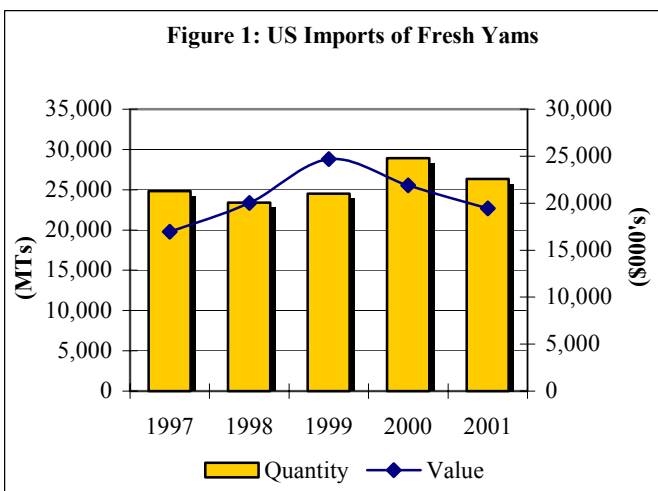


Yams



HILLSIDE
AGRICULTURAL
PROGRAM
Product Bulletin #4
2001 – 2002

Imports: The tropical yam (*Dioscorea alata*) should not be confused with sweet potato, which is sometimes called ‘yam’ in the United States. Its consumption by various ethnic groups (African, Caribbean, Latin American and Asian) has helped extend its trade to the major industrialized countries. After a slight drop in imports between 1997 and 1998 import levels increased 18 percent between 1998 and 1999 to 28,910 MTs. Despite the gains in volume, the corresponding value of fresh yam imports fell from approximately \$25 million in 2000 to \$22 million in 2001 (but was still 23 percent higher than four years prior). Volume fell from 29 MTs in 2000 to 26 MTs in 2001.

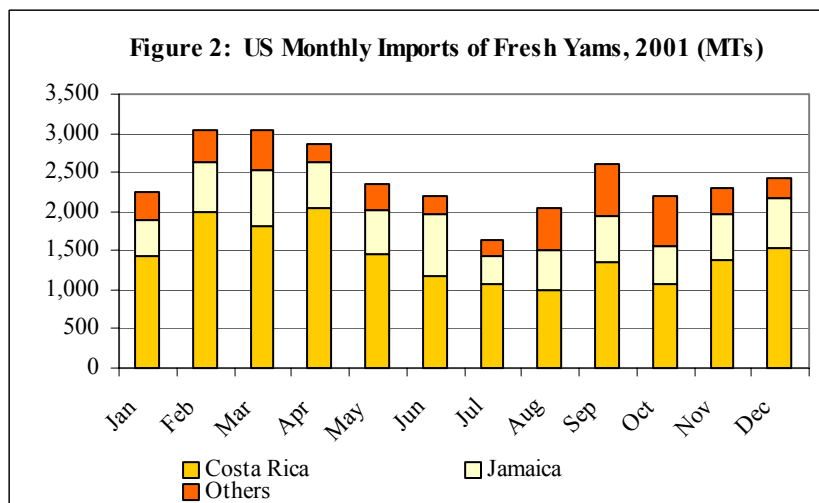


Source: USITC

Volume fell from 29 MTs in 2000 to 26 MTs in 2001.

Seasonality: Yams are exported to the US on a year-round basis. Both production and

demand fall during warmer weather, resulting in a decline in imports in the spring until an increase at summer's end. Registered highs for February and March suggest an increase in yam consumption during the colder winter months. This increase during the winter period is associated to the consumption of stews and other food applications that contain yams.



Source: US Census

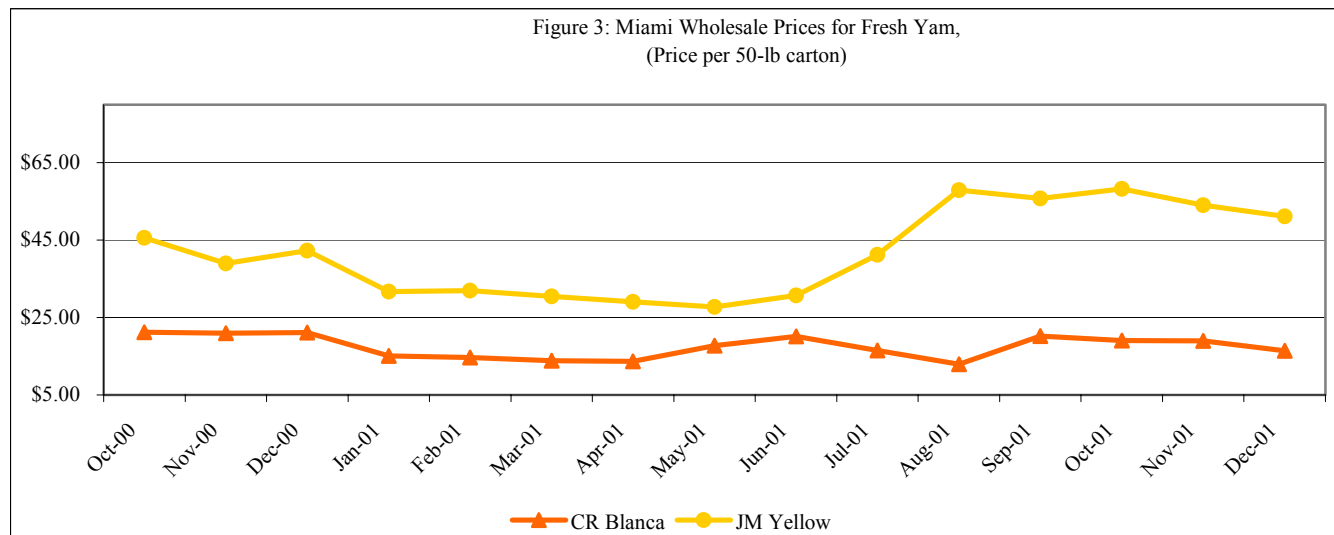
Market Share: Costa Rica claims the majority of the US market for yams, particularly during the first four months of the year. Jamaica and Ghana are the other major suppliers of yams to the United States. Costa Rica's market share increased from 55 percent in 1997 to 62 percent in 2001. Over the same period, Ghana's also increased its share to 7 percent in 2001 up from 4 percent in 1999. However, Jamaica's share decreased slightly from 27 percent in 1999 to 18 percent in 2001. Colombia has also lost market share in the past few

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For additional information contact: DAI/HAP, 11 Bis Rue Lechaud, Bourdon, Port au Prince, Haiti
Tel.: (509) 511-0397 Fax: (509) 245-2181 Web: <http://www.haitihap.org>

years. Smaller suppliers in 2001 included Brazil, Panama, Chile and China.

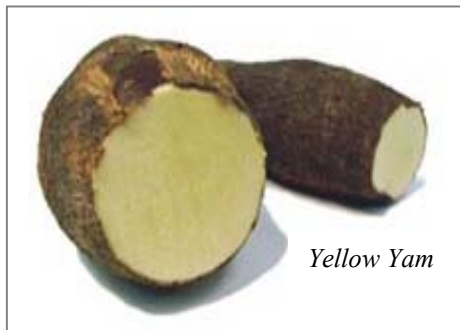
Prices: Yam prices vary sharply by variety. The Jamaican Yellow variety consistently sells 50 -100 percent higher than the more plentiful Costa Rican Blanca. In the 2001 season, Jamaican Yellow yams commanded strong premiums over Blanca, peaking at \$80 per 50-lb carton. This was due to a shortage of supply brought about by both drought and a recent USDA ban on a chemical long used by Jamaican producers. The price of Yellow yam has since fallen in 2002 and is currently trading in the low-\$40s, peaking at an average of \$ 57 dollars between August-October. The Blanca yam is still trading around \$20.



Source: USD/MNS

Quality Standards: There are no established grades and standards for fresh yams imported into the US.

Quality requirements are based on import specifications given by importers to the producers. The following specifications have been established for Jamaican varieties of yam but can at least serve as indicators for other varieties. Quality yams should be brown, clean, and fresh and should have reached their full maturity in the field before harvest.



Skin should be entirely intact, with no surface shriveling, fungal infection, insect damage, or sprouting.

If the yam has been cut as part of the harvesting process, the cut surface should be smooth, dried, and healed. Surface wounds of greater than 0.5 inches are unacceptable. Yams of even shape with regular "toes" are preferred and should weigh between 1 and 6.5 pounds.



Storage: Yams are susceptible to chill damage and should be stored at 12 - 13° C. Lower temperatures will expose them to excessive chill and higher temperatures will result in sprouting.

Packaging: Yams are packed loose with no separation based on size. Product is often packed with no other packing material, though Jamaican exporters are known to use sawdust or coconut fiber to protect the yams and retain freshness during shipping. Cartons are made of corrugated cardboard, weighing either 40 or 50 pounds after being filled (banana-type boxes are often used). For sea shipment, an additional 5 percent of net weight should be added to make up for weight losses during storage and transport. According to USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) regulations, fresh yams must be fumigated prior to entry into the US. To ensure that damage does not occur during fumigation, the yam must be fully mature at harvest and dry when treated.