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1. Issue and aims

Yam is mostly sold via informal distribution chains in Guadeloupe (FWI). In order to devise options for an improved structuring of the sector,we needed to identify the current distribution chains and understand how they work and the reasons for their existence. We inquired yam farmers and retailers and characterized the different marketing chains. We also assessed their advantages and inconveniences. Consequently we identified the marketing strategies adopted by the different actors.

2. Description and results

6 300 tons of yam are produced yearly in Guadeloupe for a total of 8 200 tones consumed, resulting in a coverage rate of 78% (Chambre d'Agriculture Guadeloupe, 2011, data of 2009). The complementary 1900 tons of yam mainly come from Costa Rica and Dominica.

Local production is mostly sold through short distribution chains (chains that count a maximum of one intermediary). We extrapolated data from our inquiries and estimate that 3000 tons of yam are sold on retail markets either by yam farmers themselves (farmer-retailer) or by retailers (cf. *figure 1*). 3200 tones are distributed between itinerant sale, direct farm sale, sale to small retailers (small supermarkets, green-groceries and restaurants) and sale to wholesaler-collectors (collection of the harvest at the farm-gate). Part of the harvest is dedicated to household consumption. Only a small proportion of the production (100 tons) is sold through cooperatives. Given these facts, we identified 5 marketing methods used by local farmers to first-stage market their production. These chains are characterized by a varying number of intermediaries, ranging from no intermediary at all (direct sale) to two intermediaries (wholesaler-collectors and retailers) between farmers and consumers (refer to *figure 1*).

Direct sale (itinerant sale and direct farm sale) is informal. It is characterized by no specific contract, a higher price paid to the farmer than in any other chain, zero payment terms and lower quality requirements regarding the product. On the other hand, it implies that farmers dedicate a large part of their activity to marketing and they need to be properly organized between production and marketing activities.

On the opposite, longer distribution chains (two intermediaries)- and particularly those involving cooperative- imply contracting on price, volumes and quality of the tubers. These chains appear to have a high level of constraints from the farmer's point of view, which can explain that only small volumes of yam are marketed these ways. Yet, cooperatives guarantee the sale of the production and give the insurance to sell it all and at a price know in advance. Additionally they provide access to marketing subsidies and help to save time that can be reallocated to production activities.

Other chains are characterized by contrasted levels of commitment between farmers and intermediaries. Whenever there is a contract, it is generally an oral contract based on mutual trust. Those chains have diverse characteristics regarding selling of the production. Those are represented in *Table 1*. Imported Costa Rican yam is marketed through long chains that count with wholesale firms as the main intermediaries while wholesale-collectors and retailers are involved in the marketing of Dominican yam (cf. *figure 1*).

3. Limits and perspectives

Properly speaking, there is no ideal marketing method for yam. Being aware of advantages and inconvenience of each marketing method (level of remuneration, marketing risk, time dedicated to marketing, quality requirements) is what make farmers decide the strategy that best suits their objectives and production factors endowment..

4. To learn more

Le Roux, C. (2011). Study of yam marketing network in Guadeloupe. Master thesis.Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe, ISTOM, School of International Agro-development and French National Institute for Agricultural Research. Research Unit:Tropical Agrosystems: 77p. + appendices. (In French).

F*igure 1* : Yam marketing chains in Guadeloupe
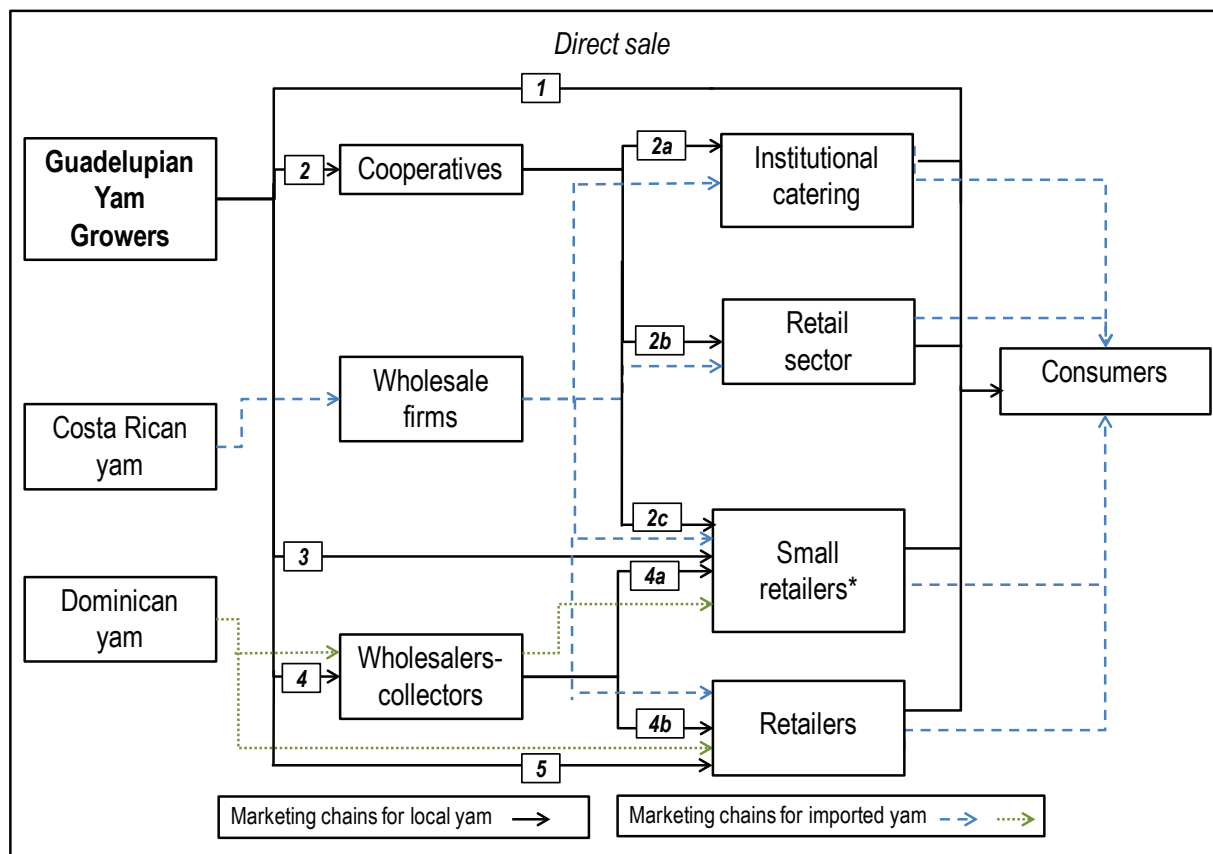*Small retailers = Green groceries, small supermarkets, restaurants

Table 1 : Assets and constraints of the different marketing chains according to yam farmers

Marketing chain	Characteristics of the marketing chain
1/ Direct sale	Low to medium guarantee on sales. High remuneration. Big amount of time dedicated to marketing and short payment terms. Small to medium volumes sold. Low quality requirements regarding marketed tubers.
2/ Farmer ⬇ cooperative	High guarantee on sales. Low remuneration but access to subsidies on marketing. Smallamount of time dedicated to marketing and long payment terms. Big volumes sold. High quality requirements regarding marketed tubers.
3/ Farmer ⬇ Small retailers	Low to high guarantee on sales. Medium to high remuneration. Small amount of time dedicated to marketing and short payment terms. Small to big volumes sold. High quality requirements regarding marketed tubers.
4/ Farmer ⬇ Wholesaler- collectors	High guarantee on sales. Low remuneration. Small amount of time dedicated to marketing and short payment terms. High volumes sold. Low quality requirements regarding marketed tubers.
5/ Farmer ⬇ retailers	High guarantee on sales. High remuneration. Small amount of time dedicated to marketing and short payment terms. Small volumes sold. Low quality requirements regarding marketed tubers.

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Technical day on yam

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