Maize Selection at the Imperial College.

1928 - 1929

Introduction

Maize is a crop the merits of which, as a food for man and beast, have been extolled so often that it would be superfluous to recapitulate them here. It played a very important part in the old Maya civilisation, its use being closely bound up with both their religious rites and their social customs. The original home of this plant and its parent forms are obscure but probably Central America was the seat of its first cultivation; though at least one writer suggests that it was being grown in Asia before Columbus had discovered the New World. From Central America maize was gradually carried to the northern continent where its cultivation, chiefly by the women, provided a welcome reserve to supplement game or to make up for its scarcity.

Whatever the date of its introduction into these islands, it is certain that the Spanish discoverers of America found maize extensively used as food by the Caribes, and other inhabitants of the West Indies.

At the present time maize cannot be observed growing in any large areas in Trinidad but it is chiefly grown in small patches in natives' gardens. It is thus difficult to assess the amount of the crop which is grown in the island. The indigenous stocks appear to be hardy and fairly resistant to insect and fungal attacks; but genetically there are a great number of types mingled in a field sample differing both in yielding capacity, ear character and vigour.

Whether the production of a fairly pure type of seed of higher yielding power would be rendering to Trinidad a benefit of any measurable dimensions can whether this seed could be distributed to native cultivators and its higher standard maintained is a problem for the economist rather than for the plant breeder.

It may be of interest if the figures relating to the import of maize into the United States quoted.