

The Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal: the virtual resource for *everything* about sweetpotato

Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal

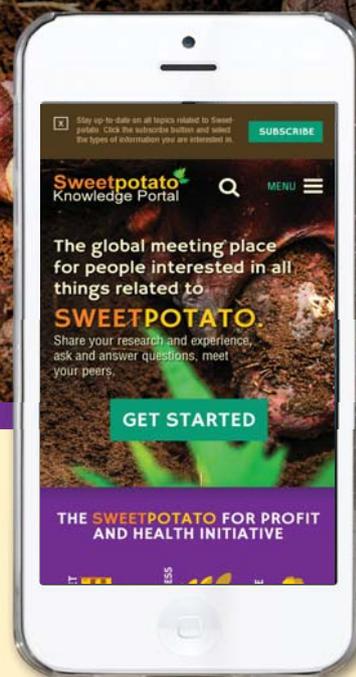
HOME ABOUT SWEETPOTATO PROJECTS & M&E PRODUCTION & SALE NUTRITION & USE SHARE & LEARN

The global meeting place for people interested in all things related to

SWEETPOTATO.

Share your research and experience, ask and answer questions, meet your peers.

GET STARTED



A major upgrade of the Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal has been completed. The Portal is a user-driven online platform that is a single access point for discovery, acquisition and sharing of information about sweetpotato research and project activities in sub-Saharan Africa.

• INTERNACIONAL •
CENTRO DE LA PAPA •
CIP
A member of the
CGIAR Consortium

SPHI
Sweetpotato
Profit and Health
Initiative

Fig. 1 Homepage of the new-look Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal

What is the problem?

Although there has been extensive work and innovation on sweetpotato in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for decades, the knowledge generated was often scattered within different institutions and was classified or indexed using different methods. Without a structured forum that promoted discourse among experts, tacit knowledge held by individuals was not adequately shared and often lost.

The Sweetpotato Knowledge Portal (SPK) was launched in December 2010, to improve access to technical, scientific, local and development knowledge on sweetpotato. The Portal is user-driven and it is easy to register. Registered members (sweetpotato scientists, practitioners and other stakeholders) have rights to publish content, such as publications, news, impact stories events and job announcements, audio-visual materials, manuals and toolkits. They can also set up collaborative project spaces or join existing sweetpotato communities of practice.

Initially, the portal was built using Plone, open-source software that is renowned for its security features, but which requires a high level of technical proficiency. Over time, it became difficult to improve the technical aspects of the Portal on a regular basis. As a result, user engagement with the portal did not grow at the expected rate over the five years of SASHA 1 (2009–2014). Moreover, we also recognized that given there was no overall manager of the site, many items had been placed by users under incorrect categories.

What do we want to achieve?

The challenge is to transform the Portal into a user-friendly, single access point for discovery, acquisition and sharing of information about sweetpotato research and activities. It should be a platform which the users can take complete ownership of, and which supports them in accomplishing their routine activities and achieving their aspirations. It should also be a

platform for the general public to gain access to sweetpotato knowledge, establish contacts with experts and facilitate collaboration between communities of practice. It is expected that improved access to knowledge will facilitate effective implementation of research and projects to improve the nutrition and food security of millions of people.

✦ How are we making it happen?

Our strategy is geared towards addressing the technological and individual capacity issues that have until now slowed down active use of the Portal.

Redesign and re-launch of the portal: In late 2014, with support from Agriculture Learning and Impacts (ALINE), a technical group called Netmidas was contracted to help redesign the portal. The exercise was undertaken in three parts: (i) a survey to establish what features users would like to see improved or added to the Portal; (ii) redesign of the portal; (iii) migration of the current content, comprising over 7,000 documents, to the new Portal; and (iv) upgrading descriptive content. Based on the findings of the survey, the new design integrates elements that are specifically geared towards improving the users' experience. The Portal has been migrated to a mobile-responsive Wordpress platform. The project pages (collaborative spaces where project teams can share publications, work plans, budgets, and reports privately or publicly) have been improved, to ease the process of registering a sweetpotato project and give project leaders greater autonomy over their pages. CoP discussion forums and member profile pages have also been redesigned and new elements such as sweetpotato expert profiles, maps and contacts of projects, institutions and decentralized vine multipliers (DVMs) have been incorporated. In addition, we have fully integrated the most popular social media platforms to make it easier for users to share content with wider audiences. This is coupled with a simpler system for uploading and categorizing content.

Improved management of the Portal and support to users: In mid-April 2015, a communication and knowledge management officer under the Sweetpotato Action for Security and Health in Africa (SASHA) project was assigned to the Portal. This will ensure that users get continuous and consistent training and technical support. The officer will spearhead categorization of content in easily accessible ways, generate public awareness about the existence of the portal and undertake

user-registration drives to increase the number of stakeholders who participate in building and using the Portal.

✦ What have we achieved?

Currently, there are 7,326 content items, with half of the content being on project initiatives and adding value (Fig. 2). Although the Portal has 635 registered users, usage data for the period between July 2015 and June 2015 indicates a 23% increase in unregistered users. Out of the users who accessed the Portal during this period, 82% did so using mobile devices. The Portal was primarily meant to cater for the sweetpotato community of practice in the 17 countries in SSA that are part of the Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative (SPHI), but usage statistics show that the Portal users originate from all over the world. Outside of Africa, users from the USA and India are the most frequent users. This is an indicator of the potential of the Portal – with a better interface and active maintenance – to become a global resource on sweetpotato science and practice.

✦ Who are we working with?

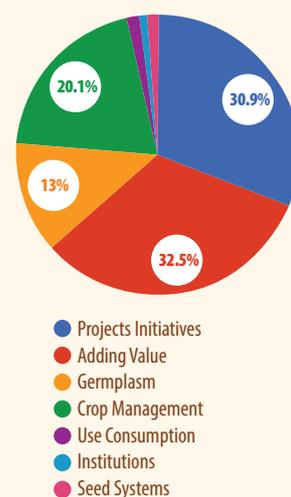
The Portal is a user-driven platform; content is contributed by all registered members. Design, maintenance, support and capacity building is supported by the International Potato Centre (CIP), through the SASHA project.

✦ What is next?

The new-look Portal will be launched during the 6th annual SPHI meeting to be held in Kigali, Rwanda between 28 September and 2 October 2015. On the first day of this meeting, participants will be trained on various aspects of the Portal, such as registration, updating individual and project information, use of discussion forums and uploading content. A registration drive will take place throughout the meeting.

Over the next year, the priority will be to improve the experience of users and increase the sense of ownership and participation in actively maintaining the Portal. To this end, user assessments will form the basis of capacity building and support. Focus will also be placed on developing a comprehensive collection of information and content on sweetpotato projects in SSA; promoting the use of discussion forums by the sweetpotato communities of practice; and increasing visits to the portal through a structured content marketing plan.

Fig. 2 Number of content items (July 2014 - June 2015) vs Category



CONTACT

Christine Bukania (CIP)
c.bukania@cgiar.org