

Leaving behind the backstreets: Indigenous African eggplant is becoming popular with African seed companies, farmers, and consumers



African eggplant is a traditional indigenous crop grown across sub-Saharan Africa. More locally adapted than its distant relative, the tomato, it is hardier and easier to grow and has the added benefit of producing a harvest every week for seven months or longer, creating a reliable income for farmers. Improved lines selected and promoted by AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center are highly sought after in local markets. Using the Center’s improved management system, farmers can earn up to twice as much compared to growing tomatoes, turning an almost forgotten indigenous crop into a major source of income.

The oval-shaped African eggplant fruit can be eaten raw or cooked. It is a traditional ingredient in many African dishes and grows naturally in the savannas and humid forests of East and Central Africa and the Sahel.

For years “garden eggs” (as they are commonly known in Tanzania) were literally just that—a backyard crop ignored as a potential income earner because of low-quality varieties. They were perceived as food for the poor and were subject to competition from exotic crops like tomatoes. Although maize and vegetable crops like beans or peppers are popular, African eggplant has unrivalled features that make it competitive: It’s hardy and produces regularly throughout the growing season, reducing risks for poor farmers.

Selection work conducted at the Center identified several lines as having good market potential: Tengeru White and the premium-priced, sweet-tasting DB3, AB2, and RW14.

Promoted widely during the Center’s training courses for farmers and technicians in Tanzania, Malawi, and Uganda, the improved lines have

out-yielded most traditional bitter-tasting lines. Demand from urban consumers has created a new market for DB3 and AB2.

The Center has developed an entire integrated management package for African eggplant to assist farmers and address their questions about spacing, fertilization, watering, cultivation and more.

