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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MOZAMBIQUE

FIRST PERSON

Sweet Success for Female Farmer

Young woman improves her family and life by successfully growing orange flesh sweet potatoes.



Credit: Eita Rodrigues, USAID/Ethiopia

"I have been able to build a cement house with my income and provide for my children and extended family with food, clothes, and school."

— Virginia, farmer and mother of four, said.

Virginia Sebastião Neves has been working in fields since she was a young child. It wasn't until a USAID supported project introduced the benefits of growing orange-fleshed sweet potato in 2003 that her business flourished and her life started to change.

With four small children and an extended family to support, times were hard. Virginia lived in a small bamboo hut and worked a full day on a small plot of land growing subsistent crops like cabbage, cassava, and maize.

USAID support for the International Potato Center led to the dissemination of improved orange-fleshed sweet potato material to over 800,000 families and to a national campaign highlighting that it is high in Vitamin A and that it is easy to cultivate in diverse soil conditions. In addition, sweet potato is a new market option and is being used as a new ingredient in baking goods, such as breads, cakes and biscuits.

Experts from the International Potato Center worked in collaboration with Mozambique National Agriculture Research Institute. This pool of 120 different national and international partners includes farmers associations to reach and teach farmers like Virginia about the benefits of the crop and its market possibilities. They also link farmers to potential clients and new markets. Virginia's outstanding commitment and success in growing and selling sweet potato made her stand out from the community. She eventually started an independent partnership that boasts its own clients who buy her crop under contracts.

"I have been helped very much. Thanks to the income I receive from my sweet potato crop, I have been able to build a cement house and provide for my children and extended family with food, clothes, and school," Virginia says.

In the future, Virginia hopes to renovate her new home, including adding more rooms and possibly painting the house orange in honor of her favored crop. "Someday I will be driving my own car!"