Will a yam by any other color still sell as sweetly?

Area farmer hopes to market novel white sweet potatoes

By DICK WRIGHT
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Irv Daniel, sweet potato grower, would like to turn one of nature's curiosities into a new Louisiana farm product.

Daniel intends to plant a few acres of white-fleshed sweet potatoes on his West Feliciana Parish farm this spring.

Daniel already grows and sells the familiar orange-fleshed sweet potatoes. The white sweet potato comes from the same field as the orange tubers.

White-fleshed sweet potatoes are mutations, or spontaneous natural changes, that occur randomly among orange potatoes. Daniel sorted out the whites and will use them to "seed" this year's white crop.

His venture is pretty much speculative. He doesn't know whether Americans will take to the unfamiliar white sweet potatoes.

A white sweet potato is a novelty to most Americans, says LSU Agriculture Center geneticist Don Labonte, though not to most of the world's sweet potato consumers.

Americans traditionally prefer the orange "dessert" sweet potatoes, Labonte said. Other people, especially Asians and Latin Americans, prefer white sweet potatoes, he said.

"We are one of the few that eat the orange dessert type," Labonte said.

The white sweet potato probably has a slightly drier flesh and isn't as sweet as orange potatoes, he said. The whites also lack the high betacarotene, or Vitamin A, content of the orange potato which helped make it No. 1 in nutrition by one organization's ranking of healthful vegetables.

Still, says Labonte, the white sweet potato is "a wonderfully nutri-..."