



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/beating-vitamin-deficiency-one-sweet-potato-time>

Beating Vitamin A Deficiency One Sweet Potato at a Time



USAID

In Mozambique, vitamin A deficiency is alarmingly prevalent: 69 percent of Mozambicans don't get enough of this critical nutrient, which impacts everything from vision to the immune system.

One simple yet proven way Feed the Future is combating vitamin A deficiency is by promoting consumption of **orange fleshed sweet potato**. Sweet potatoes come in many colors, but the medium to deep orange-colored varieties are rich in beta-carotene, a building block of vitamin A: just half a cup of boiled or mashed orange sweet potatoes meet the daily intake needs for a child under five years of age. Sweet potatoes are also high-yielding even under adverse conditions, and they grow and can be harvested more quickly than most crops.

Orange fleshed sweet potatoes are an example of the power of biofortification, a process through which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through conventional plant breeding and/or biotechnology. Unlike conventional fortification, which adds nutrients during processing (as in the case of iodized salt, for example), biofortification involves breeding crop varieties specifically to increase their nutrient levels, so that the benefits can accrue even to rural populations where the infrastructure required for processing and conventional fortification may not exist or be readily available.

With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development under Feed the Future, the International Potato Center released 15 drought-tolerant orange fleshed sweet potato varieties in Mozambique in 2011, aligning closely with initiatives led by Mozambique's Ministries of Agriculture and Health. To accelerate farmers' access to the improved varieties, sweet potato vine multipliers (voucher-based distribution centers that supply vines and other inputs to vulnerable households) were opened all across Mozambique. Over the course of three years, more than 2,400 tons of disease-free planting material were produced and distributed, and more than 3,800 farmers – over half of them women – were trained on production and multiplication of orange sweet potatoes.

These efforts were paired with public health campaigns that taught families about the importance of vitamin A and how to prepare nutritious meals with orange sweet potatoes. At the end of the intervention, vitamin A intake in children in participating communities was eight times higher than in non-participating communities, and vitamin A deficiency had fallen by 15 percent.

Part of Feed the Future's Platform for Agricultural Research and Technology Innovation in Mozambique, the orange fleshed sweet potato program demonstrates the potential impact of targeting one highly nutritious staple crop as part of a broader food security strategy.

[Learn more](#) about Feed the Future's work with orange fleshed sweet potatoes. **Have a favorite sweet potato recipe? Share it with Feed the Future!**