

INTRODUCTION.

The Trinidad cacao industry has suffered a serious and continuous decline during the last two decades, and there is, as yet, no sign of this downward trend being arrested. The annual exports of cacao have decreased steadily since 1921, and have now dwindled to less than half the total exported during that year.

The fall in prices during the same period, due to world-wide depression and to overproduction in other cacao growing countries, has been partly responsible for the reduction of the acreage under cacao and for the neglected state of the cultivation on some estates. Many planters are unable to expend the same amount on the cultivation and care of their estates as they could during the more prosperous times, and others have found it more profitable to convert some of their cacao fields to other crops such as sugar-cane, bananas, grape-fruit, etc. These factors do not, however, supply a complete explanation for the decline in exports. An examination of the records of individual estates and fields shows that the yields from a great many of them have fallen off at an alarming rate. This suggests that the age of the field, or some factors associated with age, may be a contributory cause of the decline.

The economic state of the cacao industry is a matter of the greatest concern to the Government, to commerce in general, and to many individuals connected directly or indirectly with it. Since 1936 an annual subsidy has been paid by the Government to the cacao planters in an attempt

to compensate to some extent for the low prices, to tide the industry over the period of the depression, and to provide the planters with funds to pay for the labour used for certain cultural operations considered to be essential for the maintenance of fertility and production.

Although the cacao subsidy is assisting the planters to weather the storm of depression, and has eased their financial stress, it has not solved the problem of declining yields.

The Economics Department of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture began an investigation into the Trinidad cacao industry in 1929. The main objects of this investigation were to collect information regarding costs of production, yields and any other data by means of which the factors primarily responsible for the success or failure of estates could be ascertained.

The investigation first took the form of a financial survey of a large number of estates, from which much useful information was collected. This information was later analysed and in due course published, with a view to improving the efficiency of cacao estates.

Later, a systematic examination of individual cacao fields was carried out. Previous records had suggested that soil type and the age of the trees were important factors influencing yields and profits. This detailed investigation was at first confined to the Montserrat District, which is one of the most important cacao growing areas in Trinidad. A soil survey had already been carried out in that district so the various soil types and their distribution were accurately known.