1. INTRODUCTION

The Blackhead Persian is a member of the fat rumped group of sheep indigenous to North Africa and Asia Minor, and was introduced into South Africa about 85 years ago. It is farmed wholly as a mutton sheep, the coat having no commercial value as wool. (Duerden & Boyd 1930). The Blackhead Persian sheep in the college flock do not show the pronounced fat rump of the purebred animals described by Duerden & Boyd (1930), but they are still used only as mutton sheep.

It is of interest to see if the Blackhead Persian can provide an economic source of mutton in tropical areas. This would be of especial importance in areas where it is impracticable to keep cattle, such as heavy bush areas, marsh areas and also, with due regard to problems of soil erosion, steep slopes. One of the most important benefits would be a source of high class protein in areas where the population exist mainly on a high starch diet such as rice and maize e.g. Central America and parts of Africa. In areas where this diet is common, an economic source of protein will be of considerable benefit to maintenance and health of the human population.

This breed of sheep appears to stand up to tropical conditions and, although it cannot be compared with temperate breeds with their high production capabilities, it would still be a useful source of meat.

This report is intended to estimate the milking capacity of the ewes and the rate of growth of the lambs in early life under experimental conditions. It should be regarded as a purely preliminary investigation for further studies of the Blackhead Persian as an economic source of meat in the tropics. The college flock has not been bred for experimental animals and therefore only small numbers of experimental animals were available. It also gives a chance to study the technique of obtaining data for an experiment of this nature and should be of some help to further work in this subject.

With special reference to Trinidad and Tobago, it is of interest to note that sheep have a useful function on estates with tree crops. Where estates are growing cocoa or coconuts, there is a considerable amount of

grass which could be well utilised by sheep. In Tobago, this practice is carried out and sheep are put under the coconut and cocoa plantations when the plants are tall enough to be out of browsing reach. This means that a considerable amount of labour is saved by reducing the amount of "cutlassing" required to keep down the grass. Instead, the grass can be made into a useful secondary crop through the medium of sheep. Many of the Blackhead Persian flocks in Tobago are used for this purpose. There is, however, a drawback in that the sheep have to be housed at night. It is uncertain why this practice has to be carried out but it is thought that there is a considerable relationship between parasitic infection and the amount of moisture on the grass especially in the form of dew. However, it would appear that it would still be an economic proposition as the stocking rate can be as high as 2 - 3 sheep to the acre.