

Farmers' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding production, preservation and utilization of African leafy vegetables in western Kenya

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Abstract

Many African leafy vegetables are grown and consumed in the western region of Kenya. The vegetables include spider plant, black nightshade, pumpkin leaves, cowpea leaves, amaranths, jute mallow, slender leaf, and African kale. Though nutritionally superior to the exotic vegetables, people have neglected them in favour of the exotic vegetables. This neglect, coupled with widespread poverty, poor feeding habits, and over-reliance on starchy foods has ensured persistent high cases of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. In the recent past however, promotion of these vegetables is being undertaken by various organizations. To boost the promotion of these vegetables, a study was conducted with the objective of determining the farmers' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding production, preservation, and utilization of African leafy vegetables in western Kenya. Purposeful and random sampling strategies were used to identify participants from Farmer Groups. Twelve gender-disaggregated Focus Group Discussions were held, six groups in each County. Many sources of knowledge were identified, led by family/neighbours/friends/relatives, followed by various institutions. The participants identified 20 different vegetables, which are consumed in western Kenya. Thirteen vegetables are encouraged for specific individuals mostly for health benefits. Similarly, 12 vegetables are discouraged for specific individuals, mostly due to myths. Participants outlined post-harvest handling of vegetables for the market and for home consumption. Indigenous vegetables which have been domesticated for long are sold as much as they are home consumed, while the wild, are not sold. Few participants described how they preserved vegetables for long periods by drying in the sun. Many challenges and possible solutions were given and should be addressed by organizations based in the area.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Focus Group Discussions, vegetable utilization, cultural aspects, Western Kenya