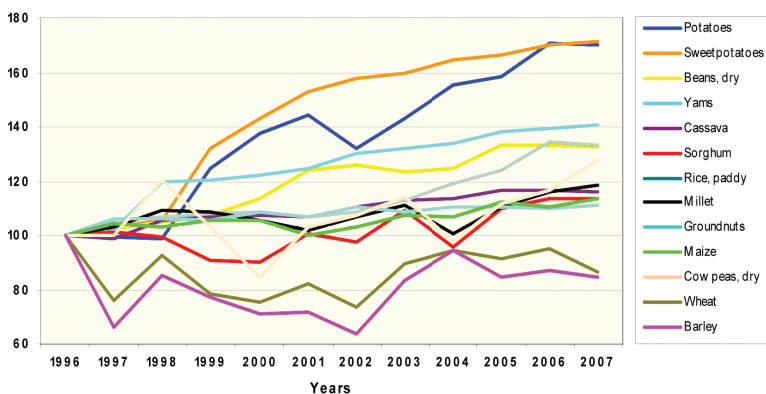


Facts and figures about sweetpotato

- ◉ Sweetpotato (*Ipomoea batatas* L. Lam) belongs to the morning-glory family. It originated in Latin America and is thought to have been brought to Africa by slave traders.
- ◉ Despite its name, sweetpotato is not related to the potato nor to the true yam, which is a native of Africa. While the potato and true yam are tubers, the sweetpotato is a root.
- ◉ In countries with two rainy seasons (e.g., Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda), sweetpotato is available 11 months of the year and is a primary staple. Elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is available 4-8 months of the year. The growth period for sweetpotato is 3-7 months.
- ◉ Sweetpotato is the 3rd most important food crop in seven East and Central African countries (6.8 million tons), after cassava (28.4 million tons) and maize (13.2 million tons). It ranks 4th in six Southern African countries targeted by the project, and 8th among four targeted in West Africa.
- ◉ Root crops in Africa have traditionally received less investment than grains and cash crops – and among root crops, sweetpotato has traditionally received less investment than cassava and other roots.
- ◉ Sweetpotato is high in carbohydrates and can produce more edible energy per hectare per day than wheat, rice, or cassava.
- ◉ Sweetpotato requires fewer inputs and less labor than other crops such as maize, and tolerates marginal growing conditions (e.g., dry spells, poor soil).
- ◉ Increasingly, Sub-Saharan African farmers are responding to a decline in cultivable land due to increased population, by growing more root and tuber crops that give higher yields per unit area than do grain crops.
- ◉ Many parts are edible. The leaves and tips of the sweetpotato plant are widely consumed by people in Sub-Saharan Africa, except in Kenya and Uganda. Sweetpotato vines



The Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) is a five-year initiative designed to improve the food security and livelihoods of poor families in Sub-Saharan Africa by exploiting the untapped potential of sweetpotato. It will develop the essential capacities, products, and methods to reposition sweetpotato in food economies of Sub-Saharan African countries to alleviate poverty and under-nutrition.



Major African field crops area growth 1996-2007

provide a high-protein, medium energy animal feed.

- Orange-fleshed sweetpotato is a very important source of beta-carotene, the precursor to Vitamin A. Only 125 grams of most orange-fleshed sweetpotato varieties can supply the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin A for children and non-lactating women (300-700 µg retinol activity equivalents).
- Vitamin A deficiency is rampant in Sub-Saharan Africa, affecting 43 million children under age 5, and contributing to significant rates of blindness, disease, and premature death in children and pregnant women.
- Sweetpotato is also a valuable source of vitamins B, C, and E, and it contains moderate levels of iron and zinc.
- The flesh color of sweetpotato ranges from white, cream, and yellow to orange and purple.
- Sweetpotato in Sub-Saharan Africa is primarily grown on small plots by poor farmers, mainly women.
- Sweetpotato can grow at altitudes ranging from sea level to 2,500 meters.

- The importance of sweetpotato as a food crop in Sub-Saharan Africa is growing; at a rate outpacing the growth rate of other staples, such as beans, yams, potato, cassava, rice, maize, and wheat.
- Part of the growth in sweetpotato production is fueled by the impact of HIV/AIDS, as farm families move to lower labor, lower cost, and lower risk crops, like sweetpotato, in the face of illness, death, and lost resources due to this disease.
- Better agronomic practices, such as site selection, planting techniques, spacing, weed control, soil fertility, and water management could more than double sweetpotato yields in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- One of the greatest threats to sweetpotato production is sweetpotato weevil, which often causes losses of 60-100% - during droughts.
- Sweetpotato is bulky and perishable. Promising pilot efforts are expanding market opportunities through the use of sweetpotato flour, dried chips, juice, and bread as well as its use as animal feed. Investments in improved infrastructure and value chain efficiency could expand sweetpotato markets, including into growing urban markets.

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