

Characteristics of fresh ware potato traders in Nairobi and Nakuru towns, Kenya

George O. Abong^{1*}, Michael W. Okoth¹ and Jackson N. Kabira²

¹*Department of Food Science, Nutrition and Technology, University of Nairobi, P.O. Box 29053-00625, Nairobi (Kangemi), Kenya;* ²*National Potato Research Centre (KARI), Tigoni, P.O. Box 338, Limuru. Nairobi, Kenya.*

*Corresponding author: Email: georkoyo@yahoo.com; Phone: 254735508558

ABSTRACT

Objective: The potato is an important food crop in Kenya employing over 2.5 million people along its value chain thereby contributing to food security and poverty alleviation. The fresh ware potato market is an integral part of this chain. The potato market in the country has been assumed to lack defined structures and having various limitations that require urgent redress. This study was designed to characterize potato sellers in terms of location, volume of sale, customer base, sources of information, variety most traded, demand and supply dynamics and potato handling practices.

Methodology and results: A total of 169 potato sellers were interviewed in Nairobi and Nakuru town markets. About 25 % of the respondents were located in Nakuru town while 75 % were located in Nairobi. A large number (70 %) of respondents traded in potatoes as the only source of income while 30 % traded in other fresh produce in addition to fresh potatoes. The average daily sale in terms of quantity was 200 kg while sales volume in monetary value was in the range of USD. 64 – 404. Demand by customers significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) correlated to season ($r=0.97$). Demand was observed to be low between January and March which coincide with harvesting seasons but increased between April and June to 24 % when glut reduces and reaches a peak (79 %) in July-August when most stocks of fresh potatoes have run out of season. The demand for

fresh potatoes was significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) correlated ($r = -0.96$) to the supply; when supply is high the demand is low. The main buyers of the fresh potatoes were individuals who bought the produce for home consumption; wholesalers and traders (23 %); outside caterers (21 %) while kiosks and supermarkets were the least buyers at 0 - 3 %. The potato varieties sold by most sellers were Cangi (42 %) and Tigoni (34 %) while Nyayo and Meru were the least traded (4 %). Most traders (48 %) depended on the farmers and fellow traders (41 %) as sources of information compared to Ministry of Agriculture (7 %) and other sources (4 %).

Approximately 56 % of the respondents stored fresh potatoes for between 1 and 3 weeks in gunny bags at their premises with reported losses of 10 % on the average mainly due to rotting (69 %) and greening (31 %). Traders lacked proper skills in handling and storage of fresh potatoes required to prevent these losses.

Conclusions and application: Many Kenyans depend on fresh ware potato trading as a source of income. The demand, however, varies with seasons. The information obtained from the study is vital for improving the quality of potato for processing since these markets are the major sources of raw potatoes for processing and home use in Kenya. . There is general lack of skills and capacity for handling and storing potatoes, which can be bridged through appropriate training of the traders.

Key words: Ware Potato, handling, trade, varieties.