

## LINKING FARMERS TO EXPORT MARKETS OF FRESH SWEETPOTATO EXPERIENCES FROM UGANDA

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Uganda has remained the giant producer of sweetpotato on the African continent, and third globally. The yields have tremendously increased over the past one and a half decade from 1.693 million tones in 1990 to 2.530 million tones in 2002. This can partially be attributed to rise in the area under production from 425,000 to 570,000 hectares during the same period. The improved technologies generated out of the research and development activities is another most probable cause of increased production. This has left farmers with substantial surpluses during bumper seasons, which are accompanied by very low farm prices and lack of market. The sweetpotato local markets, which include urban towns, institutions of learning, health, and prisons are still limited and get easily saturated. Therefore bulk of the sweetpotato is either eaten by the producers themselves or is left to waste in the ground or after harvest. Fortunately sweetpotato is consumed in foreign countries more particularly Europe where sweetpotato does not grow at all. This offers a great market opportunity for Ugandan surplus fresh sweetpotato at a better price. European consumers have liked Ugandan sweetpotatoes because they are tastier and organically produced. Various agricultural products exporting companies, for example HORTEXA (Horticultural Exporters Association), have been shipping sweetpotato to the European market, which has been growing steadily over the past years. For example, indicative data of HORTEXA's exports show that sweetpotato exports have risen from 130 tones in 2000 and 210 tones in 2002. This paper, therefore, endeavors to analyze the potentials and opportunities of exporting fresh sweetpotato as an alternative market for Ugandan farmers.

Key words: Farmers, export markets and fresh sweetpotatoes.