

INTRODUCTION.

Leguminous crops play a very important part in the cropping systems of both temperate and tropical climates, their value as fodder crops, catch crops and soil improvers is only too well known.

The Cowpea is eminently suited to supply the cultivator with any of the above requirements, when grown under favourable conditions.

The origin of the cowpea is obscure owing to its great similarity to other legumes; however it is reputed to be indigenous to Central Africa.

At a very early date (1) cowpeas were cultivated in China and at the beginning of the Christian era had extended to Arabia, Asia Minor and some of the European Mediterranean countries, but were not known in Central Europe until the middle of the sixteenth century.

Recent reports (2) show that cowpeas form an important phase in American agriculture; scientists refer the cowpea botanically to *Vigna Sinensis* Endl., "a type that is superior in vigour of growth, size and productivity than the sorts met with in the East". It is as a soil improver and a forage crop that the cowpea is chiefly grown in the States.

There appears to be a paucity of literature published on the culture of cowpeas in the West Indies. Van Bauren (2) records an instance in Jamaica, where the cowpea is grown among the bananas and young canes for seed which is gathered for human consumption. The crop constitutes a considerable proportion of the diet of the native population in Trinidad and is a valuable food for supplying protein. Consumption may take place in three forms: in the pod, shelled green and shelled dry.

Chemical analysis (3) has shown the constituents in the different forms to vary considerably.