

Title Improving sweet potato marketing in the Papua New Guinea highlands
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Abstract

Sweet potato is the major staple food crop in PNG, providing around two thirds of total dietary intake. Annual production is currently 2.9 million tonnes per year with 75% of the crop produced in the Highlands. Whilst the crop is grown across the country, the Highland areas are particularly reliant on sweet potato as a food and animal feed source. As the main staple food crop, sweet potato tends to be consumed close to where it is grown, although there is a small amount marketed to the distant markets of Lae and Port Moresby. Poor post-harvest handling, storage and transportation result in a product with a short shelf life (3 weeks) and poor quality characteristics. Losses to distant markets are high, with 30-50% of product being unsaleable on arrival in Lae or Port Moresby, due to rots and/or physical damage. The potential for marketing sweet potato to distant markets has increased significantly in recent years due to increasing urbanization. The decline in the value of the Kina has also made locally produced sweet potato more competitive with imported rice and wheat products. Consultations with PNG researchers and government agencies have identified consumer preferences, marketing and post-harvest management of sweet potatoes as priority research areas. The objectives of this paper are to understand the operational and relational aspects of sweet potato supply chains based on a literature review and semi-structured personal interviews and to identify marketing problems existing in the sweet potato supply chain.