

# Tropical Root Crops

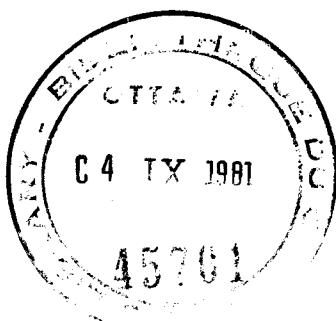
## RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR THE 1980s

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## **TROPICAL ROOT CROPS: RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR THE 1980S**

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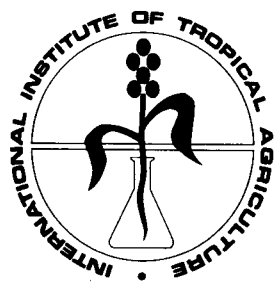
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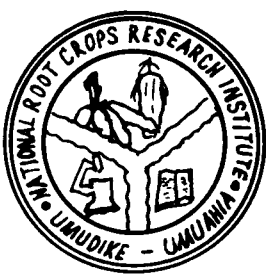
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## CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> <b>E.R. Terry</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Participants</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Welcoming Addresses</b>	
<b>Bede N. Okigbo</b> , President, International Society for Tropical Root Crops — Africa Branch .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Alhaji Ibrahim Gusau</b> , Minister of Agriculture, Nigeria .....	<b>17</b>
<b>S. Olajuwon Olayide</b> , Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan, Nigeria .....	<b>19</b>
<b>E. Hartmans</b> , Director-General, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Nigeria .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Cassava</b>	
Cassava Improvement Strategies for Resistance to Major Economic Diseases and Pests in Africa <b>S.K. Hahn, E.R. Terry, K. Leuschner, and T.P. Singh</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Cassava Improvement in the Programme National Manioc in Zaire: Objectives and Achievements up to 1978 <b>H.C. Ezumah</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Assessment of Cassava Cultivars for Extension Work <b>C. Oyolu</b> .....	<b>35</b>
Breeding Cassava Resistant to Pests and Diseases in Zaire <b>T.P. Singh</b> .....	<b>37</b>
Selection of Cassava for Disease and Pest Resistance in the Congo <b>Joseph Mabanza</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Some Characteristics of Yellow-Pigmented Cassava <b>K.A. Oduro</b> .....	<b>42</b>
~ Cassava: Ecology, Diseases, and Productivity: Strategies for Future Research <b>E.R. Terry</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Field Screening of Cassava Clones for Resistance to <i>Cercospora henningsii</i> <b>J.B.K. Kasirivu, O.F. Esuruoso, and E.R. Terry</b> .....	<b>49</b>
Properties of a Severe Strain of Cassava Latent Virus Isolated from Field- Grown Tobacco in Nigeria <b>E.C.K. Igwegbe</b> .....	<b>58</b>
Cassava Bacterial Blight Disease in Uganda <b>G.W. Otim-Nape and T. Sengooba</b> .....	<b>61</b>
Insect Dissemination of <i>Xanthomonas manihotis</i> to Cassava in the People's Republic of Congo <b>J.F. Daniel, B. Boher, and N. Nkouka</b> .....	<b>66</b>
Cassava Root Rot due to <i>Armillariella tabescens</i> in the People's Republic of Congo <b>Casimir Makambila</b> .....	<b>69</b>
Screening for Resistance Against the Green Spider Mite <b>K. Leuschner</b> .....	<b>75</b>
Biological Control of the Cassava Mealybug <b>Hans R. Herren</b> .....	<b>79</b>
Entomophagous Insects Associated with the Cassava Mealybug in the People's Republic of Congo <b>G. Fabres</b> .....	<b>81</b>
Dynamics of Cassava Mealybug Populations in the People's Republic of Congo <b>G. Fabres</b> .....	<b>84</b>
Consumption Patterns and Their Implications for Research and Production in Tropical Africa <b>Felix I. Nweke</b> .....	<b>88</b>

Problems of Cassava Production in Malawi	<b>R.F. Nembozanga Sauti</b>	95
Evaluation of Some Major Soils from Southern Nigeria for Cassava Production	<b>J.E. Okeke and B.T. Kang</b>	99
Effects of Soil Moisture and Bulk Density on Growth and Development of Two Cassava Cultivars	<b>R. Lal</b>	104
Performance of Cassava in Relation to Time of Planting and Harvesting	<b>F.O.C. Ezedinma, D.G. Ibe, and A.I. Onwuchuruba</b>	111
The Effects of Previous Cropping on Yields of Yam, Cassava, and Maize	<b>S.O. Odurukwe and U.I. Oji</b>	116
Intercropping of Plantains, Cocoyams, and Cassava	<b>S.K. Karikari</b>	120
Weed Control in Maize–Cassava Intercrop	<b>I. Okezie Akobundu</b>	124
Effect of Maize Plant Population and Nitrogen Application on Maize–Cassava Intercrop	<b>B.T. Kang and G.F. Wilson</b>	129
Cassava Leaf Harvesting in Zaire	<b>N.B. Lutaladio and H.C. Ezumah</b>	134
Effects of Leaf Harvests and Detopping on the Yield of Leaves and Roots of Cassava and Sweet Potato	<b>M.T. Dahniya</b>	137
Metabolism, Synthetic Site, and Translocation of Cyanogenic Glycosides in Cassava	<b>M.K.B. Bediako, B.A. Tapper, and G.G. Pritchard</b>	143
Loss of Hydrocyanic Acid and Its Derivatives During Sun Drying of Cassava	<b>Emmanuel N. Maduagwu and Aderemi F. Adewale</b>	149
The Role of Palm Oil in Cassava-Based Rations	<b>Ruby T. Fomunyam, A.A. Adegbola, and O.L. Oke</b>	152
Comparison of Pressed and Unpressed Cassava Pulp for Gari Making	<b>M.A.N. Ejiofor and N. Okafor</b>	154
Gari Yield from Cassava: Is it a Function of Root Yield?	<b>D.G. Ibe and F.O.C. Ezedinma</b>	159

## **Yams**

Parameters for Selecting Parents for Yam Hybridization	<b>Obinani O. Okoli</b>	163
Anthraxnose of Water Yam in Nigeria	<b>Okechukwu Alphonso Nwankiti and E.U. Okpala</b>	166
Strategies for Progress in Yam Research in Africa	<b>I.C. Onwueme</b>	173
Study of the Variability Created by the Characteristics of the Organ of Vegetative Multiplication in <i>Dioscorea alata</i>	<b>N. Ahoussou and B. Toure</b>	177
Growth Pattern and Growth Analysis of the White Guinea Yam Raised from Seed	<b>C.E. Okezie, S.N.C. Okonkwo, and F.I. Nweke</b>	180
Artificial Pollination, Pollen Viability, and Storage in White Yam	<b>M.O. Akoroda, J.E. Wilson, and H.R. Chheda</b>	189
Improving the In-Situ Stem Support System for Yams	<b>G.F. Wilson and K. Akapa</b>	195
Yield and Shelf-Life of White Yam as Influenced by Fertilizer	<b>K.D. Kpeglo, G.O. Obigbesan, and J.E. Wilson</b>	198
Weed Interference in White Yam	<b>R.P.A. Unamma, I.O. Akobundu, and A.A.A. Fayemi</b>	203
The Economics of Yam Cultivation in Cameroon	<b>S.N. Lyonga</b>	208
Effect of Traditional Food Processing Methods on the Nutritional Value of Yams in Cameroon	<b>Alice Bell and Jean-Claude Favier</b>	214

## **Cocoyams**

Strategies for Progress in Cocoyam Research	<b>E.V. Doku</b>	227
Root and Storage-Rot Disease of Cocoyam in Nigeria	<b>G.C. Okeke</b>	231

Fungal Rotting of Cocoyams in Storage in Nigeria	<b>J.N.C. Maduewesi and Rose C.I. Onyike</b>	<b>235</b>
A Disease of Cocoyam in Nigeria Caused by <i>Corticium rolfsii</i>	<b>O.B. Arene and E.U. Okpala</b>	<b>239</b>
Cocoyam Farming Systems in Nigeria	<b>H.C. Knipscheer and J.E. Wilson</b>	<b>247</b>
Yield and Nitrogen Uptake by Cocoyam as Affected by Nitrogen Application and Spacing	<b>M.C. Igbokwe and J.C. Ogbannaya</b>	<b>255</b>
<b><i>Abstracts</i></b>		
Cassava Research Program in Liberia	<b>Mallik A-As-Saqui</b>	<b>259</b>
Effects of Cassava Mosaic on Yield of Cassava	<b>Godfrey Chapola</b>	<b>259</b>
Effects of Green Manure on Cassava Yield	<b>James S. Squire</b>	<b>260</b>
Alleviating the Labour Problem in Yam Production: Cultivation without Stakes or Manual Weeding	<b>I.C. Onwueme</b>	<b>260</b>
<b><i>Discussion Summary</i></b>		
Strategies for the 1980s		<b>263</b>
<b><i>References</i></b>		
		<b>265</b>



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# YIELD AND NITROGEN UPTAKE BY COCOYAM AS AFFECTED BY NITROGEN APPLICATION AND SPACING

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Three amounts of N (0, 40, and 80 kg/ha) were tested on cocoyam, *Colocasia* spp. planted at 80, 60, and 40 × 100 cm at Umudike, Nigeria. Basal dressings of P, K, and Mg were given at 40, 75, and 20 kg/ha respectively. Averaged over all population means, application of N at 40 kg/ha increased yields of corms and cormels by 4.47 t/ha ( $P = 0.05$ ). The largest yield increase of 8.99 t/ha due to N dressing was achieved with 40 kg/ha at a spacing of 100 × 60 cm. But when averaged over all N rates, the mean yields of corms and cormels with respect to the various spacings were not significantly different even though plant heights increased with population density. Observed significant increase in yield due to N was related to an extra 15.3 kg/ha taken up in the tuber when 40 kg/ha was given. This was equivalent to an apparent recovery of 38.3% of the applied N. Tuber yields were more related to the number of cormels than of corms at harvest.

Effets de 3 dosages de N (0, 40 et 80 kg/ha) sur des taros cultivés en plantation à Umudike, Nigeria, espacés de 80, 60 et 40 cm × 100 cm. Un traitement basal de P, K et Mg a été appliqué en quantités respectives de 40, 75 et 20 kg/ha. La production de tubercules et de bulbilles pour l'ensemble des peuplements a donné une augmentation moyenne de 4,47 t/ha avec la dosage de 40 kg/ha. Le rendement optimal de 8,99 t/ha a été obtenu avec le traitement de 40 kg/ha sur des plantes espacées de 60 cm × 100 cm. Cependant, la production moyenne de tubercules et de bulbilles pour l'ensemble des plantes, quel que soit l'espacement ou le dosage d'engrais, a été sensiblement identique sauf en ce qui concerne la hauteur des plantes qui a été plus élevée dans les peuplements à forte densité. L'accroissement du rendement chez les plantes amendées avec un dosage de 40 kg/ha de N s'est traduit par une augmentation de poids des tubercules de l'ordre de 15,3 kg/ha, ce qui signifie la récupération apparente de 38,3% de la quantité de N. La production de racines intéresse davantage le nombre de bulbilles que de tubercules.

The use of optimum spacing is necessary for the maximum exploitation of the factors essential for crop growth. Such exploitation can be accomplished when population density of a crop exercises maximum pressure on all production factors, such as solar radiation, soil nutrients, and water.

We believed, therefore, that it was necessary to assess the effects of spacing and nitrogen fertilizer on the yield and N uptake by one of our cocoyam cultivars locally called Ede ofe grown under the upland soil conditions at Umudike, Nigeria.

## METHODS

Our experiment was conducted on sandy-loam soil derived from sandstone at Umudike, Nigeria, from May 1979 to February 1980. Some of the soil characteristics were pH 5.3, sand 76.4%, clay 6.8%, silt 16.8%, organic carbon 1.35%, total N

0.074%, available P (Bray P-1) 8.0; and exchangeable cations: Ca 1.87, Mg 1.25, K 0.24, and Na 0.06 me/100 g.

The experimental design was a randomized complete block with three replications. Four spacings, 100 × 80; 100 × 60; 100 × 40; and 100 × 30 cm (corresponding to 12 500; 16 666; 25 000; 33 333 plants/ha) were compared at three nitrogen rates (0, 40, and 80 kg/ha).

Basal dressings of 40, 75, and 20 kg/ha of P, K, and Mg, respectively, were given. Plant height was measured at 4.5 months after the planting, and crops were harvested after 8.5 months.

Soil pH was determined on a 1:2.5 soil, water ratio and texture by the hydrometer method. Organic carbon was by Walkley and Black's procedure, and available P was as described by Bray and Kurtz. Total exchangeable cations were leached with neutral normal ammonium acetate. Total N in corms and cormels and in soil was measured by the Kjeldahl method.



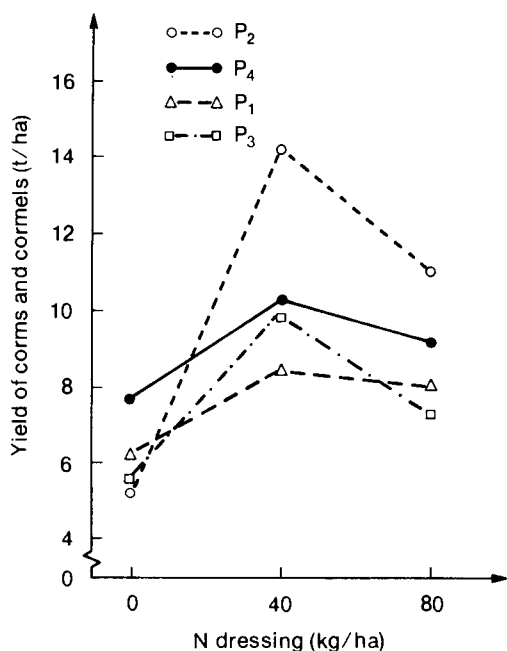


Fig. 1. Yield of corms and cormels as influenced by spacing and N dressing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### YIELD OF CORMS AND CORMELS

Fig. 1 shows that, at all the population densities tested, the highest yields of corms and cormels were obtained with an application of 40 kg N/ha. Averaged over all N rates, the application of 40 kg N/ha increased yield of corms and cormels by 4.47 t/ha equivalent to 112 kg corm and cormel per kg N used ( $P = 0.05$ ). At N applications of 80 kg/ha, yields were 2.69 t/ha larger than those from plots without N. The reason for this drop in yield is not clear but may be due to increased disease or lodging.

However, several multilevel N tests are necessary before the relationship between yield and N dressing can be described accurately. In our experiment only three rates of N were tested (0, 40, and 80 kg/ha). These are too few to show whether the corm/cormel yield N response curve is best fitted by a smooth curve or by two intersecting straight lines.

Of the various spacings we compared,  $100 \times 60$  cm gave the largest mean yield (10.1 t/ha). The difference of 2.55 t/ha between the yield at this spacing and yield at the  $100 \times 80$  cm spacing, which gave the least mean yield (7.57 t/ha) was not significant. However, the increased yield at  $100 \times 60$  cm is in good agreement with the results of

Arene and Okpala who obtained lowest rate of incidence of *Corticium rolfsii* in *C. esculenta* at a spacing of  $60 \times 100$  cm as against high rates in spacings of  $80 \times 100$  and  $100 \times 100$  cm for shallow planting. They also obtained their best yield at  $60 \times 100$  cm spacings.

### N CONCENTRATION, UPTAKE, AND RELATIONSHIP WITH YIELD

Percentage of N in corms and cormels ranged from 1.39 to 2.1 (similar in crude protein to cereals) and was slightly higher (1.9%) at 80 kg N/ha than at 40 kg N/ha and in controls (1.6%). At 80 kg N/ha applications, the largest N uptake (45.9 kg/ha) occurred even though the overall yield was

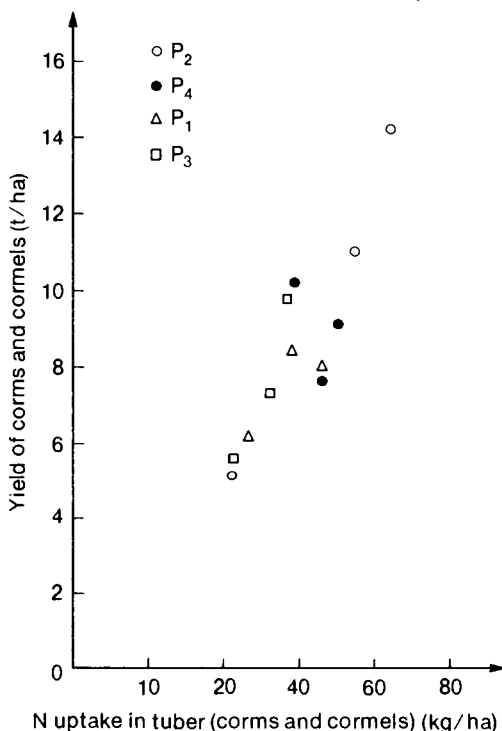


Fig. 2. Relationship between yield and N uptake in corms and cormels of *Colocasia* sp.

Table 1. Number of corms and cormels in relation to spacing and nitrogen (kg/ha) application.

Spacing (cm)	Corms			Cormels		
	N <sub>0</sub>	N <sub>40</sub>	N <sub>80</sub>	N <sub>0</sub>	N <sub>40</sub>	N <sub>80</sub>
100 × 80	33	27	29	212	223	241
100 × 60	18	52	40	172	314	421
100 × 40	34	37	40	181	369	327
100 × 30	66	42	38	289	261	254

Table 2. Effect of spacing and N application on height (cm) of *Colocasia*.

Spacing (cm)	<i>Colocasia</i> height (cm)			
	0 kg N/ha	40 kg N/ha	80 kg N/ha	Mean
100 × 80	55.8	78.8	82.5	70.3
100 × 60	60.5	81.0	72.6	71.4
100 × 40	66.0	82.5	70.8	73.1
100 × 30	78.3	80.0	77.1	81.4

1.78 t/ha less than that at 40 kg N/ha. Mean uptake of N by cocoyam with 40 kg N/ha dressing was 44.4 kg/ha, 15.3 kg/ha more than that when no N was given. This amounted to a net apparent recovery of 38.3 and 21% for application of 40 and 80 kg N/ha, respectively, in the corms and cormels. It is noteworthy that the treatment that gave the highest apparent recovery of N also produced the highest yield of corms and cormels (40 kg N/ha). Similarly for the population densities, N uptake was largest at a spacing of 100 × 60 cm (47 kg N/ha), which gave the largest yield.

Fig. 2 shows the relationship between yield of corms and cormels, and the N uptake of the tuber can be expressed by a linear model:  $Y^1 = 1.91598 + 0.16725 \times N_c$  where  $Y^1$  = yield of corms and cormels and  $N_c$  = uptake of N in corms and cormels (kg/ha).

The correlation coefficient (r) was 0.8706 and regression of yield of corms and cormels on N uptake accounted for 75.9% of the variance.

#### NUMBER OF CORMS AND CORMELS AND RELATIONSHIP WITH YIELD

Table 1 gives the number of corms and cormels as influenced by spacing and N dressing. Averaged over all spacings, N application had an increasing effect on the number of cormels but not on the number of corms.

The number of corms was only 14% of the total yield, 86% being accounted for by cormels. Cocoyam grown at a spacing of 100 × 60 cm had the largest number of cormels. In other words, the yield increments were largely attributable to the increase of cormels. Regression analysis of total yield showed that the cormels accounted for 43.6% of the variance, whereas the corms accounted for only 21.9%.

#### PLANT HEIGHT, FLOWERING, AND DEFICIENCY SYMPTOMS

Plant height measurements 4.5 months after

Table 3. The effects of nitrogen application on the flowering of 12 plots of *Colocasia*.

Nitrogen (kg/ha)	Plots in which flowering was observed	Plants flowering	Mean (%)
0	6	17	4.3
40	11	47	11.8
80	8	29	7.3

planting showed that *Colocasia* spp. grew taller as intra-row spacing decreased. For example, at a spacing of 100 × 80 cm, plants grew to a mean of 70.3 cm, and at 100 × 30 cm, to 81.4 cm (Table 2). This finding was probably due to more competition for solar radiation. N also had an effect on plant height. *Colocasia* given 40 kg N/ha was 14.9 cm taller than that given no N (65.1 as compared with 80.0 cm). Thus, a symptom of deficiency of N was stunting as was general chlorosis of the leaves. The lower leaves died rather quickly.

Flowering was observed under field conditions to be more abundant on plots that received N than on plots without N. Spacing did not have any noticeable effect on flowering (Table 3).

As this work is preliminary, more detailed work is necessary on the combined effect of population and fertilizers for the different cocoyams under the Nigerian environment. Further investigation is especially important in the Southeastern zone where annual rainfall is often more than 2000 mm with consequent leaching of both applied and native N. The sandy nature of the soil with low organic matter, total nitrogen, and phosphate suggests that these nutrients among others will continue to be limiting.

The Director, National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike, granted us permission to present this paper. Thanks are due to Dr Odurukwe for help with statistical analysis and to Mr Arene for helpful suggestions.