

SWEET POTATO EXPERIMENTS.

Introduction: "The Sweet Potato Crop in the West Indies".

I. IMPORTANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE CROP.

The Sweet Potato forms a staple article of human diet throughout the West Indies. It is essentially a peasant crop, since it is easy to propagate, thrives in poor soils and matures quickly. The crop is drought resistant and very seldom fails completely.

The Agricultural Departments of the various Islands have always encouraged the peasants to grow Sweet Potatoes, and many thousands of cuttings are distributed free of charge every year by the Departments. The Sweet Potato root contains, weight for weight, 50% more nutritive value than the Irish potato. As a food it is palatable and is easily digested. Since a yield of 4-5 tons of tubers may be obtained in 3-4 months, the crop has become very popular among the peasant population, who will always grow the crop for home consumption irrespective of the market.

II. SOILS.

The crop will grow well on soils which are too poor for most crops, and it proves profitable on a wider range of soils than does any other common field crop. A stiff soil may tend to excessive vine growth, producing rough irregular tubers, and a deep sandy soil may produce long ill-shaped tubers, due to the leaching of nutrients. An excess of undecayed organic matter in the soil is detrimental. A friable surface soil, 6-8 inches deep, resting on a porous clay subsoil, provides good drainage without leaching, together with good moisture retaining capacity; these are ideal conditions.

The crop is often employed for working up poor depleted soils, when fair yields may be obtained by growing in rotation with legumes.