



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Going Orange: Uganda Prepares to Roll Out Orange Sweet Potato on a Large Scale



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Beta-carotene-packed orange sweet potatoes are helping more Ugandans get the nutrition they need.

Welsy Anena's mother is convinced that orange sweet potato (OSP) saved her daughter's life. Anena had been sickly since birth and at 18 months, she weighed just nine pounds. She had been in and out of hospitals so often that her mother braced herself for the worst.

But when her mother started feeding her OSP, everything changed. Since increasing her consumption of this nutrient-dense food, Anena has grown into a vivacious 30-pound three-year-old.

In Uganda, Anena is one of the lucky ones. One out of every three Ugandan children under the age of five suffers from vitamin A deficiency. This condition is a leading cause of preventable blindness and increases the risk of disease and death from common childhood infections. Each year, almost 30,000 children in Uganda die due to causes related to vitamin A deficiency.

Now, Uganda is turning to OSP to improve the health and nutrition of its population, particularly among children and their mothers. With its high concentration of beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A, OSP packs a powerful nutritional punch: a single ice cream scoop's worth is enough to provide a child's daily vitamin A needs. OSP has been hailed as the "**Mother Teresa of foods**" and one of the **five most innovative ways to feed the planet**.

Ugandans already grow and eat an abundance of sweet potatoes – in fact, Uganda produces more sweet potatoes than any other country in Africa. But whereas sweet potatoes at U.S. supermarkets typically have the same bright orange color as other beta-carotene-rich foods like carrots and apricots, white- and yellow-fleshed potato varieties are more commonly available in Uganda, so OSP is a new twist on an old favorite. The good news for smallholder farmers is that, in addition to offering much greater nutritional value, OSP yields more and matures earlier than the traditional white and yellow varieties.

Using such a widely consumed crop in a targeted way could turn out to be one of the sweetest public health investments in Uganda. Today, more than 100,000 Ugandan farm households across 22 districts are growing OSP and feeding it to their families. This has created a welcome challenge to Feed the Future partner [HarvestPlus](#), which leads the delivery of this conventionally bred nutritious crop to Ugandan farmers.

"There's much more demand for OSP than there is supply," notes Anna-Marie Ball, who oversaw the crop's introduction and

expansion in Uganda under the HarvestPlus program. “The task now is to get some of the larger farmers growing it and bringing it to market.”

With support from Feed the Future, HarvestPlus aims to reach more than 225,000 farming households with OSP by 2016. This will involve working with local labs and multipliers to ensure that healthy vines are delivered to farmers for planting, and encouraging farmers who receive free vines to “pay it forward” upon first harvest by sharing the improved vines with others in their communities. The project has also begun introducing another nutritious crop – high-iron beans – in northern, western and central Uganda to help provide a comprehensive and varied “food basket” approach to improved nutrition.

Importantly, the project can count on the commitment of the Government of Uganda. In February 2015, the Speaker of Uganda’s Parliament officially launched a campaign to get OSP to more Ugandans.

“Let me take this opportunity to officially launch the scaling of the orange sweet potato in Uganda and recommend it to farmers, agricultural extension advisors and the general public,” Speaker Rebecca Kadaga announced at the launch event.

This momentum points to a future Uganda where more stories like Anena’s can be told.

This story was contributed by Denis Okello at HarvestPlus, a leader in the global effort to end hidden hunger caused by the lack of essential vitamins and minerals in the diet.