

Reducing Vitamin A deficiency with orange fleshed sweet potato

Duration:

- 36 months

Countries:

- Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso

Partners:

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Helen Keller International
- The International Potato Centre (CIP)
- Sweet Potato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA)

Vitamin A deficiency is a widespread health challenge in sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately 250,000 to 500,000 malnourished children in the developing world go blind each year from a deficiency of Vitamin A. This form of malnutrition reduces the ability to fight infections and means children are at much greater risk of measles, respiratory and diarrheal infections, decreased growth rate, slow bone development, and decreased likelihood of survival from serious illness.¹ As many as 43 million children under age 5 in Sub-Saharan Africa are Vitamin A deficient. Globally, inadequate Vitamin A uptake claims the lives of an estimated 670,000 young children annually. Vitamin A deficiency also poses a health threat to pregnant women and new moms, as it contributes to maternal mortality and poor health outcomes during pregnancy and breastfeeding.^{2,3}

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, sweet potatoes are a staple crop for farming families. However, the traditional African sweet potato is pale yellow - not bright orange like the ones we find in Canadian or American super markets. This is a problem because bright orange is the colour of foods that are rich in beta carotene – necessary for Vitamin A production. After fifteen years of research, new varieties of African sweet potato have been bred (not using GM) that contain much more beta-carotene without affecting their taste or texture. This “Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato” (OFSP) is a highly nutritious crop that has health benefits for pregnant women,

new mothers and young children. Increasing the consumption (especially by children) of OFSP is an excellent approach to reducing Vitamin A deficiency. Efforts are now needed for this crop to reach the farms and dinner tables of mothers, pregnant women and young children. In partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Helen Keller International, The International Potato Centre and the Sweet Potato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA), Farm Radio International launched a new three-year initiative to reduce the burden of Vitamin A deficiency. Using participatory radio and ICT strategies, the project will scale-up the production and consumption of OFSP in Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mali and Burkina Faso, adding it to at least **500,000 rural households’ diets**.

Over a three year period we will work with 15 radio stations and national OFSP champions in four regions: Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, and Burkina Faso, to enable **at least 100,000 rural households to begin cultivating and consuming OFSP**. This project will use the approach we call Rural Radio 2.0. This approach differs from conventional radio in that it involves target audience members in program design and development,



1. World Health Organization, *Vitamin A Deficiency*, <http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/vad/en/>, retrieved November 2012
2. Latham, Michael E. (1997). *Human Nutrition in the Developing World (FAO Food and Nutrition Paper)*. Food & Agriculture Organization of the United. ISBN 92-5-103818-X.)
3. Sommer, Alfred (1995). *Vitamin a Deficiency and Its Consequences: A Field Guide to Detection and Control*. Geneva: World Health Organization. ISBN 92-4-154478-3.

who work together with farmers, researchers, buyers, experts, policy makers, and others to develop interesting and interactive programs. It takes advantage of new ICTs to make programs more content-rich, accessible and entertaining. Programs are broadcast over 4-6 months, and are directed toward specific, measurable learning and behavior goals.

We will implement the program in a phased approach, working with 6 stations (two each in Tanzania, Uganda, and Ghana) in year one, and nine more stations in years 2 and 3 (two in Tanzania, Uganda and Ghana, and three in Burkina Faso). We will engage and work closely with three OFSP champions in each country, who will assist us in ensuring that all information is accurate and tailored to local situations and needs. We will build the radio stations' capacity not only to make great Rural Radio 2.0 programs, and use ICTs to best advantage, but also to deliver quality, accurate and entertaining information on OFSP. The series of programs will cover all aspects of OFSP: cultivation, marketing, preparation, nutrition and consumption. Listener groups will be established to increase interactivity and uptake support.

By the end of the project, **15 stations** will have aired a total of **360 hours** of RR 2.0 OFSP promotion programs reaching a potential audience of 2.5 million rural households (assuming an average 150,000 households per station). This will result in increased knowledge, skills and commitment of small-scale farmers on cultivation of OFSP, and the increased knowledge, skills and commitment of parents and caregivers to increasing OFSP into the diets of children, pregnant women and nursing mothers.



About Farm Radio International

Farm Radio International is a Canadian registered charity that is at the forefront of using radio combined with other ICTs to serve smallholder farmers. We have been using radio to help African smallholder farmers for three decades. We send information on low-cost ways to improve food security to **over 400 radio stations** across **38 African countries**.

Consistent with our commitment to empowering smallholder farmers to achieve their farming and food security goals, Farm Radio International can offer agriculture initiatives a way to communicate with smallholder farmers and support their efforts to innovate and effect change. We can help other organizations achieve their objective of communicating effectively with farmers using the medium of radio by adapting and delivering training programs to broadcasters and running specialized Participatory Radio Campaigns that aim to give farmers a voice in their own development. To learn more about how to work with Farm Radio International please contact us at:



Learn more about our projects online:
farmradio.org/projects/

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