

A publication of the Market Information Service (MIS) - Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries  
"Linking the market and Primary producers"

## Yam (Ufi)



There are several species in the genus *Dioscorea* that are known as yams. <sup>1</sup>The two most important ones in the Pacific are *Dioscoreaalata* (greater yam, water yam) and *Dioscoreaesculenta* (lesser yam, potato yam). Both of these species originated in southeast Asia and very early were carried by voyagers into the Western Pacific and brought *D. alata* as far east as Hawaii.

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Yams continue to make an important contribution to nutrition and food security in most Pacific Islands. In addition, *Dioscoreaalata* is an important prestige food in Papua New Guinea,

<sup>1</sup> Research Guides: Traditional Pacific Island Crops: Yam.

Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia.

### Local Production

Yams are a high value food that are easily grown and mature quickly in the right soil conditions. Unlike most other tropical root crops, yams exhibit well keeping qualities and may be harvested in advance of eating.

Yam production occurs on both islands, albeit the greater proportion occurs on Upolu. There has been a lack of interest in farmers to grow this particular due to its longer periods of growing before harvesting.

There are available markets, both local and overseas for farmers to sell this crop.

<sup>2</sup>According to the 2015 Agriculture Survey, 15,788 major households both Upolu and Savaii were recorded to have grown yam with only 881 households growing mainly for sale.

Major Households	Upolu	Savaii
No. major *HH growing yam	11,052	4,736
Area of land growing yam (acres)	5,781	2,098
No. major HH growing yam for sale mainly	550	331

Source: 2015 Samoa Agriculture Survey

### Varieties in Samoa

Yams are NOT sweet potatoes. They belong to a different plant family. Yams grow as vines and their tubers can grow up to 4.9 feet in length and weigh up to 70kg. They are highly regarded for

<sup>2</sup> Samoa Agriculture Survey 2015  
\*HH - Households

their size, texture, delicious flavor and cultural values.

<sup>3</sup>There are 5 available varieties in Samoa according to information unit in Crops Division at Nu'u.

- Tau (Red/Black)
- Palai
- Lei
- Africa
- Faifai

<sup>4</sup>Most varieties of yams grow best in rainfall of >1 500 mm/year and require a minimum 6-month growing season with well-distributed rainfall. Yams do not tolerate poorly drained soils or water logging. They are mildly drought tolerant but do not compete well with weeds for soil nutrients. Yams should be staked to improve yield, and reduce weed competition and the incidence of anthracnose disease. They exhibit early shade tolerance during establishment but require full sun for good yields.

## Market Information

### Marketing

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Yam is marketed through a number of methods:

- Farmers selling at farm gate. This method is common in yam market and one of the major methods in export. Locally, taro exporters who wish to fill up their containers or when there is a demand from overseas markets; they will usually go directly to the farmer and ask for availability of a pre-determined quantity and offer a price.
- Farmers selling directly at the market. Producers will have a general idea of the price they sell their produce at the local market. Because the supply of yam to the

local markets varies depending on the time a farmer harvests its produce and if there is a high demand of yam, usually its selling price will be higher.

- Processed yam (cooked yam with coconut cream) is one of the easiest and fastest ways of selling and fast cash for farmers. This is seen in front of nearby supermarkets with a price of \$10tala a fa'alifu ufi (boiled yam with coconut cream).
- Export to overseas market. Farmers who usually export are familiar in export process and post-harvest handling of yam. Advantage of this it can either be fresh or frozen. Yam industry is not commonly commercialized by the local farmers unlike taro and banana.

When the taro industry was struck by the Taro Leaf Blight outbreak in 1993, yam had the opportunity to fill market supply-gap together with other substitute crops bananas and ta'amu. Now, taro industry has revived back and highly favored, yam market has decreased and low supplies resulting in higher prices.

### Local market

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Yam prices and supply to the local markets varies due to its availability and production. Figure 1 shows the trend of total average supply and total average price of yam at its local market from 2014 to 2018. The average supply is decreased and average price is increased.

The average price of taro for 2018 has decreased, compare to the same period of 2017. As shown on Figure 2, the average price for January 2018 is SAT\$3.97/kg whereas in December it accelerates as high as SAT\$5.66/kg.

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<sup>3</sup> Yams in Samoa: Information Unit Crops Division-MAF

<sup>4</sup> Pacific Root Crops: FAO

## Export

**Figure 1: Total average Quantity and Total average Price at Local Markets from 2014-2018**



Source: Local market –PPCD statistic report (MAF website)

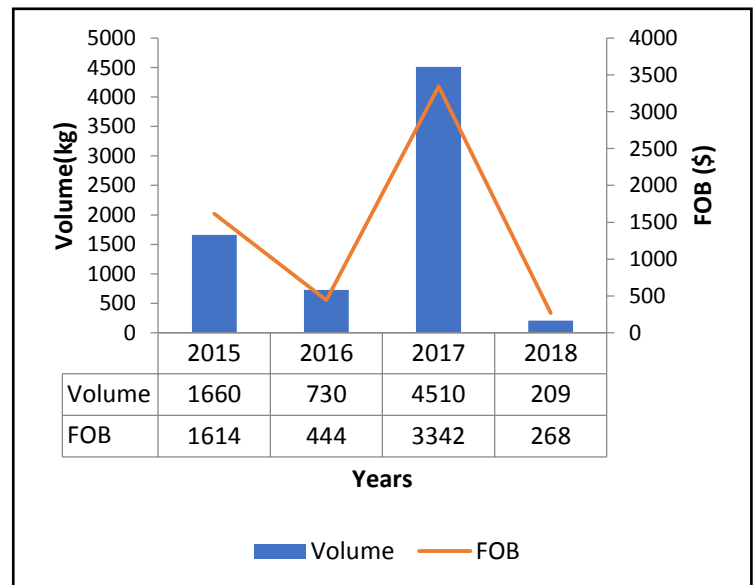
**Figure 2: Total average Quantity and Total average Price at Local Markets from July 2018 to July 2019**



Source: SBS Local market Survey

Overseas markets such as New Zealand and Australia are available and opened for local farmers to export their produce. Yam can be export either as frozen or fresh. There is a high demand from overseas markets but very low supply from the local farmers.

**Figure 3: Volume and FOB of Yam Export of Samoa**



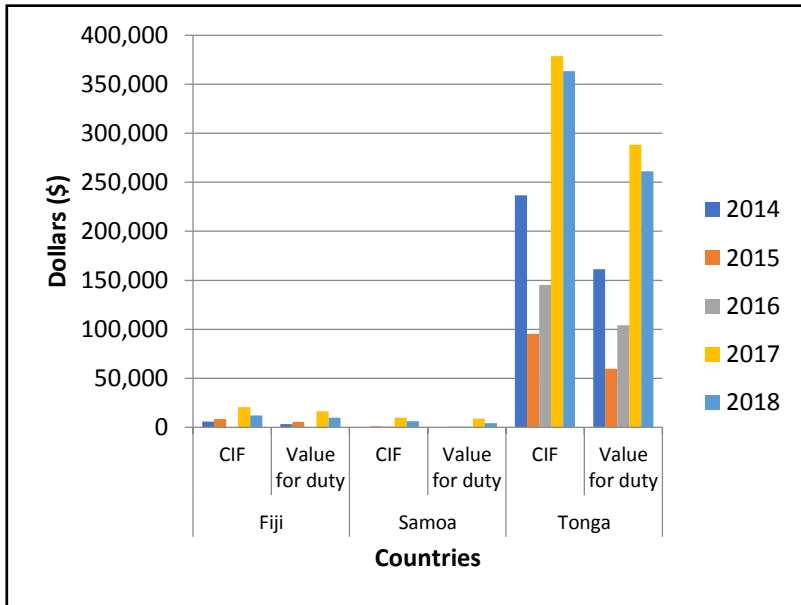
Source: Export Summary-PPCD Statistic reports (MAF website)

In all Pacific Island countries, yam is documented as the most important crop but only Fiji, Samoa and Tonga are majorly exporting with Tonga exporting in large quantities.

Tonga dominates the yam market in New Zealand over Samoa and Fiji.<sup>5</sup> A drop of export from Tonga was seen in 2017 to 2018 and according to National Reserve Bank of Tonga from their monthly export reports; it is believed that the drop was due to the impact of the damages caused by Tropical Cyclone Gita early 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Agricultural Export Volume 2018: National Reserve Bank of Tonga

**Figure 4: CIF& Value for duty of yam importing in New Zealand from three major yam exporters in Pacific. (2014-2018)**



Source: NZ Statistics

### Other Uses

Boiling of yam tuber is the easiest and common method of preparing yam in most households. It can be further processed into flour, powder and others. Apart from as a source of food, the crop are increasingly used as livestock feed and raw materials for industrial purposes in other parts of the world.

**Figure 5: Common cooking of yam in Samoa-boiled yam with coconut cream (fa'alifu ufi) and processed yam flour done by other countries.**



### Average Prices at the Fugalei Market

Commodities (SAT\$/kg)	July 2019	August 2019	Lowest Price for 2019 to date	Highest Price for 2019 to date
Taro	2.87	3.03	2.07	3.03
Banana	1.38	1.34	0.93	1.38
Ta'amu	7.12	6.41	5.45	7.33
Coconut	0.94	0.97	0.92	1.21
Breadfruit	1.49	1.36	1.05	2.27
Yam	4.13	4.62	4.13	6.84
Head Cabbage	8.27	8.93	8.27	13.12
Tomato	17.94	17.01	14.36	22.39
Chinese Cabbage	6.72	6.28	6.28	9.26
Cucumber	5.11	5.00	4.27	5.62
Pumpkin	3.60	4.21	2.87	4.21

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics-Local market survey (July-Aug2109)

### Foreign Currency per Tala (SAT\$)

May-June 2019	USD\$	NZD\$	AUD\$	YEN\$	FJD\$	EURO
1 Samoan Tala SAT\$=	0.3614	0.5694	0.5374	37.9400	0.7829	0.3205

Source: Bank of South Pacific

### Market Link Newsletter

This newsletter is published bi-monthly and it seeks to assist stakeholders (farmers, consumers, wholesalers, policymakers) make informed market and marketing decisions based on credible, relevant price and supply information. Help us help you by providing constructive feedback on market information issues that will improve the service which will lead to growing a healthy and wealthy Samoa. For more information contact the Policy, Planning and Communication Division and ask for Losan Madar.

### Disclaimer

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