

INTRODUCTION

In the tropics the practice of mixed cropping is so widespread and important that any interested person will inevitably encounter it. In a tropical country the mainstay of the rural population is the native gardener, and it is his small garden rather than the large holding of the immigrant farmer that is the typical agriculture of the country. If the native gardener can be called the typical agriculturist, then mixed cropping, which plays so large a part in his system of farming, may fairly be called the favourite practice.

The native gardener has always been a source of information to immigrant farmers and planters, who have adopted his crops, and to some extent his methods. The immigrant farmer wishing to produce crops on a large scale can benefit, and has benefited by the adoption of modified methods of native agriculture. In any such utilisation of the native practice mixed cropping must inevitably come to the fore, since it is so much a part of the agriculture of the country; examples of mixed cropping adapted by the large scale farmer to his own needs can be seen on many farms, for instance on the Imperial College farm. But claims to the suitability of a method cannot be substantiated without reasons. Native methods of cropping and cultivation must be examined from the point of view of essential soundness before the large scale farmer can adopt any such methods himself. The preliminary step must be enquiry into the native practice, with especial emphasis upon the reasons underlying that practice. It is the purpose of this paper to describe the results of such an investigation, during the course of which the writer concerned himself chiefly with the reasons for the various methods followed by the native gardeners near St. Augustine.

In view of the fact that mixed cropping plays such

an important part in the agriculture of tropical countries, it is surprising to find little literature on the subject as such. Most references to the practice are found in text books on agriculture in various parts of the tropics, and for the most part these references are rather scanty. They serve to provide examples for comparison with the methods in Trinidad, but they give little indication of the agricultural value of the practice of mixed cropping. Articles on the subject are hard to find, but Wood (1), and Nicol (2) have suggested reasons to account for the popularity of mixed crops, though they do not give any data to support these reasons. The ecological side of the question, dealing with the effect of one crop on another and the subsequent effect on the soil, has been fairly well covered, but principally in connection with temperate countries. Data from such sources can give no more than a general idea of the theories on the subject, and are not necessarily applicable to the tropical practice. In the writers opinion the subject has been much neglected, though its complexity and importance are certainly deserving of much greater interest.