A safe, healthy, reliable, and affordable food supply is necessary for the proper functioning of any sustainable society. For this to exist, a society needs high-quality raw foodstuffs, trained and educated workers in the agriculture and food sectors, and the technology and infrastructure to create consumer-ready food products. Many Sub-Saharan African countries have historically struggled with worker education and training, particularly in the agri-food industry. Most agri-food workers in the region have had a high school education, but further training or skills development is often impossible due to family responsibilities and the need to continue working. The International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST) created a program that aims train workers in food production in an informal, non-academic setting. IUFoST developed learning programs for ten key areas of food science and food processing: food safety, dehydration/drying, thermal (heat) processing, food freezing, food packaging, quality assurance, food laws and regulations, shelf-life of foods, minimally processed foods, and practical human nutrition. Each was designed to provide a more hands-on approach to skills training than the typical classroom-based education.

A recognized expert in each of the ten key areas created introductory, intermediate, and advanced level courses for their topic. A course manual, series of assignments, and grading schemes were then given to “mentors” at local universities or food industries who provided one-on-one training and ongoing support for program participants. A trial run of the introductory dehydration/drying course was carried out in the summer of 2009 with eight participants (five men, three women) from five different Sub-Saharan African countries. After the eight-week course, the participants and mentors completed questionnaires about their experiences.

A trial run of a hands-on skills training program in food dehydration was offered to eight food industry workers from five Sub-Saharan African countries. Both the instructors and the participants reported positive experiences with the program and a willingness to participate in future courses.
What did the researchers find?
The mentors were happy with the quality of information and materials provided by the program developers and found the assignment problems to be of appropriate difficulty. They also stated that they were willing to participate in future courses. The mentors suggested that the website could be improved by making it easier to access and navigate. The participants reported that the education they received was excellent and the instructions were clear and easy to follow. The participants were also interested in participating in future courses. Most importantly, the participants felt that the training would help them to do their job better.

How can you use this research?
African educational institutions can use this research to develop practical, skills-based training programs that will be relevant and helpful for workers in the agri-food industry.

International aid organizations can use this research to improve food security and encourage economic development by creating on-site, informal education programs for agri-food workers in developing countries.

Keywords:
Education, Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture, food processing, skills training, employment

About the University of Guelph researcher:
Don Mercer is an Associate Professor in the Department of Food Science at the University of Guelph. Email: dmercer@uoguelph.ca.

Article citation:

Cite this work:
University of Guelph, Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (2013). Successful trial run of skills training program for food industry workers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved from: http://hdl.handle.net/10214/6156

This summary is a project of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) at the University of Guelph, with project partners: the Catalyst Centre, SPARK Program at the University of Guelph, and the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University. This project is part of the Pan-Canadian Research Impact Network.

http://csahs.uoguelph.ca/pps/Clear_Research

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported