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Postharvest Losses in Vegetable Production among Rural Farmers in Ekiti State, Nigeria: Can Indigenous Technology Help?

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Abstract

Globally, about 2/3 of food produce is lost due to poor handling after harvest in a world where over 1.2 billion people suffer from chronic hunger and about 780 million of those suffering from chronic hunger live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, between 30–45 % of food crop produced particularly vegetable is wasted despite the fact that several indigenous technologies like sun-drying, drying under fire among others exist to reduce this enormous losses in crops like tomato and Okra. Considering the level of losses and its effect on food security status of rural farmers in Ekiti State, being the largest producer of these crops in South-west Nigeria, this therefore becomes very pertinent to examine farmers' perception and level of use of these technologies in reducing losses. Snowball sampling technique was used to select 211 farmers who predominantly cultivate Tomato and Okra with the use of interview schedule. Data obtained were analysed with the use of Tobitmodel. Results show that the mean age of the farmers was 52.9 ± 10.61 years and the mean farm size was 1.95 ± 0.58 hectares. Majority (73.9 %) of the farmers never preserved their crops. However, only 26.1 % used sun-drying, 17.1 % used drying under fire while only 8.1 % used baskets and 18.0 % used bags in the transportation of these crops with the aim of preventing losses. The study revealed that only 32.7 % had positive disposition to the use of these technologies as they were tagged to be ineffective. Characteristics such as rapid drying ($b = 0.065$), complete removal of moisture content of crops ($b = 0.015$), harbouring harmful microbes ($b = 0.069$) and changing the flavour of vegetables ($b = 0.037$) were the significant determinants of usage. The study established that these technologies have features that could prevent postharvest losses in perishable crops like tomato and Okra, if appropriately used.

Keywords: Indigenous technology, postharvest losses, rural farmers, vegetable