

*Commentary*

## **A look at Cassava production in Nigeria**

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**Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) production is vital to the economy of Nigeria as the country is the world's largest producer of the commodity. The crop is produced in 24 of the country's 36 states. In 1999, Nigeria produced 33 million tonnes, while a decade later, it produced approximately 45 million tonnes, which is almost 19% of production in the world. The average yield per hectare is 10.6 tonnes.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, cassava production is well-developed as an organized agricultural crop. It has well-established multiplication and processing techniques for food products and cattle feed. There are more than 40 cassava varieties in use. Cassava is processed in many processing centres and fabricating enterprises set up in the country.

Originally a crop of South America, it was introduced in to Nigeria's southern part during the period of slave trade proliferated by Portuguese explorers and colonizers in the sixteenth century.[1] However, its importance to the country got a boost in the late nineteenth century when more slaves returned to their homeland and introduced processing techniques. Over the years, it has become a major economic sustenance crop and it has attained the status of largest producer in the world with recorded production of 34 million tonnes and is a cash crop of great importance to the people of Nigeria.[1]

### **Production**

In Nigeria, cassava production is well-developed as an organized agricultural crop. It has well-established multiplication and processing techniques for food products and cattle feed. There are more than 40 cassava varieties in use. Though the crop is produced in 24 of the country's 36 states,[2] cassava production dominates the southern part of the country, both in terms of area covered and number of farmers growing the crop. Planting occurs during four planting seasons in the various geo-ecological zones. The major states of Nigeriawhich produce cassava are Anambra, Bendel, Benue, Cross River, Imo, Oyo, and Rivers, and to a lesser extent Kwara and Ondo.[3]

In 1999, Nigeria produced 33 million tonnes,[4] while a decade later, it produced approximately 45 million tonnes, which is almost 19% of production in the world.[5] As of 2000, the average yield per hectare was 10.6 tonnes.[4]

Cassava is grown throughout the year, making it preferable to the seasonal crops of yam, beans or peas. It displays an exceptional ability to adapt to climate change,[6] with a tolerance to low soil fertility, resistance to drought conditions, pests and diseases, and suitability to store its roots for long periods underground even after they mature. Use of fertilizers is limited, and it is also grown on fallow lands.[1]Harvesting of the roots after planting varies from 6 months to 3 years.

The land holding for farming in Nigeria is between 0.5–2.5 hectares (1.2–6.2 acres), with about 90% of producers being small-scale farms.[1] In order to increase production, several varieties of cassava have been developed which are pest resistant; production in the country is hampered with problems

with green mite, the cassava mealybug, and the variegated grasshopper. Diseases affecting cassava crop are mosaic disease, bacterial blight, anthracnose, and root rot.[1][7]

### **Government intervention**

Eager to promote self-sufficiency, the government wants to promote the use of cassava while curtailing rice and wheat imports.[8] According to a Nigerian Presidential Initiative of July 2002, the cropped area of cultivation of cassava was proposed to be increased to 5 million hectares by the end of 2010 with a projected annual yield of 150 million tonnes resulting in an annual export earning of US\$5 billion. An adopted innovation is the introduction of vitamin A-rich cassava. The federal Government of Nigeria launched a project to introduce pro-Vitamin A cassava varieties to 1.8 million farmers in the country.[6]

### **Uses**

Cassava, which is rich in starch in the form of carbohydrate, has multiple uses. It is consumed in many processed forms, in the industry and also as livestock feed.[1] Roots or leaves are made into flours. Flours are of three types, yellow garri, white garri, or intermediate colour, with yellow garri considered the best product in Nigeria. Its other products are as dry extraction of starch, glue or adhesives, modified starch in pharmaceutical as dextrines, as processing inputs, as industrial starch for drilling, and processed foods.[9]

Cassava is Africa's most important staple food crop, after maize, and Africa produces half of the world's supply. The plant is used to make a starchy food called gari, and it is also a source for biofuel as well as animal feed. Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava, producing around 45 million tonnes in 2009, almost 19% of total world production. Despite its preeminent position in cassava growing, Nigeria has yet to make much impact on the global cassava market, since most of its crop is consumed domestically. But with new initiatives under way aimed at increasing and improving cassava production and developing new ways to use the crop, Nigeria hopes to utilise cassava as part of its strategy to diversify its economy away from petroleum.

### **Initiatives to Boost Production**

The major stakeholders in the cassava sector include the Nigeria Cassava Growers Association, an advocacy group drawn from those producing cassava, and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), a non-profit agricultural research group headquartered in Ibadan. Working together, these two are enabling growers to boost their crops with the help of the US Aid for International Development fund. Under the USAID programme, announced in 2009, 5'000 cassava growers are being furnished with high yielding varieties of cassava to plant and assisted to plant one hectare of the new crop. The aim is to upgrade the cassava stock among small growers, so as to allow farmers to raise their return from the current 12-15 tonnes of cassava per hectare to 40-50 tonnes per hectare.

The IITA is partnering with the Nigerian Farm and Infrastructure Foundation to carry out Nigeria's part in a cassava improvement project funded by the UN's Common Fund for Commodities (CFC). The Cassava Value Chains project is under way in Nigeria, Benin and Sierra Leone, and CFC has made USD1.6 million available for distributing high quality cassava seedlings to growers and constructing new international standard cassava processing facilities.

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