

12 Weeds: friends or foes?

Background

A sweetpotato field with many weeds is in most places considered not well taken care of, and the farmer is labeled “lazy”. Nevertheless, a farmer may have very good reasons why she or he lets the weeds grow, for instance, because there is not enough labor in the family to weed the crop, or they believe that the weeds are useful.



Objectives

This activity is intended to:

- Enhance the participants’ understanding about the disadvantages and advantages of weeds in the sweetpotato crop.
- Strengthen their capacity in utilizing weeds in the crop.

Materials

- Analysis board.
- Newsprint paper.
- Felt-tip markers.

Activity steps

- A *Which one is a friend, which one a foe?*
- A.1 The participants are divided into small groups, and invited to collect samples of weeds from the field.
- A.2 In the small groups, the weed samples are put on the analysis board by distinguishing between weeds that significantly affect crop development (listed in the column “unhealthy”) and weeds that are considered not harmful (listed in the column “healthy”). The (local) names of the weed species are written on a sheet of newsprint paper that is pasted in the middle of the board.
- A.3 In turns, the groups present and discuss their results.
- A.4 All weed species found by the various groups are written on a sheet of newsprint paper in the first column of a ranking table. Two other columns are drawn with the headings:
- Causes yield loss.
 - Is difficult to control.
- A.5 The various weeds listed are ranked by the group for each of these columns, separately, by giving a score of 10 to the weed causing the highest yield loss or the one most difficult to control, after which the other weeds are scored proportionally. The total score for the weeds is calculated by adding the scores of the two columns.
- A.6 Discussion:
- How can weeds affect the development of a crop?
 - Do all weed species affect the crop negatively?
 - How can weeds in the field be useful?
 - What is the most appropriate way to manage (and utilize, whenever possible) weeds?

For more information see:

- Weeds (Part III, Section 5.7).