

Nigeria gets improved cassava varieties

The Nigerian government has released four improved cassava varieties that will boost production and keep the country in the lead as the world's largest producer of the root crop.

The varieties, which are a product of about a decade-old conventional breeding research include; NR 01/0004, CR 41-10, TMS 00/0203, and TMS 01/0040.

TMS 00/0203 and TMS 01/0040 were bred by scientists working at the Ibadan-based International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA); while NR 01/0004 and CR 41-10 were bred by Umudike-based National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) and the Colombian-based International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) respectively.

On-farm prerelease trials involving local farmers in eight states of the country show that the improved varieties out-performed local checks with an average yield of about 31 tons per hectare as opposed to 26 t/ha recorded by the local varieties.

Farmers love the varieties for their excellent culinary qualities, high yield, and resistance to pest and diseases.

"The release of the varieties is good news for Nigerian farmers in particular and African farmers in general," says Dr. Peter Kulakow, IITA Cassava Breeder.

"We expect to see more cassava produced in Nigeria" he adds.

Over the last decade, cassava has evolved in Nigeria from a mere food security crop to a cash and industrial crop.



Farmers working on a cassava farm

Annual production has increased from 32 million metric tons in 1998 to 45 million metric tons in 2008, thanks to crop improvement programs by IITA and partners.

The new varieties seek to strengthen Nigeria's leadership in cassava production, increase farmers' incomes and guarantee food security.

Although cassava is hardy and can survive where most other crops cannot, it responds to good environments when it finds one.

Researchers say the key to mitigating changes in environmental conditions and pest and diseases among many others depends on the deployment of suitable varieties that will not suffer from sudden

changes in the environment.

"Host plant resistance still remains the most sustainable approach to mitigate the impact of pests and diseases on agricultural productivity," says Drs C.N. Egesi and E. Okogbenin, NRCRI Cassava Breeders.

"These factors call for the need to cultivate a range of cassava varieties that may be a buffer to cassava production in an integrative manner since no single variety can achieve all the end-users' requirements," they add.

The researchers argue that the present and future demands on cassava for food and industrial needs make it necessary to always provide the farmers suitable improved cassava varieties to meet their challenges.

FAO warns of 'food price shock'



A trader sells cowpea in the market

The world faces a "food price shock", the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has warned after its benchmark index of agricultural commodities prices shot up to a nominal record last month, surpassing the levels of the 2007-08 food crisis. The warning from the UN body comes as inflation is becoming an increasing economic and political challenge in developing countries, including China and India, and is starting to emerge as a potential problem even in developed countries, including the UK and the eurozone.

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African scientists want governments to commit more resources to yam research

African scientists have urged policy makers and governments in the West and Central African bloc to commit more resources to the production and processing of yams.

They also agreed to form a network with a view to collating and sharing information on yam research.

These were part of recommendations made in a communiqué issued at the end of a stakeholder meeting organised by IITA under the “Strengthening Capacity for Yam Research-for-development in Central and Western Africa” (SCYReC) project in Ghana.

Specifically, stakeholders in the yam sector requested policy makers in the region to make available funds for yam research and training of researchers who would also commit more time to yam research.

The experts also requested that technologies and the requisite infrastructure be developed that would improve the participation of women in yam research and production.

They expressed their unanimous commitment to sharing information within the network and with the wider society on yam research; and to work with relevant stakeholders to promote the commercialisation of yam production and



Women selling yams in the market

processing, and to commit more research time to yam.

“The unanimous decision to form synergies on yam research is a milestone,” says Dr. David Annang, IITA-SCYReC Coordinator.

“It is a sign of hope for increased yam production,” he adds.

Commonly referred to as the ‘King of Crops’ owing to its traditional and nutritional benefits, yam in West and Central Africa – a region that accounts for about 93 per cent of global yam production—faces a plethora of limitations among which are high costs of planting material and of labor, decreasing soil fertility, inadequate yield potential of varieties, as well as the increasing levels of field and storage pests and diseases associated with intensification of cultivation.

Cassava stem multiplication records success in Sierra Leone



Samah (second left) on his 53-hectare farm with colleagues

Improved cassava multiplication in Sierra Leone has recorded a milestone with farmers cultivating large hectares across the country.

The farmers, supported by IITA-UPoCA, obtained the improved planting materials during the 2008/2009 season and will be disseminating the same varieties to other farmers next season as they harvest the root crop.

Researchers working under the IITA-UPoCA project say the varieties will improve cassava productivity in the country.

Mrs. Agnes Mamie Gbanie, a group leader and mother of seven is among the beneficiaries of the improved cassava stems. She and her group currently cultivate about 23 hectares of cassava, thanks to IITA-UPoCA.

Apart from cassava stem multiplication, Gbanie has also benefited from a capacity building workshop organized by IITA. After receiving the training on gari

processing, Gbanie organized women in her group and processed 200 bags of gari which they sold to the market.

“To me, I remain grateful to IITA-UPoCA because of their help. They have raised me up,” she says.

Gbanie explains that the Mandu Women Group, which she leads, operates by working together and proceeds from their efforts are offered to members as loans.

Apart from Gbanie and her group, farmer Seedi Samah now cultivates 53 hectares of cassava. The 53-hectare farm is located near Kpandebu Growth Center, a UNIDO community assistance project; about two hours drive from Kanema.

Samah says he got interested in cassava after coming in contact with researchers working under the IITA-UPoCA project.

“All the varieties here were given to us by IITA-UPoCA free of charge,” Samah says.

The cassava farm which is located a kilometer away from the Growth Center stands to be a major supplier of cassava root to the enterprise which had remained dormant since inauguration some years ago.

Dr. Braima James, IITA-UPoCA Project Manager, says the project linkage with the Growth Center is a good and necessary compliment.

Help conserve electricity!

Before leaving the workplace at the day's end, make sure that you have:

- (1) Powered off all unnecessary electrical office/lab equipment;
- (2) Turned off air conditioners; and
- (3) Switched off all lights.