



Farmers from Eastern Uganda belonging to Buseko seed producers and cooperatives union tend a sweet potato crop on their communally acquired land.

PHOTO CREDIT: LOMINDA AFEDRARU

Cooperative eases sweet potato farmers' land worries

Lominda Afedraru

Sweet potato is the fourth most important crop in Uganda after maize, cassava and banana, with production volumes totalling over 1.8 million metric tons and consumption of 73kg per person per annum. It is grown in all regions of Uganda on 55 percent of root and tuber arable land.

The major producing districts include Iganga, Bugiri, Nakasongola Gulu, West Nile and Kyenjojo. Sweet potatoes in Uganda are marketed principally

as fresh roots and consumed in steamed, boiled, fried or roasted form. In addition to food, sweet potato is an important commercial crop, contributing to incomes of farmers.

Scientists from the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI) have been engaging farmers across the country to embrace sweet potato value addition. The commercialisation of sweet potato has seen more land put under the crop.

It is common for farmers to acquire land as groups or cooperatives.

This approach allows for sharing of resources, economies of scale and easier access to land that might otherwise be unavailable to individual farmers.

In Eastern Uganda, farmers often acquire communal land for seed multiplication projects. Most of these cooperatives were established from farmer groups initially set up for





training purposes. Some individuals, including those who hosted variety trials, also obtain released varieties and become vine multipliers.

These multipliers then sell vines to farmers or directly supply projects. Tito Wanale, a 41-year-old farmer from Buyende, is among those growing sweet potatoes and multiplying seedlings. He belongs to Buseko Seed Producers and Cooperatives Union with 108 members and he is the chairperson. He notes that out of the 108 members, six of them are seed multipliers.

The cooperative union owns over 30 acres, which has been donated by members who own large chunks of land. The cooperative land is located in Iganga district and farmers from neighbouring districts who are members do participate in the group farming initiative. Members have allocated half of the land for growing sweet potatoes for seedlings.

They sell the vines to fellow farmers and the money is deposited in the cooperative's account. In a season the farmers harvest 15 pickup loads or more of sweet potato vines.

Half of cooperative's land is for growing sweet potatoes for tuber, with part of the produce sold and some given to members for food. Wanale began multiplying seedlings (vines) four years ago on three out of the 15 acres he owns individually.

There are five other sweet potato seedling multipliers in his district. At the end of every year, cooperative members share profits made from the group farming initiative. Some of the group members like Betty Muwuma, 62, deal in value addition.

She processes sweet potato flour and leaves into baby foods by adding ingredients such as roasted soy bean flour, rice flour and maize flour ■



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