

Why Invest in Vitamin A rich Sweetpotato



Eating vitamin A rich sweetpotato reduces vitamin A deficiency in children, courtesy of ...

Vitamin A Deficiency killing children

Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD) is a major health problem in sub-Saharan Africa. Facts indicate that out of 100 children, more than XX% have VAD. This deficiency is affecting the majority of people especially in rural areas, particularly young children. It leads to malnutrition, night blindness, and lowers the child's capacity to fight malaria, measles, pneumonia, diarrhoea and AIDS associated illnesses. VAD also causes stunting in children, lowers IQ and significantly increases risks for both mothers and infants during childbirth. The costs of VAD in terms of lives lost and reduced quality of life are overwhelming.



Harvesting sweetpotatoes in Eastern Uganda, courtesy of ...

The vitamin A rich sweetpotato has high contents of beta-carotene that reduces VAD. This variety has a comparative advantage over other common staple foods especially cereals and legumes which provide zero to minor traces of beta-carotene. Children below 5 years, 7-10 years and adults need to eat about 30g, 40g and 80g of the vitamin A rich sweetpotato respectively, to meet the daily requirements. Thus even if the vitamin A rich sweetpotato is not a preferred diet, one needs only a small portion in addition to the preferred choice foods. WHO indicates that several nutritional disorders can be easily alleviated by consuming the vitamin A rich sweetpotato.

Why invest in vitamin A rich sweetpotato

There is a great need for African governments to put in place policies to promote the vitamin A rich sweetpotato to reduce VAD especially among children and mothers. Rural farmers especially women should be availed with the necessary planting materials and extension services to successfully produce the crop. Behaviour change education should also be carried out among targeted communities on the

benefits of growing and consuming this type of potato as opposed to other varieties. Results indicate that by just replacing white-fleshed with orange-fleshed vitamin A rich sweetpotato, reduces the VAD burden by XX%.

The benefits of vitamin A rich sweetpotato include:

- **Health food:** To all people even those on HIV and AIDS anti-retroviral treatment regimes.
- **Staple food:** The vitamin A rich sweetpotato has an advantage over most vegetables in that it can supply significant amounts of vitamin A and energy simultaneously - thus helping to address both VAD and undernutrition.
- **Famine food:** Sweetpotatoes generally often survive when maize fails, hence a reputable famine food.
- **Breakfast food:** Boiled or steamed sweetpotato roots are used principally as breakfast food in lieu of bread or eaten as a snack, particularly by children during the day. It is a good food item that children can go with to school.
- **Vegetable:** Sweetpotato is considered as a horticultural crop that is grown in some communities, schools or homes.
- **Income generation:** If well marketed especially to urban consumers, the potato has the potential of improving household incomes especially for rural women. This calls for improved marketing opportunities by positioning it as a healthy food, and by adding value through processing into products like flour, chips and cakes.

Let us promote the vitamin A rich sweetpotato.

Contact:

.....

