

21 Variety selection

Background

Farmers are always on the outlook for new varieties with better characteristics, such as a higher yield potential, higher resistance to major pests and diseases, a better taste, worth a higher market price, and with a shorter growth duration. But can we expect breeders to produce a super variety like that? The fact is that a short duration variety has automatically a relatively lower yield potential, and often high yielding varieties lose on taste. Besides, a certain variety performs differently under different situations, depending on location-specific and seasonal conditions. How can farmers choose varieties that fit and perform best under the prevailing farming conditions?

Objectives

After completing this activity the participants better understand the factors to consider when selecting a variety.

Materials

- Newsprint paper.
- Felt-tip markers.

Activity steps

A *Varietal preferences*

- A.1 Ask the participants to list all the sweetpotato varieties that are commonly grown in the area.
- A.2 Make a table with three columns: (1) name of the variety, (2) strengths, and (3) weaknesses. Let the participants fill out the strengths and weaknesses columns for each variety.

- A.3 The strengths of the varieties listed can be interpreted as the desired characteristics of the sweetpotato crop, whereas the weaknesses represent those characteristics farmers preferably avoid. Discuss to what extent the farmers are able to select varieties with more strengths than weaknesses. Point out interrelatedness of some strengths and weaknesses, such as short growth duration and lower yield potential, or high yield and lower taste quality.
- A.4 Explain, by probing the participants, what a farmer should consider when selecting a variety. Discuss how farmers can get access to new varieties with potentially better characteristics, such as exchange of seeds with farmers from other areas, or from research stations, and how these new varieties should be tested and evaluated first to assess their suitability.
- A.5 Draw conclusions about the role of variety selection in achieving optimal results in sweetpotato cultivation.

For more information see:

- Variety selection (Part III, Section 6.6).

Notes