

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY

"The West Indies are a classic example of an exchange economy, relying as they do upon the proceeds of their staple agricultural exports such as sugar, cotton, cacao, arrowroot, citrus and coconuts, to enable them to import the food, clothing and other goods which they have never produced in adequate variety or quantity."⁽¹⁾ The indirect result of this is that until a few years ago animal husbandry played a secondary role in Caribbean economy, the dominant note being production for export. Up to 1920, and later in many territories, it occupied a position ancillary to the cultivation of export crops, a practice which was economically sound, since as Bryan Edwards ⁽⁴⁾ observed in 1801, it was cheaper for the planter to use the revenue from these highyielding crops to buy provisions and grain from others than to raise these himself. Hence up to this time the livestock industry remained insignificant, haphazard and the pursuit of private enterprise alone. It was built around nondescript Creole breeds and frustrated by shortage of funds, lack of any definite governmental policy, and heavy mortality amongst temperate breeds imported with a view to upgrading the stock.

But the West India Royal Commission of 1938, in stressing the need for a greater production of meat, milk, poultry and eggs if a better balanced diet were to be provided for the population of the West Indies, touched off a general awareness of the importance of animal husbandry throughout the area, an awareness which has grown remarkably during the last few years with the result that there has been a marked increase of all types of stock in most of the territories. In 1941, the Inspector General of Agriculture for the West Indies ⁽²⁾ pointed out that from the standpoint of economics and of nutrition of the local population, livestock held by far the most promise for agricultural development. In Jamaica in 1942, the Agricultural Policy Committee of Trinidad ⁽²⁾ stressed that the keeping of livestock should be encouraged primarily to assist in stabilizing the system of agriculture and to improve nutritional standards. In 1943 the Anglo-American Caribbean

Commission further championed the cause of livestock in Agricultural Systems. But the matter was not allowed to rest there. In 1944 the Agricultural Policy Committee of Antigua drew attention to the increased yields and improvement of soil conditions that would accrue from wider use of pen manure, whilst its counterpart in Jamaica advocated crop diversification and mixed farming as basic to the success of the small and medium scale agriculturist.

Since then great strides have been made in practically every territory as regards improvement of stock, increase in their number, and a raising of the levels of management and feeding employed. But the livestock industry in the West Indies is not yet secure on its feet. Much remains to be done - "the scope for improvement is infinite."⁽²⁾