

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Sweet Potato (*Ipomoea batatas* Lam) belongs to the family Convolvulaceae, being the only member of the genus *Ipomea* to be of any economic importance (5)^{*}. Believed to be of Tropical American origin (33), its cultivation is now widespread throughout the tropics between lats. 30°N - 42°S.

Being largely confined to peasant small holdings and gardens, no reliable figures for acreages and production are available in many areas, and it is therefore difficult to assess its importance relative to other food crops. However, its ease of propagation, reasonable yields even under conditions of indifferent cultivation and quick maturing qualities make it a useful stand-by crop, which together with yams and cassava form a major source of carbohydrates in the tropics.

In countries where production figures are available, great increases in the acreage under sweet potatoes are recorded. In the U.S.A., for example, sweet potato acreage increased from 593,000 in 1929 to 1,059,000 in 1947, (1). This represents a quarter of the acreage under Irish potatoes and is larger than any other vegetable crop. This increase may, however, be influenced by the fact that besides its popularity in the Southern States as a fresh vegetable, the tubers are canned or used for flour manufacture, starch production, manufacture of glucose syrup, industrial alcohol and other miscellaneous products.

The nutritive qualities of sweet potatoes are perhaps not excelled by any other vegetable crop (31) and it is superior to Irish potatoes in most categories especially Calcium and Vitamin A (Table I). The leaves are valuable as a spinach and the vines are useful as fodder for the livestock.

^{*} Nos. in brackets refer to literature cited. See references on page 47.