

Research Application Summary

Estimation of consumer preferences for cowpea in Uganda

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Abstract

This study conducted in eastern Uganda, assessed consumer and market vendors preferences for different cowpea varieties grown in Uganda. Both consumers and market vendors preferred large white seeded grains. The study recommends adding value to the grain products.

Key words: Consumer preference, *Ebelat*, Uganda, *Vigna Unguiculata*

Résumé

Cette étude menée dans l'est de l'Ouganda a évalué les consommateurs et les vendeurs du marché, préférences sur les différentes variétés de niébé cultivées en Ouganda. Les consommateurs et les vendeurs du marché préféraient les larges graines blanches de semis. L'étude recommande d'ajouter de la valeur à des produits céréaliers.

Mots clés: Préférence de consommateurs, *Ebelat*, l'Ouganda, *Vigna unguiculata*

Background

Cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* L. Walp) is one of the most important indigenous legumes of the tropics and sub tropics. It is a key source of nutrients for low income communities. In Uganda, cowpea is increasingly becoming an important cash crop. Consumer characteristics and preference information is key for sustainable promotion of such a pro-poor crop. Thus the main objective of this study was to assess consumer preference for the various cowpea varieties.

Literature Summary

Cowpea grain contains between 20-25% protein (McFarlane,1983) and 64% carbohydrate (Bressani, 1985). It therefore has a potential to contribute to the alleviation of malnutrition among especially the poor households. It is a cheap source of protein for both rural and urban people. The choice of the variety grown by farmers depends on expected end use (Adipala *et al.*, 1999). However, traditionally, the crop has been produced for own subsistence production, marketing only less

than 10% (Emaju, 2000). The marketing of the crop is not only confined to farm gate and local markets, but also finds its way to the regional markets (Sabiiti, 1995). However, it is not known when the crop reaches the market, why the consumers choose certain bundles of cowpea leaves and seeds for purchase.

Study Description

This study focused on consumer preference for cowpea in Soroti and Kumi district, as these two areas produce 90% of Uganda's cowpea crop. Five samples of *Ebalat*, *SECOW 2W*, *Icirikukwai*, *Kenyan* and *SECOW 1T* varieties were given to consumers and traders. They were asked to evaluate the varieties according to their own preferences. In addition, four focus group discussions were held, again to evaluate the same varieties. Hedonic price model was used to estimate preference for attributes.

Research Application

Results showed that cowpea was an important part of diet as it was consumed by up to 99.4% of the households and served on important occasions (73%) like funerals, child naming and to visitors (71%). This popularity, and extensive current consumption, could translate into a good market potential for the crop. It is more cherished by women (65.8%) but it is consumed by over 90% of all the age groups. However, less parents teach their children how to prepare the crop and cowpea meal. This poses a potential danger of the crop becoming extinct eventually. Seed colour (56%) and seed size (39%) are the most important quality parameters consumers consider in their decision to purchase or grow cowpea. Consumers have preference for white and tan testa cowpea and large seeded crop, associated with *Ebalat*, *SECOW 2W* and *Icirikukwai*. Seed colour coefficients for all the other four varieties except the black seeded *Kenyan* were positive and statistically significant. The Ugandan consumers disliked the black seeded cowpeas which are popular in some markets in Kenya.

These results suggest that efforts to improve cowpea grain size and the white testa colour will be worthwhile in Uganda. They point out the possibility of expanded market for *Icirikukwai*, *Ebalat* and *SECOW 2W* varieties. The results also show the need to grow and market pure crops of *Icirikukwai*, *Ebalat* and *SECOW 2W* varieties. Also, consumers were willing to pay more for larger seeds and white testa colour.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations are made: 1) traders and producers should sort their seeds before

sale. This is because consumers are willing to pay for a higher premium for that effort; 2) a cowpea improvement programme should breed for white testa, large seeds for Ugandan market associated with *Ebelat and SECOW 2W* varieties which were preferred by consumer; 3) there is need to create awareness among researchers so that they can put efforts in studying regional food preferences; and 4) there is need to promote consumption of the crop by studying alternative ways of adding value to the crop such as snacks for the youth and the wealthier urbanized population.

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