

Sweet potato gains more importance

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Sweet potato production has gained greater importance following recent agricultural research and discoveries regarding the different ways the crop can be used to mitigate food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty.



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Uganda is the biggest producer of sweet potato in Africa. Sweet potato is the third most important food crop in East Africa and it is also much valued as a major food crop in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Fodder for livestock

However, due to research efforts by the International Potato Center (CIP) and other organisations, the crop has gained more importance in the recent years as a source of material for silage making to feed pigs and other livestock during times of fodder scarcity.

For a long time, sweet potato vines, peelings, and inedible tubers were given to pigs by farmers. But, since they were highly perishable and seasonal, the excess was wasted leaving the farmers with the burden of feeding the animals during the dry season. This caused most farmers to reduce their herds.

In light of this, pig farmers and youth groups in Masaka and Kamuli Districts have been trained in making sweet potato vines silage. Last month, two sweet potato silage making business centres were launched in Masaka and one in Kamuli for the purpose of training more people. Farmers have also been trained in better farming practices and introduced to higher yielding varieties of the crop.

Sweet potato benefits

International award winner Robert Mwanga, also CIP's sweet potato breeder for East and Central Africa, attended last month's event in Masaka. He emphasised to the farmers the importance of growing bio-fortified Vitamin A-rich sweet potatoes. Eating these sweet potatoes enhances nutrition among children and pregnant women.

It is expected that sweet potato growing will reduce pig farmers' feed costs and spur animal growth rates, which will result in bigger profits.

Silage making will reduce litter in towns and rural households as people collecting potato peelings and inedible roots for silage making.

Employment opportunities will be generated as more youths not directly engaged in pig keeping will turn into silage making and selling.

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