

# THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVESTOCK IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES

## INTRODUCTION

During the last decade there has been a marked unanimity among expert opinion regarding the place that livestock industry should occupy in the Caribbean economy. The West India Royal Commission of 1938 placed special emphasis on the necessity of a greater production of meat, milk, poultry and eggs, if a better balanced diet was to be provided for the population of the West Indies. Three years later Mr. A.J. Wakefield, C.M.G., Agricultural Advisor to the Comptroller of Development and Welfare, pointed out that the most promising line for agricultural development in Jamaica was the livestock industry from the stand point of both economics and of nutrition. In the next year, the Agricultural Policy Committee of Trinidad stressed the fact that the primary purpose of encouraging the keeping of livestock was to assist in stabilising the system of agriculture and to improve the standard of nutrition of the local populations. (1)

However, before the livestock industry as a whole can accomplish, to any marked degree, improvement in Agricultural Development, or nutritional standards of the various populations of the West Indies, there must be some form of improvement of livestock in the British West Indies.

The conditions under which livestock improvement programmes have to be implemented vary greatly not only from country to country, but also from area to area within individual territories. In some islands more progressive sections of the population have created conditions in which comparatively high levels of animal production have been made possible. In some, considerable improvement in the productivity of livestock of the mass of the indigenous inhabitants still remain at a very low level. In most of the islands or territories it has been necessary to introduce various breeds of livestock to effect improvement.

Not only is the improvement of livestock essential if standards of living are to be raised, but also the whole future welfare and progress of millions of peasant farmers, as well as the continued fertility of the soil, depend largely upon the evolution of sound systems of permanent agriculture, in which livestock must play a much more important part than it has been in the past. If crop production is to be maintained or increased, the animal will have to become a vital factor in the process. Improved animals possessing reasonably high standards of production, either for meat, milk, eggs, draught or otherwise, will go a long way in providing the economic incentive to the peasant farmer to use his animals in a sound system of mixed farming, which system appears to be most suitable for the development of the agriculture and livestock industries in the British West Indies. (13)

Some of the more important conditions to be found in the British West Indies and which govern the methods of livestock improvement employed will be mentioned in more detail later. These conditions or factors are: Nutrition, Management, Breeding, Control of Pests and Diseases.