

Abstract

Certain varieties of sweet potato, especially orange-fleshed, are being promoted as part of the strategy to combat vitamin A deficiency in children and pregnant mothers. However, the consumption of sweet potato is more widespread in rural households where it is mainly boiled or eaten raw. The lack of value addition excludes majority of urban and higher income consumers who consider sweet potato an inferior product. At the same time low income urban households that would be interested in consuming sweet potatoes are not able to receive regular supplies from the rural producing areas due to perishability and bulkiness of the produce. This study examines consumer perceptions and demand for value-added biofortified biscuit derived from the vitamin A-rich orange fleshed sweet potato in Rwanda. Specifically, it assesses consumer perceptions and preference for biofortified biscuit, consumer willingness to pay for biofortified biscuit and consumers' rating of the biofortified biscuit. It uses data from 1085 consumers stratified by income levels drawn from consumers in several urban markets of Rwanda. The study finds very favorable rating of the taste, color, packaging, looks, and sweetness for the biofortified biscuit. It also finds higher willingness to pay (WTP) for the biofortified biscuit among consumers from low and low/middle income groups. However, the study finds mixed results of WTP for the biofortified sweet potato among consumers in the high income neighborhoods. Also, contrary to expectations, the study finds no evidence that knowledge of vitamin A increases consumer rating for the biofortified biscuit, suggesting that the promotion campaigns did not change the way consumers perceive the biofortified sweet potato, perhaps due to the way the campaign was designed. The study concludes that the biofortified biscuit is currently more acceptable among the low and low/middle end income categories probably because of greater promotion at these levels. However, it has a high potential for the high and medium income groups as evident from the high rating it received among these groups. The paper discusses the implications of these findings and suggests a need for more detailed studies and indepth quantitative analysis of consumer perceptions and WTP for orange-fleshed sweet potato.