

## INTRODUCTION

"The economy of the Caribbean is based essentially on its external trade, each country exporting the bulk of what it produces and importing the bulk of what it consumes".<sup>1</sup> Although this statement is true, it gives no indication of the role played by agriculture, without which the export trade would be extremely small.

The effect of this export trade is somewhat nullified by the large quantities of food imported into the region, a large proportion of which could be home-produced, and will have to be home-produced, if the increasing population is to be fed without further widening the trade gap. This is especially so for the smaller territories which have no other important industries or basic resources.

The basic problem, therefore, is increasing the agricultural production of the area, whether it be valuable export crops or crops to provide a substitute for those food products which are imported, and, with the exception of British Guiana, this increase must come from a very limited area of land. Further, such an increase must be achieved at the lowest possible cost to the producer, if he is to compete on the world markets.

With the emphasis on increasing crop yields from small areas of land, much more attention will have to be given to maintaining soil fertility, largely by the application of artificial fertilizers and it is at this point that growers turn to soil scientists and chemists for guidance as to recommended dressings. Apart from a very few cases, little or nothing is known about the way in which each individual crop reacts to fertilizer applications, or whether the outlay of capital on fertilizer is justified, and it is only now that a regional fertilizer investigation is being planned.

The purpose of this study is to compile information pertaining to fertilizer use over the post-war period which will serve as a background to such an investigation.