Cassava; a nutritious and healthy staple crop

Recognize the problem
Cassava is the third most significant staple food in the world. However, consumption of cassava, as an ingredient or processed product, is low in Barbados because consumers believe incorrectly that cassava contains cyanide and is poisonous.

Background
The cassava plant does not contain cyanide as a pure compound but contains two chemicals, linomarin and lotaustralin, which can produce hydrogen cyanide if the plants sustain physical damage. The cooking process will destroy any cyanide that forms.

Management
When harvesting cassava, avoid damage to the roots as far as possible to keep the amounts of cyanide low. Any cyanide that is formed because of the damage is readily broken down at 25 degrees Celsius, or under local ambient conditions.

To rid the roots of any traces of cyanide, they should be boiled for 30 minutes. Afterwards, the roots can be chipped and placed in a secure well-ventilated area, and allowed to air-dry to a moisture content of 15-20% for long term storage.

These processes will ensure that all residues of cyanides are removed from the cassava, and then it is healthy and nutritious to consume.

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Barbados

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Edited by Plantwise.

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