

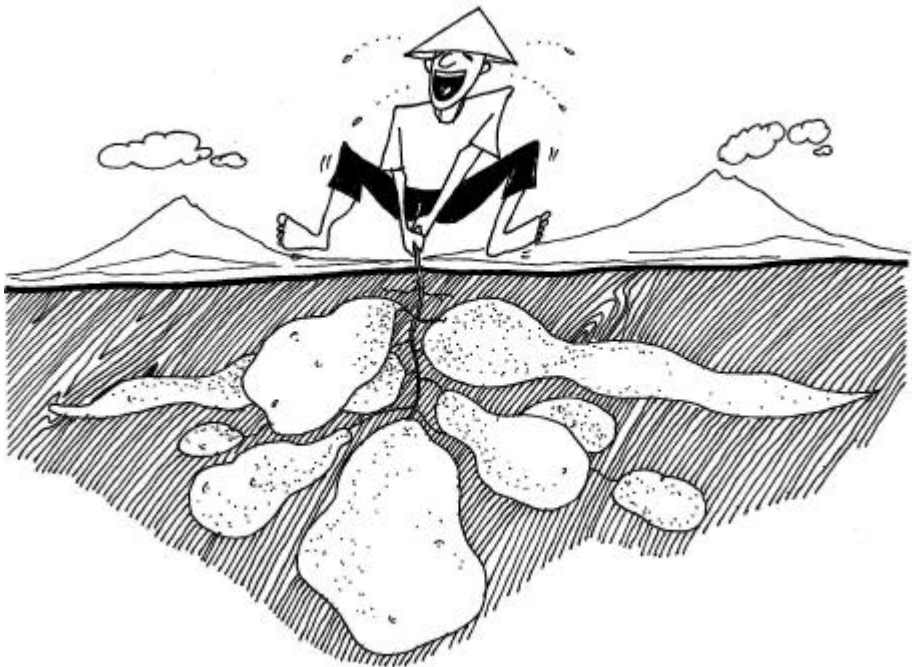
Part II

*Field guides for
Sweetpotato ICM
FFS activities*

1 Introduction to the sweetpotato ICM Farmer Field School

Background

Sweetpotato cultivation can be highly profitable for farmers. When market prices are high farmers' profits double or triple compared to those from growing rice. The relatively high yield and low production costs contribute to this profitability, but unfortunately, in many places in the world sweetpotato prices fluctuate widely. Sometimes, when price declines radically, sweetpotato farmers might even lose money. The marketing system may also limit farmers' profits, particularly when middlemen are involved who make contracts with farmers to buy the standing crop. Because farmers rarely know how to estimate the yield of the unharvested crop and are not fully aware of the prevailing prices at wider distribution markets, they are at a disadvantage in price negotiations with the trader and usually accept the offer with little



discussion. Most farmers believe that profit is determined more by their luck in making a sale agreement with the trader than by the yield of the crop.

Highly fluctuating prices and a weak bargaining position influences farmers' attitudes towards sweetpotato cultivation because it provides little incentive to produce high yields. Nevertheless, comparison of yields and profits obtained by farmers in Indonesia showed a tendency for farmers who produced higher yields to earn higher profits. This suggests that farmers can increase profits by increasing their yields through better crop management, and by learning to estimate what the yield is likely to be before entering into negotiations with a trader. How can farmers' knowledge and skills be developed so that they can improve their crop management and business capacities? In this activity, farmers will analyze the relative importance of the sweetpotato enterprise and its constraints. ICM is presented as an alternative to tackle the constraints, and the FFS as a way to learn about ICM.

Objectives

After completing this activity the participants:

- Can explain the relative importance and constraints of the sweetpotato enterprise under the prevailing conditions.
- Understand the meaning of ICM.
- Understand the objectives of the sweetpotato ICM FFS.
- Realize the need for ICM training.

Materials

- Newsprint paper.
- Felt-tip markers.
- Maize seed (100 g).

Activity steps

A *The importance of sweetpotato*

A.1 The facilitator explains the objectives of this activity.

- A.2 The facilitator asks the participants to mention the three most important crops grown in their area, and writes these on a newsprint as headers of three columns (leave space on the left side of the columns for the row headers).
- A.3 The facilitator asks the participants to mention the main factors that make a crop important to them, and writes them on the newsprints as headers of rows, so that a matrix is formed.
- A.4 The participants are divided into three small groups. Each group is provided with newsprint paper and a felt-tip marker. The groups are asked to copy the matrix with the three crops heading the columns and factors determining importance in rows on the newsprint.
- A.5 In the small groups, the participants all take a handful of maize seeds. For each factor of importance, each participant individually ranks the three crops by dividing 6 maize seeds among the three crops, representing the proportional value they give to each crop for that factor. After everybody places his or her seeds, the final outcome for the row is reviewed by the participants and they are given the opportunity to move some seeds around, if they believe that the result does not reflect the group's opinion. When everybody agrees to the outcome, the amount of seeds per cell is counted and written in the cell before the next row is ranked in the same manner (see example below).
- A.6 After all factors are ranked, the participants count the total number of maize seeds in each column or crop type and write the number in a row labeled "TOTAL".
- A.7 Each group presents the results of the ranking exercise.
- A.8 The following questions can be posed by the facilitator to stimulate the discussion:
 - Which of the three crops provides the most advantageous enterprise for farmers in this area?

