



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

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### ABSTRACT

*Objective:* The potato being an important food crop in Kenya employs 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 Kenya has been assumed to have defined structure with various limitations that require urgent redress. This study was therefore designed to characterize potato sellers in terms of location, volume of sale, customer base, sources of information, variety most traded, demand and supply variations and handling practices by the traders.

*Methodology and results:* A total of 169 potato sellers were interviewed in Nairobi and Nakuru town markets and selling points. About 25 % of the respondents were located in Nakuru town while the majorities (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 sales in terms of quantity were 200 kg while sales volume in monetary value ranged from Kenya shillings 5, 000 – 31, 500. Demand by



customers varied highly (99 %) with seasons being low between January and March which coincide with harvesting seasons but improves between April and June to 24 % when the glut reduces and reaches a peak high in July-August (79 %) 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. The main customers of the fresh potatoes were individuals who bought the produce for home consumption. Other customers included wholesalers and traders (23 %) and outside catering (21 %) while kiosks and supermarkets were the least buyers at 3 % and 0 % respectively. The potato variety sold by most sellers was Cangi (42 %) followed by Tigoni (34 %) while Nyayo and Meru were the least traded (4 %). Most (48 %) traders depended on the farmers and fellow traders (41 %) as sources of information compared to Ministry of Agriculture (7 %) and other researchers (4 %).

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

*Conclusions and application:* Many kenyan depend on fresh (ware) potato trading as a source of income. The demand is, however, dependent on seasons. There is general lack of skills and capacity for handling and storing potatoes. This information is vital for the purposes improving quality of potato for processing since these markets are the major sources of raw potatoes for the many small-scale crisps processors in Kenya. The gap in potato handling and storage skills could be bridged through appropriate training of the traders.

**Key words:** potato handling, potato traders, Cangi, Tigoni