

Promoting Sweet Potato Processing in Papua New Guinea through the School Curriculum: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

Processed sweet potato products have a marketing advantage especially when produced with locally available materials. However, there is no food processing culture in Papua New Guinea and little awareness of potential benefits of food processing. The objective of this research was to raise awareness of food processing in the wider community through the Making-A-Living (MAL) program of the primary school curriculum that focuses on developing practical life skills. In this paper, we outline how we worked with two primary schools in the Houn District, Morobe Province, to promote food processing. Key activities for the school project included (1) training teachers in sweet potato processing, (2) developing learning outcome strategies with teachers of MAL, (3) training students in sweet potato processing, (4) assisting students with their group projects on product development, (5) organizing product competition, and (6) promoting winning recipes and products to potential markets. Preliminary results show that the initiative has raised awareness of and generated significant interest in food processing, and it has enhanced students' ability and willingness to think and do things differently. Initially, sweet potato flour was supplied to one group of students in Bubia School. Later, the group scale up numbers to 8 groups and used up to 30 kg of flour in processing. It was supported by the school, community leaders, and families because it helped bring the community together. With this initial success, the next step is to work with the district and provincial authorities to formally incorporate the initiative into the provincial school program to promote good nutrition and food security and to foster innovation and entrepreneurship through outcome-based learning approach.