

# CONSUMPTION OF SECONDARY FOOD CROPS BY LOW- AND HIGH-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

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## ABSTRACT

The study attempted to identify the kinds of secondary food crops consumed by households when the normally consumed staple food is scarce or when such households experience an income squeeze. One thousand two hundred households in the Visayas region were included in the survey. The respondents were divided into high- and low-income groups based on the median income of the group. Four secondary food crops, namely: sweet potato, plantain banana, cassava and taro were usually bought by respondents to supplement their staple food consumption. In general, more respondents in the low-income group bought plantain bananas than those who bought sweet potato and vice versa in the high-income group. Low-income households showed higher preference for cassava than high-income households most probably because of its low price. Most respondents preferred sweet potato due to its easy preparation.

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**KEY WORDS:** Secondary food crops. Respondents. Consumption. Low- and high-income households. Demand. Preference.

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## INTRODUCTION

Filipino consumers always face various constraints in their consumption activities. These constraints may take the social, political or legal forms. Others are mostly economic in nature such as those

affected by supply and demand, prices, and income. Even if the supply of staple food is abundant, household consumption may still be limited by high prices and low income, especially among the rural poor. In such situations; Filipino consumers are forced either to cut

able. These included sweet potato, plantain banana, cassava, taro and rice and/or corn (Table 1).

Generally, there were more consumers (45%) who ate sweet potato when rice and corn were not readily available in the market. This was followed by respondents who consumed plantain bananas (43%), cassava (7%), and taro (3%). Rice was eaten by those whose main staple was corn.

#### *Root Crop Preference of Households*

The root crop preference of the respondents as affected by income group is presented in Table 2. Of the 1200 household respondents, 51% preferred sweet potato to other root crops; about 21% preferred cassava; 16% taro; and 12%, yams.

Distinct differences in consumer preferences for cassava, taro and yams were observed between the two income groups. Among the low-income households; 26, 15 and 7% preferred cassava, taro, and yams, respectively. In contrast; the choice for cassava, taro and yams did not markedly differ in the high-income households; each with about 16% preference. However, it was noted that more respondents in the low-income group (26%) preferred cassava than those in the high-income group (16%).

#### *Reasons for Households' Preference*

Six hundred seventeen households were noted to prefer sweet potato most (Table 3). Out of these households, 78.6% indicated that the product is very easy to prepare and another 16% said that they like its taste. Three percent of the respondents claimed that sweet potato is always available in the market and a few (less than 1% each) reasoned out that it is more nutritious, cheaper, and has many uses.

Of the 195 respondents who preferred cassava most, 40% said that cassava was the cheapest and another 40% claimed that it is always available (Table 4). Twelve percent reasoned out that they like the taste of cassava and 7% chose this root crop because of its easy preparation.

Among those who liked taro most, the usual reasons for preference especially in the higher income group were its better taste compared to other root crops and usefulness as a vegetable.

#### *Reasons for Households' Non-Preference*

About 20% (245) of the total respondents did not prefer sweet potato. Of this, 67% (164) belongs to the low-income group and 33% (81) to the high-income category (Table 5). Among the 164 respon-

**Table 1.** Alternative food crops used by low- and high-income respondents in the Visayas in 1983 if main staple was not readily available.

Kind of Food Crop	Low Income		High Income		Both Income Groups		Variation by Income Level
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Sweet potato	240	40.0	301	50.2	541	45.1	$\chi^2 = 42.77^{**}$
Plantain banana	272	45.3	240	40.0	512	43.0	
Cassava	64	10.7	19	3.2	83	7.0	$\chi^2 (0.05) = 11.10$
Taro	18	3.0	21	3.5	39	3.0	
Rice	1	0.2	14	2.3	15	1.0	
Corn	5	0.8	5	0.8	10	0.8	
Total	600	100.0	600	100.0	1200	100.0	

\*\*Highly significant

Table 2. Root crop preference of household respondents in the Visayas in 1983 as affected by income group.

Kind of Root Crop	Low Income		High Income		Both Income Groups		Variation by Income Level
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	
Sweet potato	315	52.5	302	50.3	617	51.4	
Cassava	153	25.5	94	15.7	247	20.6	$\chi^2 = 42.76^{**}$
Taro	91	15.2	99	16.5	190	15.8	
Yam	41	6.8	105	17.5	146	12.2	$\chi^2 (0.05) = 7.81$
Total	600	100.0	600	100.0	1200	100.0	

\*\* Highly significant

**Table 3.** Reasons for preferring sweet potatoes to other root crops.<sup>1</sup>

Reason	Number	Percent
Easy to prepare	485	78.6
Tasty	99	16.0
Always available	20	3.2
Cheap	3	0.5
Has many uses	5	0.8
More nutritious	5	0.8

<sup>1</sup>Only respondents who chose sweet potato as their most preferred root crop were included.

**Table 4.** Reasons for preferring cassava to other root crops.<sup>1</sup>

Reason	Number	Percent
Cheap	78	40.0
Always available	78	40.0
Tasty	23	11.8
Easy to prepare	14	7.2
More nutritious	1	0.5
Many uses	1	0.5

<sup>1</sup>Only respondents who chose cassava as their most preferred root crop were included.

**Table 5.** Reasons for non-preference of sweet potatoes.<sup>1</sup>

Reason	Low Income		High Income		Both Income Groups	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Expensive	133	81.1	6	7.4	139	56.7
Poor taste	11	6.7	45	55.5	56	22.9
Not available	16	9.8	14	17.3	30	12.2
Not popular	4	2.4	16	19.8	20	8.2
Total	164	100.0	81	100.0	245	100.0

<sup>1</sup>Only respondents who did not prefer sweet potatoes were included.

dents in the low-income group who did not like sweet potatoes, 81% reasoned out that they are very expensive. Given the choice, those whose main staple is corn would rather save their money and buy rice. In contrast, only 6.7% of the 81 respondents in the high-income group who did not prefer sweet potatoes gave cost as the reason for their non-preference. The main reason for non-preference by the high-income group was the crop's flatulent characteristic.

Twenty-one percent (252) of the total respondents did not eat cassava for fear of poisoning. Fear was based on their previous experiences or the experiences of relatives, and news reports.

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since more consumers belonging to the low-income households tended to eat plantain bananas (45%) than sweet potato (40%), the relative potential of plantain bananas as food should be explored and they should be given equal attention as root crops in terms of research and development. It also appears that an information drive is necessary to allay fears of non-consumers regarding cassava poisoning.

Results obtained in this study should be used with care because the analysis was based on percentage response and not on the percentage of total household consumption.

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