

INTRODUCTION:

Towards the end of the 15 th. century citrus fruits, particularly the sweet orange, were highly valued throughout the countries of the Mediterranean. After the discovery of the New World the Spanish and Portuguese extended the cultivation of these plants to Florida, Central America, Brazil and the Caribbean Islands. The first introduction of citrus to the New World was by Columbus in 1473 (1).

Citrus trees have done well in Trinidad and have been encouraged by government in past years, particularly the latter part of the 18 th. century. As a result seedling oranges were established at Chaguaramas, the Santa Cruz Valley and other valleys of the Northern Range. These orchards were still in existence in 1900, but due mainly to the lack of local transport and cold storage facilities they were cut out and planted to cacao, coconuts and other crops.

About 1900 many varieties of orange trees budded on sour orange stocks were introduced to Trinidad from Florida and among the varieties introduced were Washington, Valencia, Ruby, Majorca, Saul's blood, Parson Brown and Jaffa. Among the mandarin group the King and Dancy orange were introduced. The planters of Trinidad were induced to plant small scale orchards throughout the island to meet the local demand for oranges. There was no serious attempt to grow oranges for export before the advent of witches' broom disease of cacao, but the small orchards that were established yielded valuable information and experience in connection with flavour, bearing capacity, shipping quality and the other qualities of the various varieties of orange.

The first interest in grapefruit production in Trinidad was shown by the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company when in 1905 they established an orchard of grapefruit in the La Brea district. Approximately 10 years later grapefruit orchards were planted by private individuals in the Santa Cruz Valley and at Talparo. The expansion of grapefruit growing was slow until the spread of witches' broom disease of cacao caused planters to seek other economic crops for Trinidad. Further impetus was given the orange and grapefruit industry by the cacao subsidy scheme of recent date, whereby planters were given financial assistance to convert land unsuited to cacao to other crops.

As a result of the increased demand for young orange and grapefruit trees, the government and private individuals have developed nurseries using sour orange stocks and in a limited number of cases rough lemon stocks. The government nursery has distributed plants at a price below the cost of producing them and as early as 1934 the demand was 4 or 5 times the supply. The acreage devoted to orange and grapefruit production has continued to expand, checked only by the war, and at present citrus ranks 4 th. in value of agricultural exports of Trinidad and Tobago. The position of citrus exports relative to other agricultural exports is given in table 1.