

INTRODUCTION

The West Indies consist of a chain of islands stretching from the peninsula of Florida to the mainland of South America.

The climatic and edaphic conditions of these islands are ideally suited to commercial coconut growing, yet, in spite of these conditions, the area produces a disappointingly small percentage of the world's crop. This can be mainly attributed to the ethnographical element, the distribution of the coconut palm being largely the result of several phases of dispersal by man (25)(29). It was not in fact until the latter half of the nineteenth century that coconuts first figured as an article of the area's commerce.

The serious depression of the sugar industry towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century caused planters to seek alternative sources of revenue. The increasing world demand for vegetable oils at this period attracted many of these planters to the coconut industry, and plantations were established in several of the islands.

Today the demand for coconut oil exceeds the supply and is steadily increasing. Throughout the coconut growing areas of the world efforts are being made to increase the supply, and in recent years several new areas have been brought into production in the West Indies.

Apart from opening up new lands, which are not always available, increased production can best be achieved by a combination of ways, namely: the growing of high yielding palms, better cultural methods, the greater use of fertilisers, and last but by no means least, modern methods of crop protection against disease and pest infestation.