

INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE STORAGE OF
SWEET POTATOES (*Ipomea batatas* Lam.)

The Sweet Potato (*Ipomea batatas* L) is an important annual crop in many tropical and sub-tropical countries. It has become the staple food in Sumatra, Malayan Archipelago, New Guinea and various other South Pacific islands. Together with yams and cassava, it forms a major source of starchy food for a large number of tropical peoples. To the European, the crop is as important as the Irish potato. In the United States it is second in commercial importance only to Irish potatoes as a root crop (27) and in the West Indies, it plays an important part in the diet of the people. In Barbados, St. Vincent and Montserrat where the climatic conditions are favourable for its production and where pests and diseases have not become serious, enough is produced for local consumption and export to the neighbouring islands. Thus, for instance, in 1943, St. Vincent (34) exported 2,299.5 tons of Sweet Potatoes to Trinidad. In West Africa where the crop was once regarded as a poor man's food, it is steadily taking the place of yams and is being consumed by a large proportion of the people particularly in Southern Nigeria where labour cost for yam production is becoming prohibitive. Sweet potato takes a shorter time to come to maturity and is much cheaper to produce than yams.

Sweet potato is the one economically important member of the family convolvulaceae. Morphologically the tuber is a root and resembles cassava (*Manihot* sp.) in this respect but differs from the Irish Potato which is a modified stem. It grew in wild form originally but as a result of years of domestication, it is now cultivated as an annual. It originated in Tropical America and West Indies where it has been grown for many thousands of years. The crop was introduced early to China from where it spread rapidly to other parts of the world. As very few varieties produce viable seeds, the normal method of propagation is by the use of the tuber or the vine.