

ABSTRACT

With vitamin A deficiency enduring as a major public health concern in developing countries, orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP) continues to be promoted as a food-based alleviation strategy for the deficiency. It is also noteworthy that while a multiplicity of studies have determined that consumers tend to be inclined to pay for OFSP, limited attention has been paid to household level social-cognitive mechanisms that drive the OFSP acceptance process. This study sought to enhance understanding of the role of rural household decision-makers'/farmers' cognitive and socio-cultural contexts in OFSP acceptance in Uganda. It specifically aimed to (i) determine whether farmers' beliefs characterize their decisions to cultivate OFSP; (ii) determine whether farmers' capability and perceptions of social approval correlate with OFSP cultivation; (iii) assess the extent to which perceptions of health risk correspond to OFSP cultivation. The research was conducted in two randomly selected rural sub-counties in Uganda that had participated in an NGO sponsored, nation-wide OFSP delivery program for three contiguous years. A mixed methods approach involving a survey of farmers' perceptions of OFSP cultivation, and in-depth and key informant interviews were used to collect data about sweetpotato producing households. ANOVA showed the OFSP cultivation staged-process to be characterized by differing belief sets held by household decision-makers. Likewise, OFSP sustained cultivation positively conformed to social pressure and farmers' capability and health-related risk valuations. Through mutual observation about OFSP agriculture, farmers' response resulted into low cultivation intensity, which resultantly made access to vines difficult, slowed experienced gratification of OFSP qualities and the attendant cultivation defections overtime. This study points to a cardinal role for processes that create supportive social and cognitive environments for promoting bio-fortified technologies such as the orange-fleshed sweetpotato.