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Strengths and weaknesses of yam sector and prospects for improvement

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1. Issue and aims

Yam is the first crop grown in Guadeloupe in both terms of area (450ha) and production (3600 t). Local production covers 78% of the needs and contributes among other products to food self-sufficiency in Guadeloupe (Chambre d'Agriculture, 2009). However, this high potential sector faces difficulties at different levels (production, distribution and consumption) that hamper its competitiveness. In order to understand better its strengths and weaknesses we inquired yam producers, retailers, consumers as well as extension services. The present work is an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the sector from the point of view of different stakeholders. We also suggest options for improvement.

2. Description and results

A cross-analysis of the sector revealed that actors' expectations and proposals are numerous and diverse, which highlights the fact that there is a great potential for improvement (Table 1). Consumers are generally willing to eat more yams, which they usually consider as a quality product. They would like to have access to a greater varietal diversity. Other consumers, who are also less knowledgeable about the crop, consider that yam is long to prepare and is not tasty, especially for children. For everybody yam is still an expensive product that can only be afforded depending on family budget. Therefore, it could be interesting to offer increased varietal diversity to consumers as well as different forms of processed products (ie. peeled or pre-cooked yams), thus providing competitive product supplies compared to other stark foods (pastas, rice, etc...). Intermediaries support consumer demand and are also interested in more varietal diversity. Additionally, they would like yams to be of more homogeneous quality and the supply to be more regular. On the production side, farmers' expectations are currently difficult to satisfy because of important phytosanitary constraints affecting varieties that consumers appreciate a lot but that prove difficult to grow. Prospects for improvement of the sector are: counter-season production of non-photoperiodic cultivars, stretching of production taking advantage of the fact that there are short and long cycle cultivars, storage facilities, improvement of cultural practices. Also, the production could be more diverse and of higher quality (production of seed tubers of rare varieties, taking advantage of the diversity of soil and climate conditions in Guadeloupe).

Additionally, the marketing value of products could also be improved through more attractive marketing varieties and by increasing consumers' awareness of the existing varietal diversity. Our results also suggest that a prospect for development could be improving the fit between demand and supply. To do so, we need to characterize consumers' expectations and identify the drivers of their own choices (i.e., the guarantee on the origin and production type, taste criteria, price...).

3. Limits and perspectives

Our proposal was built from a representative sample of the diversity of stakeholders. It enables us to draw prospects for the development of the yam sector in Guadeloupe, in accordance with stakeholders' expectations.

4. To learn more...

Defêche, C., 2005. Diversity of yam growers' agronomic and technical practices in Guadeloupe. Petit-Bourg, Guadeloupe, INRA AG APC: 57p + appendices. Report produced within the frame of a voluntary civil service for technical support. (In French).

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).

Merlot, J.-C., 2007. Yam growers' marketing strategy and consumer demand in Guadeloupe. Diagnostic elements for the drafting of a marketing policy. Masterthesis. ENITA (French National School of Agricultural Engineers), UPROFIG, ARECA : 43p + appendices. (In French).



Stakeholders views of the strenghts and weaknesses of the yam sectors and proposals for their development

	Producers	Retailers	Consumers
Strenghts and weaknesses	Profitable crop but with important labour time requirement and high risks on production	Yam, « a product that sells good » but whose supply has to be regulated and commercial quality enhanced	Yam is an appreciated local product but it is too costly for some consumers while for others it does not fit with the new patterns of food consumption
	Sensitivity to fungal diseases and pests High sensitivity to weed infestations and droughts Lack of healthy seed tubers Imported yam is responsible for the decrease of local yam price and it can potentially cause phytosanitary problems	Local production irregular due to constraints at the production level and lack of technical advice and planning Lack of quality and homogeneity of local production: twisted and dirty tubers, lack of calibration Lack of organization and endorsement among farmers Local yam too costly	Hurdles at the consumer level:: price, lack of interest from children, time and difficulties at cooking stage, lack of knowledge about the identity of yam and lack of taste Drivers of consumption: taste, willingness to eat local products, quality of products
Proposals	Producing more Seeking solutions against diseases Improving access to seed tubers Organizing producers into groups Subsidizing local yam Developing linkages with consumers Regulating yam importations Avoiding cultivation of non competitive yam cultivars compared to imported yams Developing yam processing	Encouraging yam consumption Offering processed products to consumers Improving linkages between producers and retailers Homogenizing the quality of production Increasing the provision of different cultivars Increasing commercial outlets for cooperatives	Providing new forms of product conditioning and processing? Spreading new recipes ? Improving the knowledge of the different cultivars ? Offering more calibrated products fitted for family consumption ? Offering more cultivars and more often ?

Journ'ïames 2012

Technical day on yam

September, 25 - INRA Duclos, Petit-Bourg

October, 2 - CFPPA Petit-Canal

Proceedings

