



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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10 Reasons We're Sweet on Sweet Potatoes and Why You Should Be Too!



Meredith McCormack, USAID

First Lady Michelle Obama harvests sweet potatoes with students at the annual fall harvest of the White House Kitchen Garden in October 2014.

The unassuming sweet potato graces our plates in the United States each Thanksgiving. But across the developing world, it's packing a powerful punch every day against poor nutrition.

Just this week, First Lady Michelle Obama [harvested](#) sweet potatoes from the White House Kitchen Garden during the annual fall harvest.

These sweet potatoes are special for many reasons. For one, they're full of important nutrients—their high vitamin-A content gives them their signature orange color. They're also a product of Feed the Future's [work](#) with U.S. universities and the international research community to research and develop varieties of foods - like the [orange-fleshed sweet potato](#) - that address both undernutrition and poverty.

We're helping researchers get innovations like these from the lab to field, where they can really make a difference, particularly in the lives of smallholder farmers who we're celebrating today on [World Food Day](#).

In the United States, most of our varieties of sweet potatoes are orange-fleshed and most Americans are aware of their nutritional benefits. However, in Africa and many parts of Asia, the dominant varieties are white, containing no vitamin A whatsoever.

Yet when sweet potatoes are grown in these regions, it's often by poor smallholder farmers, providing a win-win when it comes to fighting malnutrition [and](#) poverty.

That's why Feed the Future and its partners are helping families across the globe – and especially in Africa – grow and incorporate orange-fleshed sweet potatoes into their diets. In fact, millions of people across Africa now enjoy this type of sweet potato, and its nutritional benefits, alongside traditional varieties as a result of our work.

Read on to learn why we love sweet potatoes and why, if you care about ending hunger and poverty, you should too!



- 1.** Sweet potatoes deliver life-saving nutrition. While the sweet potato comes in many colors, the orange ones are the most packed with vitamin A. This is particularly important in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than 43 million children are vitamin-A deficient. Orange-fleshed sweet potato could help them avoid blindness, disease and even death!
- 2.** The sweet potato has been saving lives for years. It has kept millions from starvation in China and Uganda when various crises meant other crops were unavailable to eat. Farmers in Japan and the Philippines have grown sweet potato after typhoons to help aid in food security and recovery.
- 3.** Sweet potatoes can even help fight poverty. Ninety-five percent of sweet potatoes are grown in developing countries, often by small-scale farmers and in home gardens. The extras that families don't eat, they can sell to boost their income. And since many of the orange-fleshed sweet potato varieties are ready to harvest before traditional white varieties, they're first to market and first to fetch a good price. Women often use the money from selling sweet potatoes to pay for school fees, buy medicines, and purchase other foods for their families.
- 4.** Sweet potatoes are full of the A, B, C's – and E's! They're a valuable source of all these vitamins and even contain some iron and zinc. Just one ice-cream scoop's worth of orange-fleshed sweet potato (150 grams) meets a child's full daily need for vitamin A.

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5. Sweet potatoes aren't just for humans - they make great food for animals too. Farmers feeding sweet potato vines to their chickens report that they produce more and better quality eggs. And studies show dairy cows fed with high-protein sweet potato vines produce less methane gas than when fed other feed, potentially helping reduce harmful global emissions. Sweet potatoes also require less water to grow than most grains. So basically, sweet potatoes are [climate-smart](#) too!

6. Sweet potatoes are versatile. From Latin America to Africa and Asia to the White House garden, as long as the climate is hot and moist, sweet potatoes will thrive. They can grow anywhere from sea level up to 2,500 meters (higher than the mile-high city of Denver, Colorado). They can also be incorporated into many recipes. In Africa, you can find bread, juices and other snacks made from sweet potatoes. You can even substitute sweet potatoes for a portion of wheat flour when baking to increase nutritional content. [Need a recipe?](#)

7. Sweet potatoes are true to their name: They're sweet, particularly the orange-fleshed varieties. In Africa, children especially love the sweet taste and enjoy snacking on sweet potato and sweet potato products. This helps them get the vitamin A they need to grow up strong and healthy.

8. Sweet potatoes sweeten fields too! Because they come from a different genus than many other crops, farmers may plant them in between planting other crops to prevent pest build up. George Washington Carver developed this technique, called crop rotation. He was a big fan of sweet potatoes too, creating new uses for them such as flour and vinegar.

9. Sweet potatoes support moms. In Sub-Saharan Africa, we've distributed orange-fleshed sweet potatoes to farming communities, particularly to women farmers. Women and children suffer the most from vitamin-A deficiency, so they stand to gain the most from growing them. When we distribute these sweet potatoes to women alongside providing them nutrition education, we can help them improve their vitamin-A status.

