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# Pack 99, Item 8

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**Rwandan farmers show that sweet potatoes can be a profitable crop to grow and to process into other foods**

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### Notes to broadcaster

Rwandans eat sweet potatoes as a staple in some parts of the country. But storing sweet potatoes is difficult.

This script shows how a Rwandan farmer has helped solved that problem by creating a successful business processing sweet potatoes. New varieties of sweet potatoes enriched with vitamin A are being provided to farmers by Rwandan researchers, and sweet potato is being transformed into an income-generating crop.

You could use this script to help inspire other farmers to try processing sweet potatoes, and feel more confident that they can earn a good income from their business. The script could also inspire consumers to eat different kinds of foods made from sweet potatoes.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could use this script as inspiration to research and write a script on a similar topic in your area. For example, there may be another staple crop that could be processed into other kinds of products. Or you might choose to produce this script on your station, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

Estimated running time: 10-12 minutes, with intro and outro music.

*The signature tune fades in to start the show. It fades out after 20 seconds under the voice of the host.*

**Host:** Greetings, dear Radio Salus listeners. This is Jean Paul Ntezimana. You are listening to the agro-breeding show. Last time, we talked about processing agricultural products here in Rwanda. Today, we are speaking about processing sweet potatoes.

Sweet potatoes are grown and eaten on a large scale in Rwanda, mostly in the countryside. They’re usually eaten right after they are harvested. They go straight from the field to the cooking pot. One reason for this is that we don’t know how to store sweet potatoes for a longer period.

You may be excited to hear that researchers have introduced new orange-fleshed varieties enriched with vitamin A. They are also working with farmers who are making a profit by processing sweet potatoes into flour to make donuts, biscuits, cakes, and other foods.

Are you curious to know how sweet potatoes can generate a good income? Then listen to our show today. Today, we will talk to a sweet potato farmer who is making good money by processing sweet potatoes into different foods.

*Sound of a journey by car – engine sounds, starting and stopping, etc. Fade under host.*

**Host:** I am on my way to visit Habumuremyi Jean Marie Vianney. Jean Marie is a 36-year-old farmer with four children. Like other farmers, he used to practice subsistence farming, mainly growing pineapples. But six years ago, he started to increase his income. Because he lived near a secondary school, he was lucky enough to start supplying sweet potatoes to the school. Let’s listen to Jean Marie as he tells his story.

*Fade out sounds of car*

**Clip of Jean Marie:**When I started providing the school with sweet potatoes, I had to buy them in the market in order to then sell them to the school. So I started growing sweet potatoes myself.

Then I learned that the Rwanda Agricultural Board, the RAB, was distributing new varieties of sweet potatoes that gave a better yield and that contain higher amounts of vitamin A.

I approached them and they gave me the new, orange-fleshed varieties. Later on, RAB selected me for the training on sweet potato production and processing. Before that, I had been wondering how I could store the sweet potatoes without rotting.

*Sound of someone walking up a hill – perhaps breathing hard, sounds of walking*

**Host:** To get to Jean Marie’s home, one must climb a gently sloping hill through his pineapple plantation. A big house is still under construction, and there is an oven in front of the house and two other houses on the same property. As I get closer, I can see a tall, slender and muscular man.

**Host:** (*Calling across a distance*) Hello, Mr. Jean Marie.

**Jean Marie:** (*Starting off-mic, but on-mic by end of speech*) Hello and welcome to our place. I am really happy about your visit to our sweet potato processing business. We have just finished making a pile of donuts – maybe you can try! Theoneste is making some bread, and everything is going well. Welcome to our place!

**Host:** (*Stopped walking now*)Jean Marie, since sweet potatoes are so easy to prepare and eat, why did you want to process them into other foods?

**Jean Marie:** I have been a farmer for a long time. I used to supply secondary schools in our district. But when the schools didn’t need any sweet potatoes, or didn’t want as much, I was afraid I would lose them as a customer, because you can only store potatoes for five days before they rot.

Then the idea of processing came along. I wondered: can sweet potatoes be processed to stop them from rotting so quickly and so that I would not lose any income? How could I preserve them a bit longer than five days?

**Host:**  What did you do?

**Jean Marie:** I approached the local district government, which helped me apply for credit at the bank to set up the processing business. (*Editor’s note: In Rwanda, farmers often use their land as collateral to qualify for a loan. Jean Marie was also assisted by the local government, which played the intermediary role with the bank.*) RAB helped me grow new vitamin-A rich, high-yielding varieties, participate in fairs and exhibitions across the country, and offered other assistance.

They also trained me how to dry and process sweet potatoes. It was 2010 when I started putting my idea of processing sweet potatoes into practice.

**Host:** Mr. Jean Marie Vianney, it sounds like you think your idea has become a success. How much sweet potato can you process in a day?

**Jean Marie:** Today, I dry only a small amount of sweet potatoes. I can mill and use only 500 kilograms of sweet potato flour per day. This is not enough. My ambition is to process at least 20 tonnes per day.

I bought some quite powerful machines that can process 20 tonnes of potatoes per day, so I am optimistic. But to do that, I would need more than 150 employees. I employ only 15 today. With more capacity, we would add products like sweet potato juice.

**Host:** Thank you, Mr. Jean Marie. We will speak with you a little bit later in the program.

Dear listeners, you are listening to the Agro-breeding show on Radio Salus. Today, we are talking about processing sweet potatoes into other food products.

Jean Marie grows much more sweet potato than he did in the beginning. But, to have enough for his processing business, he is always working with other farmers, including Mr. Gatete Alexis, who is here with us. Mr. Gatete, can you tell us if you are making money with this processing business?

**Mr. Gatete:** I have been a sweet potato farmer since I learned how to farm in my teenage years. But I only started to make money from sweet potatoes when I began to work with Jean Marie. He buys my harvest – all my harvest! Also, he sometimes employs me to buy sweet potatoes from other farmers for the processing business. If I had a lot of land, I would grow more sweet potatoes because they are really profitable today!

**Host:** Thank you, Mr. Gatete! Next, we will speak with Mr. Sindambirwa Theoneste, who has been constantly on the move since we’ve been here. He’s been walking to and fro, going here and there, with sweat on his forehead. Theoneste produces sweet potato products. Greetings, Mr. Theoneste. Since I’ve been here, you have been very busy! Can you explain to the listeners what you do with sweet potatoes?

**Mr. Theoneste:** I take the sweet potato flour, add 20% wheat flour and make bread, donuts, and cakes! I can process 500 kilograms of flour per day into these products. The market is asking for more than we can currently supply. That is why I am working so much.

**Host:** So you add 20% wheat flour to the sweet potato flour. Okay. Are you earning a good living with this small sweet potato processing business?

**Theoneste:** I have been trained and I earn a hundred dollars a month. That’s a lot for a man who lives in the countryside like me! I started working here in 2010. I am married and I have two children. I have half a hectare of banana trees, I have a cow and I am planning to buy another next year. I have two pigs, and I am happy with my work!

**Host:** Now let's get back to Mr. Jean Marie. With projects such as Jean Marie's, problems are not uncommon. What are the problems that you come across, Jean Marie, and how do you solve them?

**Jean Marie:** The problems are related mostly to growing sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes are not an official farming priority in Rwanda.

But I have tried to grow them and encourage other farmers to grow more. The sweet potatoes we are using are not those usually grown here in Rwanda. They are new orange-fleshed varieties enriched with vitamin A. Farmers are not familiar with these new varieties. It took intensive extension work to get farmers to grow them. Besides, the cuttings must be bought; they are not free. This is another obstacle to their popularity. But the farmers and their co-operatives understand that growing these new varieties is profitable.

**Host:**  What are you doing to promote the new orange varieties?

**Jean Marie:** My business is working with eight co-operatives, and more than 15 farmers who work outside of co-operatives. We have also talked with the district. The district authorities have made sweet potatoes a priority crop because they appreciate what we are doing in our processing business. The district will provide sweet potato farmers with some assistance to strengthen their enterprises. We hope that sweet potato production will become more popular and that we can grow enough to meet the market demand.

**Host:** Mr. Jean Marie, is operating such a processing business profitable? Are you getting some benefit yourself?

**Jean Marie:** Yes. I bought more land to increase the space to grow sweet potatoes! I had only three hectares of sweet potatoes but now I have 25! I built a house valued at about ten million Rwandese francs ($15,000 US) in Karenge, where our regional market is. This is because of all the profit I’m making! I hired a teacher who tutors my kids after school! This is a really huge benefit from my processing business.

**Host:** Thank you, Mr. Jean Marie, and thank you, dear Radio Salus listeners. As you just heard Mr. Jean Marie say, he had the idea of processing sweet potatoes into other food products and he was successful. But he is not using the sweet potatoes that we usually grow here in Rwanda. They are new, orange-fleshed varieties. If you want a high yield of sweet potatoes and you want to make money from potatoes, why not try growing these new, orange-fleshed varieties? And why not try processing your sweet potatoes into flour to make bread, cakes and other baked products for sale?

Dear listeners, dear farmers, I thank you very much for your kind attention. If you have questions, suggestions, or ideas about this show, don't hesitate to contact us at our address: Radio Salus, Post Box 117, Butare. This is Jean Paul Ntezimana saying thank you and see you soon!

**Acknowledgements**

Contributed by: Jean Paul Ntezimana. Radio Salus, Butare, Rwanda.

Revised by: David Mowbray, Senior consultant, Training and Communications, Farm Radio International.

## Sources of information

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Farm Radio International. *Research in Rwanda aims for a good harvest of sweet potatoes.* <http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-86/research-in-rwanda-aims-for-a-good-harvest-of-sweet-potatoes/>

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