



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Focus: Bananas & potatoes

With the rising threats to food security there is need to look at crops that can adapt to high temperatures and low rainfall.

Apart from the major staples such as maize and cassava there is also need to consider bananas and other crops.

Bananas and potatoes are a major source carbohydrates – a nutrient also found in maize and cassava.

The ability of these crops to withstand long periods of little rainfall is one of the major reasons that they should be grown on a large scale.

People in Zambia have acquired knowledge on how other countries such as Tanzania have utilised the banana to be a part of their main diet.

It is therefore, important to promote as many crops, such as bananas and potatoes that are able to withstand climate extremes - such as drought.

# The Weekly Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

## The Problem: Bananas and Sweet Potatoes Are Not Always Seen As Cash Crops in Zambia

Bananas in Zambia are mainly looked at as fruits that are eaten as a snack – much the same as potatoes.

This has been due to limited information on how these plants can also be used as an alternative crop to maize or cassava as a staple food.

There is a need to provide information on how these crops should be grown in the country.

Its ability to produce better yields in poor conditions with less labor makes the sweet potato particularly suitable as a crop in a society threatened by the effects of climate change.

Most of the sweet potatoes grown are used for home consumption, which further emphasizes the importance of the sweet potato as a food security

Apart from being a food security crop, sweet potato is a cheap, nutritious solution for farmers that need to grow more food in less space for a rapidly growing population.

Sweet potatoes and bananas are already widely grown in Zambia, but most farmers don't realize they are highly drought-tolerant.

It should also be noted that these two crops can be source of income. It is therefore, important to educate farmers on the need to plant these two crops on a large scale. The waste from bananas and sweet potatoes also act as a soil nutrient for other crops such as maize. The growing of these crops reduces soil acidity thereby making the soil good for most types of crops that the farmers may need and they also reduce soil erosion.

## Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help the community understand that bananas and sweet potatoes are two crops that could help the country in its drive to maintain food security, regardless of changes in the climate. That is, these crops can be grown for both food and cash.

Help the listeners understand the following points about bananas and sweet potatoes:

These crops are cheap to store. They just need a cool dry place and do not need barns such as crops like maize -- which is labor intensive. Bananas and sweet potatoes are not easily attacked by insects therefore reducing the cost of buying insecticides to protect the crops.

Both of these crops are a source of carbohydrates providing quick energy. They can be used to occasionally replace Nshima, offering a relatively cheap alternative to Zambia's national food.

Besides being high in carbohydrates, bananas and sweet potatoes are also high in vitamins A and C. These vitamins are important for growth in infants and adults. They help with giving good eyesight and making strong bones.

The sweet potato leaves can also be cooked and eaten as vegetables, providing additional protein, vitamins and minerals.

Farmers need to be given enough information on how these crops can be grown. These crops are important because of their ability to adapt to harsh climate changes. They are widely accepted crops and so there is no need for them to be introduced as new crops.

Conduct an interview with farmers who grow sweet potatoes and bananas in your area. What has been their experience with these crops? How do they store their sweet potatoes and bananas to keep them from spoiling? What suggestions do they have for other farmers as far as growing tips?

Interview an agricultural expert from your area; ask him/her about the cultivation of sweet potatoes and bananas. What are the advantages of growing these two crops? Can they be cash crops for farmers? What kind of market is there for sweet potatoes and bananas?

Share recipes for various sweet potato and banana dishes.

### Useful Link

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