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Improving Smallholder Cassava Production using New Varieties and Best Agronomic Practices on Ultisols in Southern Cameroon

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Abstract

Cassava is the main subsistence staple for farmers and a preferred food item for both rural and urban consumers in southern Cameroon. Urbanisation and increased world market prices of alternative starchy staples have resulted in an increased demand for both fresh and processed cassava. At present, the high demand is not met by increased supply, resulting in higher prices which undermine food security for a growing segment of urban poor. Cassava is currently produced by fragmented smallholder producers in mixed food crop fields with groundnut as the major cropping partner. The main objective of these fields is subsistence food production and not cash generation. Cassava root yields in subsistence fields are considered low caused by a combination of low plant density and high pest and disease pressure. Better market prices and improved cassava performance may provide an incentive to farmers to shift to more commercially oriented cassava fields to complement their income. The objective of this study was to develop a set of best practices to be recommended to farmers to lift productivity to commercially attractive levels for local markets. In a multi-locational participatory field trial in three villages in the Yaoundé area, performance of IITA improved cassava germplasm was compared with the best local variety. The experiment compared a combination of cultural practices including planting pattern (square vs rectangular), soil management (level till vs ridged vs no-till) and groundnut intercropping in a factorial design. Harvest data is currently evaluated with the collaborating farmers and is soon to be analysed.

Keywords: Agronomy, Cameroon, cassava, improved germplasm