

## INTRODUCTION

It has recently been stated in the Report of the Agricultural Policy Committee of Trinidad that "the welfare of the people of the Colony largely depends on Agriculture which is, and always will be, the main foundation of national life". It is apparent from this statement that the future improvement in the standard of living of the majority of the people will, to a large extent, come through the further application of better agricultural methods and a more intelligent and intensive use of the soil.

Even before the last war an increase in population had led to a more intensive home production of staple food crops, although on the whole the emphasis has been, until present conditions altered it, primarily on cash crops. The present emergency led to a sudden large demand for food crops due to a great decrease in imports, which has led to a stimulus to peasant agriculture. Unfortunately, however, this has in turn led to an increase in shifting cultivation throughout the colony, a dangerous practice, since indiscriminate cutting, burning and cultivation of clean-weeded crops has caused, particularly in the hilly areas, an increase in soil erosion causing loss in surface soil and of natural soil structure and a serious leaching of plant nutrients. Often <sup>these</sup> hilly areas, which are fairly productive for two or three crops, become so degraded by erosion that they are merely left to grow again into lastro or secondary bush when often six to nine years' regeneration is necessary to make them again productive. In the meantime, the peasant moves onto another area and continues the destruction. In a colony such as Trinidad, with a large and increasing population, this method cannot continue indefinitely, particularly on the poor soil-types where natural regeneration takes even longer.

In many districts here, owing to the decline in the plantation cacao due to diseased and aged trees and labour difficulties, areas of old cacao have been loaned out under the food production campaign for peasant gardens. Under the methods the peasants use, however, it would appear that fertility is rapidly lost. The peasant at the best only applies cutlass cultivation, the seeds being normally planted in the topsoil and the litter, which are scraped into heaps. This eventually removes the

ground cover and the richest part of the soil is lost. Thus the fertility, that in great part is invested in the plant residues and the litter occurring under the cacao, is exploited. These effects have for a long time, been pointed out, but before a suitable solution to the difficulties are found, a more exact picture of the specific changes and speed of fertility loss is desirable. However, this is not a short term matter, and to obtain the desired results, investigations will have to be continued over a period of several years.