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Fair prices for Irish potatoes in Rwanda

A new price-setting mechanism



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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Abbreviations.....	vi
Executive summary.....	vii
1 Introduction.....	1
2 The current price-setting table for Irish potatoes in Rwanda.....	2
3 Potential adjustment factors.....	4
4 A proposal for a new price-setting mechanism for Irish potato.....	7
5 Conclusions.....	9
References.....	10
Annex.....	11

Figures

Figure 1.	Average monthly prices for Kinigi potato in Kigali, 2020–2022	5
Figure 2.	Inflation, consumer prices (annual, as a percentage) in Rwanda.....	5
Figure 3.	Farm-gate prices by different levels of farmer gross margin in 2023	8

Tables

Table 1.	Price-setting table for Kinigi potatoes un Musanze in 2022	3
Table 2.	List of the potato varieties available in Rwanda and their productivity	6
Table 3.	Alternative price-setting table for Kinigi variety in Musanze	7
Table A1.	Farm-gate prices for other Irish potato varieties and districts	11

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Abbreviations

CIP	International Potato Center
CIP	Crop Intensification Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
IPS	Irish Potato Strategy
MAFAP	Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies programme
MINAGRI	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources of Rwanda
MINICOM	Ministry of Trade and Industry
NISR	National Institute of Statistics Rwanda
RAB	Rwanda Agriculture Board
RICA	Rwanda Institute for Conservation Agriculture

Executive summary

The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) of Rwanda requested the Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies (MAFAP) programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to undertake an analysis of the mechanism currently used to set up the farm-gate price for Irish potatoes. The present analysis discusses the way in which these prices are determined in Rwanda, and points out potential areas of improvement. The price-setting mechanism that is currently applied has some important limitations, namely data reliability, price volatility and rents repartition along the value chain. To address these issues, the report recommends the following:

- Introduce wholesale and retail prices: taking into account wholesale and retail costs and prices in the price-setting formula would be a necessary condition for each actor to benefit from potato sales and to provide incentives for farmers for increased productivity. For this analysis, a comparison was made between MINAGRI and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MINICOM) pricing tables and a proposed revised table incorporating wholesale and retail costs and prices.
- Revise meeting schedule: since a single price is determined for the whole year and the potato prices are highly volatile within the year and even the season, addressing price volatility is of crucial importance to drive investment in the sector. At present, there is one meeting per year. The report recommends MINAGRI and MINICOM to explore the possibility of establishing regular price-update meetings, for example at the beginning of each season (February and September).
- Update cost figures: given that the cost data used in the price-setting table for Irish potatoes has a strong influence on computed farm-gate prices, it is essential to regularly measure and revise the production costs used as inputs in the mechanism to calculate prices. It would also be useful to take into account a simple inflation adjustment.

1 Introduction

Agriculture is among the top three sectors in terms of contribution to the Rwandan economy and, despite being dominated by smallholder farmers, it has always played a major role in the country's economy, employing approximately 67 percent of the population (NISR, 2023a) and contributing about 27 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (NISR, 2023b).

Rwanda is one of the top ten African producers of Irish potatoes, with an estimated production of 908 007 metric tonnes in 2022. Since 2015 and up to 2019, potato production was increasing at an impressive rate of 23.7 percent, but in 2020 production decreased significantly by -13.3 percent; but rebounded the following year in 2021, when production increased by 8.5 percent. The potato value chain, which encompasses all the activities from seed production to processing and marketing of potatoes, contributes to the country's food security and economic development, as it provides a source of livelihood for around 300 000 smallholder farmers and plays a vital role in meeting the nutritional needs of Rwandans.

With that in mind, the Government of Rwanda has implemented various policies and initiatives to support the Irish potato value chain. These include the Irish Potato Strategy (IPS), which was launched in 2015 with the aim of increasing productivity, improving quality, and enhancing market access for Irish potatoes. The strategy includes policy interventions such as the distribution of high-quality seeds, farming training on best practices, and the establishment of market linkages.

In addition to that, the government has also implemented the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) to improve the productivity of smallholder farmers, including those involved in the Irish potatoes value chain. The CIP provides farmers with improved inputs such as fertilizers and seeds, as well as training on modern agricultural practices. Since 2018, the Government of Rwanda also has been promoting the establishment of 68 Irish potato collection centres as part of its efforts to promote smallholder agriculture and increase farmers' income. These collection centres are located in the Burera, Musanze, Nyabihu and Rubavu districts, managed by potato farmers' cooperatives. The government has also been working to improve the infrastructure connecting the collection centres to markets and processing facilities, as well as providing training and capacity-building support to the managers and staff of these centres.

Despite these efforts, the sector is still facing various challenges, including low yields, post-harvest losses, and limited access to markets and finance. Although production increased in 2021, market prices continued to rise so much so that they doubled (from RWF 262 in 2021 to RWF 561 in 2023 per kg), mainly due to the increase in consumer demand and the increased inflation rate, which affect the costs of production.

Against this backdrop, and since 2018, the government has been setting farm-gate prices in an attempt to guarantee a minimal level of income for farmers. A meeting held in Musanze in December 2017, brought together farmer representatives, traders, managers of Irish potato collection centres, the Ministries of Trade and Industry, of Agriculture and Animal Resources, and of Local Government, among other stakeholders, to set potato farm-gate prices at between RWF 135 and RWF 170 kg depending on the variety of the potatoes, thus to ensure that farmers get at least a 25 percent return on their investment, while the market price in Kigali was set at between RWF 185 and RWF 220 kg. The set prices should apply for the entire season countrywide.

Given the role prices have in driving potato supply and on value chain activity, it is crucial to take a closer look at the way in which these prices are set. This report aims to provide a detailed analysis of the mechanism used by MINICOM to determine farm-gate prices. It starts by providing a description of the current price-setting mechanism, in order to point out potential areas for improvement. An alternative price-setting mechanism, which includes several adaptations and improvements with respect to the current system, is proposed in Sections 3 and a proposal for a new price-setting mechanism is outlined in Section 4. Recommendations and suggestions for next steps are summarized in Section 5, which concludes the report.

2 The current price-setting table for Irish potatoes in Rwanda

MINICOM has been using a specific price-setting table since 2018 to compute the Irish potato farm-gate price, and on which stakeholders in the sector are consulted. The price computed in the table is submitted to the stakeholders in a meeting, for negotiation before the official price is endorsed. Currently, the price is only indicative and has been revised only once. In 2022, MINICOM began determining farm-gate prices using a table where a fixed gross margin per kg is applied to farmers' total costs (including production, transportation, loans, etc.) to compute a farm-gate price, which is differentiated according to potato variety and production sites.

The following paragraphs describe the 2022 price-setting table for the Kinigi variety in Musanze for season B (February–July) in detail, as measured in May 2022. For the other varieties and districts, the structure of the price table is relatively similar (see Table 1) and, hence, reported in the Appendix. The only differences from Table 1 are the production costs and the resulting proposed farm-gate prices.¹

Production cost for farmers are estimated to be RWF 160 per kg of potatoes. This estimate was produced using the survey results from MINAGRI, MINICOM, RAB, and RICA which collected data on production costs using a sample of farmers and cooperatives in 3 districts, namely Gicumbi, Musanze, Rubavu, and for 5 different varieties, namely Gicumbi, Kinigi, Kirundo, Nyirakarayi, and Peko.

The farm-gate price is then computed according to the following formula:

$$p_{fg} = FC (1 + \pi)$$

Where p_{fg} is the farm-gate price in RWF per kg, FC is the farmer's production cost in RWF per kg, and π is the gross margin. Therefore, in the price-setting table, the farmers' total cost is divided by the production in kg to obtain the average production cost per kg, to which a fixed gross margin of 25% is applied. As a result, the farm-gate price for the Kinigi variety in Musanze is equal to: $(3\,524\,164/22\,000) \times (1+0.25) = 200$.

The introduction of this price-setting mechanism aims to ensure a reasonable profit for farmers. However, taking into account retail prices would be a necessary condition for each actor to benefit from potato sales and to provide incentives for farmers to increase productivity. Furthermore, since a single price is determined for the whole season and potato prices are highly volatile throughout the year and even the season, addressing price volatility is of crucial importance to drive investment in the sector. Secondly, the use of an identical fixed gross margins for different potato varieties does not encourage quality upgrading. Finally, such a scheme is very demanding in data, both in terms of quantity – as production costs for a representative sample of farmers for each variety and district should be sought – and reliability, as farmers may be tempted to artificially increase their costs to capture a higher share of the value-added.

¹ Table A1 in the annex reports farm-gate prices for other potato varieties and districts.

Table 1. Price-setting table for Kinigi potatoes un Musanze in 2022

	Item	Type	Quantity	Unit cost	Total cost in RWF	
1	Farm rent	ha	1	500 000	500 000	
2	Buy seeds	kg	2 500	500	1 250 000	
3	Fertilizers	NPK	kg	300	882	264 600
		Inorganic/travertine	kg	2500	100	250 000
		Organic (FUSO/T)	Fuso	6	70 000	420 000
4	Farming	Labour				
5	Fertilizer transformation	Labour				
6	Hole digging	Labour				
7	Planting (seeds and fertilizer)	Labour				
8	Tubes cultivation	Labour				
8	Weeding	Labour				
9	irrigation					
10	Pesticides	Detane	kg	26	5 000	130 000
		A summer anti-aging	litre	1	10 000	10 000
		Redomil	kg	1	26 000	26 000
11	Rent for pesticides pumps		14	500	7 000	
12	Water mix pesticides	Jerrican (30/ha×7 times)	20	210	4 200	
	Labour/water transportation	Labour (3/ha×7 times)	21	1 500	31 500	
13	Labour/pesticides	Labour (2/ha×7times)	14	1 750	24 500	
14	Guardian	Labour	2	25 000	50 000	
15	Harvesting transportation	kg	3	20 000	60 000	
	Subtotal				3 315 300	
	Interest on loans				208 864	
	Total				3 524 164	
	Production	kg	22 000		22 000	
	Farmer production cost per kg				160	
	Gross margin per kg	25%			40.05	
	Proposed farm-gate price (RWF per kg)				200	

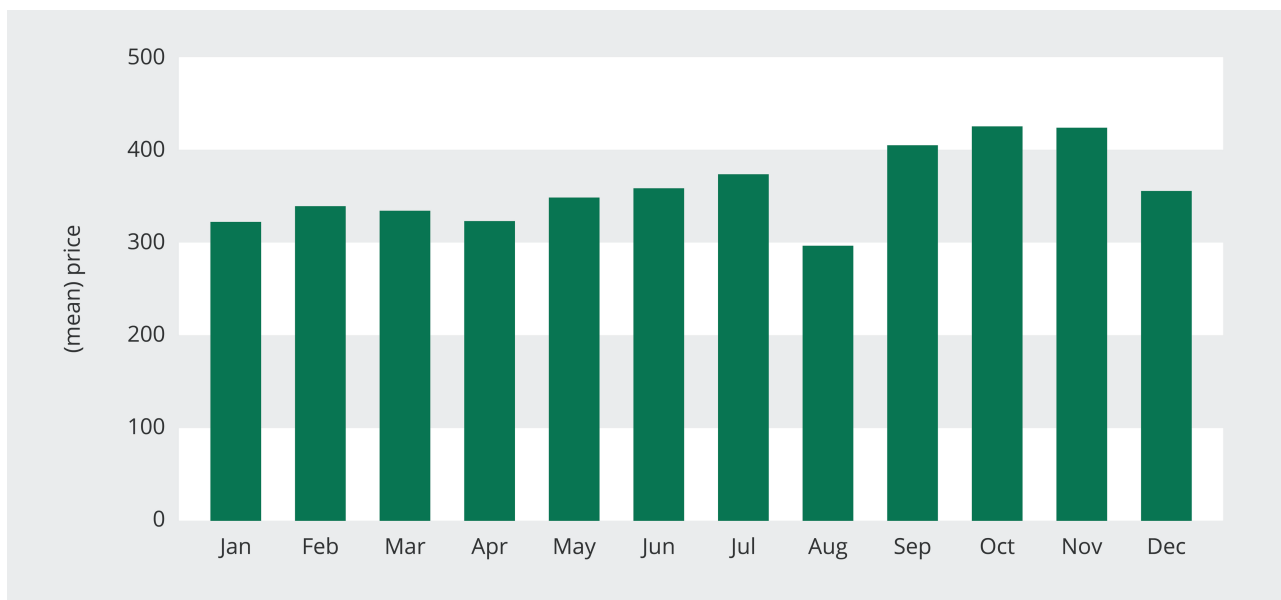
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3 Potential adjustment factors

The following factors are recommended to include and adjust the price-setting mechanism for Irish potatoes:

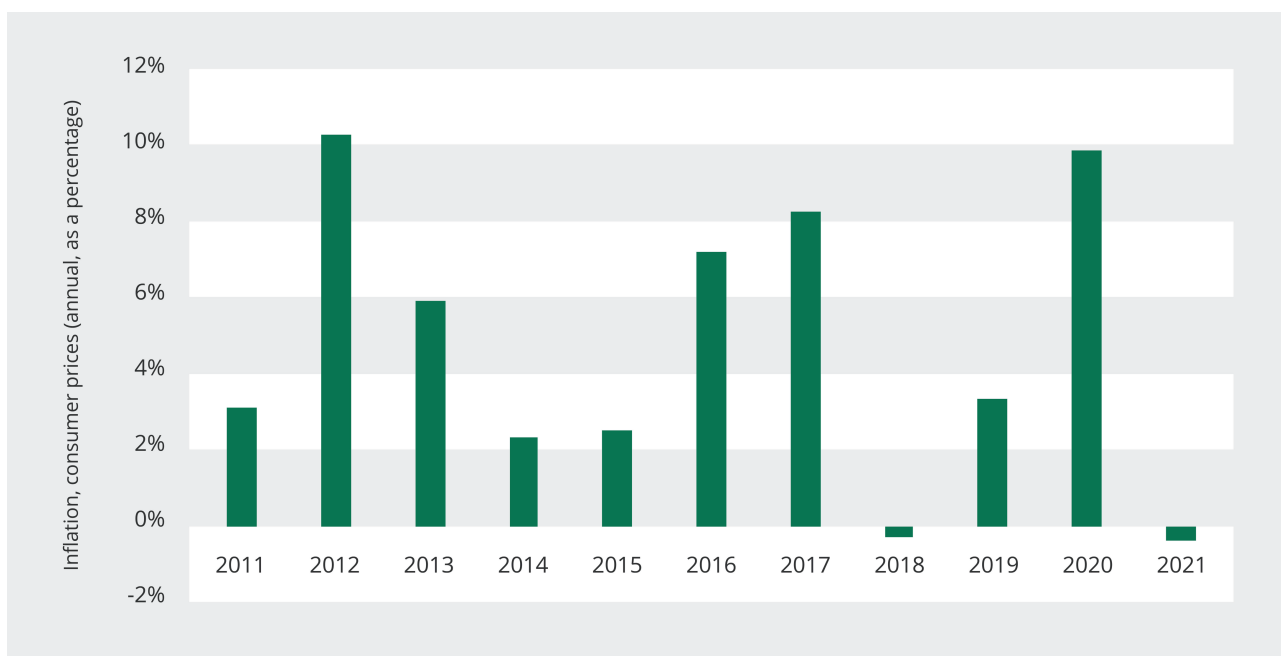
- **Including wholesale and retail prices.** Firstly, the current price-setting mechanism does not allow for profits to be shared fairly throughout the value chain. The reason for this is that, without considering potato wholesale and retail costs and prices, it is impossible to compute total revenues and, therefore, identify profits. In particular, for instance, wholesalers pay RWF 5 to potato collection centres and bear the transportation costs of around RWF 30 per kg from these to the final market (usually Kigali). Thus, it is suggested to consider wholesale and retail costs and prices in a new price-setting formula, therefore all profits along the potato value chain can be captured.
- **Accounting for seasonality.** Secondly, since there are two main potato seasons in Rwanda – season A between September and January, and season B between February and July - these prices may vary quite a lot across the year, even within potato variety (see Figure 1). For example, the average monthly retail prices for Kinigi potatoes in Kigali varied between RWF 300 to more than RWF 400 between 2020 and 2022. This is also because at the end of harvest seasons, prices are likely to decrease in August and December/January as supply is higher than demand. During the harvest period, farmers are pushed to quickly sell their produce to avoid possible deteriorations in quality. Since a single price is determined for the whole season, volatility risks are then non-negligible. The effects of this volatility are currently borne by all stakeholders along the potato value chain, according to their sales/payments schedule. Therefore, it is recommended to establish regular price updates at the beginning of each season, in other words, in September and February.
- **Adjusting farmers’ production costs.** Thirdly, since it is very costly to run extensive surveys every year to update farmers’ production costs, it would be useful to take into account a simple inflation adjustment. The latter, measured by the consumer price index, reflects the annual percentage change in the cost to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services. Figure 2 shows the inflation rate over the last ten years. Since farmers’ production costs are estimated to be RWF 160 per kg in 2022 for the Kinigi variety in Musanze (see Table 1), its updated 2023 figure would be on average 20.8 percent higher, i.e. RWF 192 (NISR, 2023c).
- **Creating incentives to improve quality.** Finally, the use of the same gross margin for different potato varieties does not provide for quality-upgrading incentives. Thus, currently a 25 percent mark-up is applied to farmers’ production costs, irrespective of the potato variety produced, i.e. either Kinigi, Kirundo, Nyirakarayi or Peko. However, there are currently more than 25 potato varieties available in Rwanda, with a very different levels of productivity, ranging from 10 metric tonnes per ha to 50 metric tonnes per ha (see Table 2). For instance, Kinigi, which is among the most preferred potato variety, shows a productivity of 20 to 30 metric tonnes per ha, while 30 metric tonnes per ha are produced for the the Kirundo variety.

Figure 1. Average monthly prices for Kinigi potato in Kigali, 2020–2022



Source: MINAGRI (Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources of Rwanda). 2023. Commodity prices. In: *e-Soko*. Kigali. [Cited 3 September 2023]. <http://esoko.gov.rw/esoko/ResponseViews/ResponseView.aspx?sm=m506&rrp=10&cp=1&pg=AllSurveys&rrpR=10&cpR=1&rid=59&ACTIVITYID=33&selid=1725>

Figure 2. Inflation, consumer prices (annual, as a percentage) in Rwanda



Source: World Bank. 2023. Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) – Rwanda. In: *World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC. [Cited 3 September 2023]. www.data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2021&locations=RW&start=2011

Table 2. List of the potato varieties available in Rwanda and their productivity

	Potato variety	Productivity capacity yield (metric tonnes per ha)
1	Victoria	25
2	Gikungu	35
3	Kigega	40
4	Mizero	40
5	Mugogo	25–30
6	Nderera	35
7	Ngunda	50
8	Mabondo	30–35
9	Kirundo	30
10	Cruza	20–30
11	Gasore	10–18
12	Kinigi	20–30
13	Marirahinda	30–40
14	Nseko	20–30
15	Sangema	20–25
16	Gahinga	25–40
17	Nkunganire	30–35
18	Ndeze	20–25
19	Twihaze	30–50
20	Kazeneza	30–40
21	Izihirwe	30–50
22	Twigire	30
23	Gisubizo	35
24	Ndamira	30–40
25	Kerekezo	30
26	Jyambere	25
27	Seka	30

Source: CIP (International Potato Center). 2021. *Good agricultural practices for seed potato multiplication in Rwanda. Trainer Guide*. Lima.

4 A proposal for a new price-setting mechanism for Irish potato

The structure and content of the price-setting table used by MINAGRI and MINICOM should be coherent, taking the perspectives of all stakeholders into account and in the best interest of the whole Irish potato value chain. As mentioned in the previous chapters, three straightforward issues have emerged concerning the current price-setting table: cost data, price volatility, and rents.

With those factors in mind, the suggested price-setting formula below (see Table 3) computes the farm-gate price as the farmer's production cost in RWF per kg, adjusted for inflation rate, plus the gross margin. It also includes wholesalers' and retailers' costs, margins, and the corresponding prices. The effects of changing the mechanism analysed in an ex-post fashion, by observing how producer prices would have been if an alternative mechanism had been used.

Table 3 shows the farm-gate price for the Kinigi Irish potato variety in Musanze in 2022 used by MINAGRI and MINICOM compared to the proposed alternative mechanism. While column 1 reports the price for Kinigi Irish potatoes in 2022 under the current price-setting mechanism, column 2 computes the price when the new formula is introduced. Specifically, it shows the wholesale and retail prices.

Finally, column 3 estimates the potential 2023 price when inflation adjustment is taken into account, resulting in a price of RWF 192, up 20.8 percent from May 2022, and fixing farmers' gross margin to 25 percent. In this case, the minimum farm-gate price would have been around RWF 242. Finally, between December 2022 and January 2023, MINAGRI conducted a rapid assessment of farmers' production costs, which resulted in an increase of the latter to RWF 345 per kg. Considering also an 8 percent inflation adjustment (Consumer Price Index growth rate between December 2022 and March 2023) and a gross margin of 7 percent, the farm-gate price would be RWF 399 (See Table 3, column 4).

Table 3. Alternative price-setting table for Kinigi variety in Musanze

		1	2	3	4
Stage in the value chain	Items	Current price-setting mechanism 2022	New price-setting mechanism 2022	New price-setting mechanism 2023	Proposed price-setting mechanism 2023
Farmer	Production cost per kg	160	160	160	345
	Inflation adjustment			20.8%	8%
	Gross margin per kg	25%	25%	25%	7%
Farm-gate price (RWF per kg)		200	200	242	399
Wholesale	Production cost per kg		40	40	40
	Gross margin per kg		2%	2%	2%
Wholesale price (RWF per kg)			245	287	447
Retail	Gross margin per kg		2%	2%	2%
Retail price (RWF per kg)			250	293	456

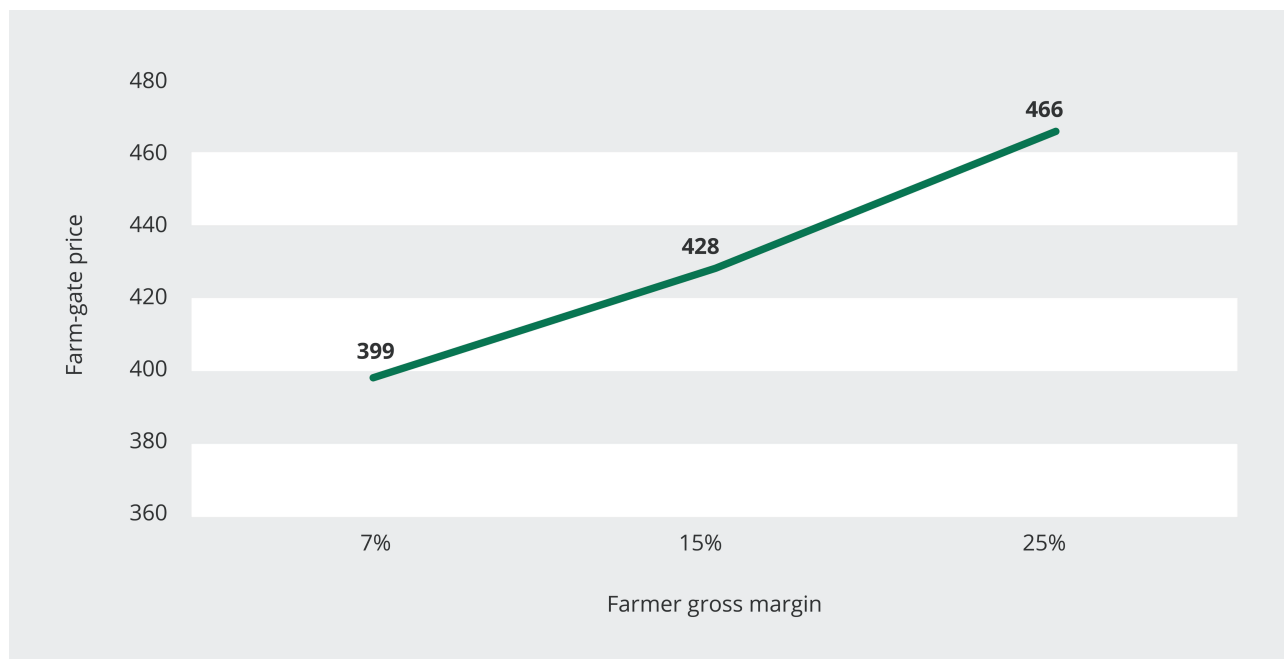
Notes: Amended items are in bold. Inflation adjustment in column 3 is computed as the Consumer Price Index growth rate between May 2022 and March 2023, while in column 4, for between December 2022 and March 2023.

Source: NISR (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda). 2023. *GDP National Accounts. Fourth Quarter 2022*. Kigali. www.statistics.gov.rw/publication/1915

Finally, Figure 3 uses the new formula and adjustments introduced in column 4 (Table 3) to show farm-gate prices according to the different levels of farmer profit margins. Starting from a 7 percent farmer share level, which reports a price of RWF 399, up to a 25 percent level, for which the proposed farm-gate price would have been RWF 466.

Moreover, in order to introduce productivity-enhancing incentives for farmers, we can further propose to differentiate the farmer-share level according to the productivity of the potato variety. For instance, for all varieties between a productivity of 10 to 20 metric tonnes, a farmer share of 7 percent; for those between 25 to 35 metric tonnes, a farmer share of 15 percent; and finally, for those varieties with productivity between 40 to 50 metric tonnes, a farmer share of 25 percent.

Figure 3. Farm-gate prices by different levels of farmer gross margin in 2023



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

5 Conclusions

Irish potato is a key commodity in Rwanda and an important source of rural-farm income. Because potato farmers are often price-takers, the government implements a farm-gate price-setting mechanism. The objective is to guarantee a minimal level of income for farmers and to incentivize production. Accurately setting a farm-gate price is, therefore, of tremendous importance to allow all value chain agents to grow their businesses.

With that in mind, this report analysed the 2022 potato-pricing mechanism, focusing on cost figures, retail prices, and productivity issues. The main recommendations are summarized below:

- **Include wholesale and retail prices.** It is advised to take into account wholesale and retail prices for each actor in the value chain to benefit from potato sales and to provide incentives for farmers to increase their Irish potato productivity. In the analysis, a comparison was made between MINAGRI and MINICOM's table together with a proposed revised table that incorporates wholesale and retail costs and prices.
- **Revise meeting schedule.** Furthermore, since a single price is determined for the whole year and potato prices are highly volatile within the year and even the season, addressing price volatility is of crucial importance to drive investment in the sector. At present, there is one meeting per year. It is recommended that MINAGRI and MINICOM establish regular price updates, for example, at the beginning of each season (September and February).
- **Measure cost figures.** Given that the cost data used in the price-setting table has a strong influence on computed farm-gate prices, it is essential to regularly measure and revise production costs used as inputs in the price-setting calculation. It would be useful to take into account a simple inflation adjustment.

This report is the result of a request for policy support from the Government of Rwanda to MAFAP and is intended to set the ground for discussions between MINAGRI and MINICOM to reform the current price-setting mechanism for Irish potatoes in Rwanda in order to give fairer prices to farmers that take into consideration the aforementioned factors that are lacking in the current set up. The report is also expected to be used as policy evidence to further develop the potato sector in the country.

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Annex

Table A1. Farm-gate prices for other potato varieties and districts

District	Variety	Farm-gate price in RWF (per kg)
Rubavu	Gikungu, Kinigi	192
Musanze	Gikungu, Kirundo, Rwangume, Rwashaki	176
Rubavu	Kirundo, Kuruseke	162
Rubavu	Kazeneza, Peko	140
Gicumbi	Nyirakarayi	160
Rubavu	Gikungu, Kinigi	192

Source: MINICOM (Ministry of Trade and Industry of Rwanda). 2022. *Farm-gate prices for Kiundo, Kinigi and Peko varieties*. Kigali.

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MONITORING AND ANALYSING FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES [MAFAP]

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