

Gates Foundation funds research for genetic tools in sweet potato breeding

North Carolina State University will receive \$12.4 million over the next four years from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to improve a crop that is an important food staple in sub-Saharan Africa – the sweet potato.

The grant will fund work to develop modern genomic, genetic and bioinformatics tools to improve the crop's ability to resist diseases and insects and tolerate drought and heat. Sweet potatoes are an important food security and cash crop with potential to alleviate hunger, vitamin A deficiency and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 13.5 million metric tons are produced in sub-Saharan Africa annually; they are predominantly grown in small plot holdings by poor women farmers.

A priority crop for the Gates Foundation's Agricultural Development Program, the sweet potato has a complex genetic blueprint. Lack of knowledge about the crop's complex genome and lack of modern breeding tools for the crop currently hamper efforts to expand production.

"NC State has a long history of commitment to developing Africa's sweet potato breeding programs," Yencho said. "We will work very closely with the sweet potato breeding community to identify young breeders for advanced training to build long-term capacity in use of genomic breeding. During the project term, we will make efforts in training to ensure that new researchers and partners are fully capable of employing newly developed tools."

Read full, original story: [NC State receives \\$12.4 million grant from Gates Foundation for sweet potato research](#)