

Abstract

Traditionally considered a “poor man’s food”, the pumpkin is increasingly being recognized as an important food crop in Kenya mainly due to increased knowledge of its nutritional value and ease of crop cultivation in several agro-ecological zones. However, pumpkin production is faced with several challenges that have limited the exploitation of the crop particularly pests and diseases that currently do not have effective control methods. A participatory research project was to find out solutions to these constraints with a goal of optimizing pumpkin production for food security and income generation.. The initial activity involved a baseline survey in four counties in eastern and central Kenya where farmers and traders were interviewed in order to capture the challenges and issues of concern in pumpkin growing and marketing in the region. On average, pumpkin were ranked fourth as an important food crop in the area and was mainly grown as an opportunistic crop mixed with other major food crops. Several pumpkin varieties recognized by their colour, shape, ridges, stripes and spots were grown in the region. Taste and cooked texture were the major desired characteristics for a good pumpkin. The main limitations to pumpkin growing were cited as limited availability of high quality seed and lack of markets. Farmers are willing to increase their pumpkin production for income generation (51%), food security (31%), market demand and availability (7%) among others. These findings will guide in pumpkin germplasm improvements through marker assisted breeding