

INTRODUCTION.

The accent is on research! For want of it the Livestock Industry in the West Indies labours under many difficulties, and these appear in a vicious circle. Nevertheless, all schools of thought realise the importance of improved native livestock. In the past much emphasis has been on veterinary care and attention for productive animals. Recent trends indicate that the study and practice of animal breeding is becoming prominent. However, it should be universally recognised and emphasised in spite of repetition, that no improvement in the livestock situation can come to pass without an adequate quantity of good quality forage.

Systems of mixed farming have been advocated for the West Indies and the various advantages, theoretically at least, to be derived are well known. No economic gains can be derived, however, where the feeding of concentrates to livestock is prevalent. The pressure of population is continuing hard upon food supplies and any improvement in the production of cheap animal products necessitates cheap forage production. This is more so when it is realised that the efficiency of animals in the conversion of foodstuffs is low.

TABLE I  
EDIBLE HUMAN FOOD PRODUCED PER 100 LBS.  
(After Leitch 1941)

DIGESTIBLE MATTER CONSUMED					
Cow	in terms of	milk	...	...	18 lbs.
Pig	"	"	carcase	...	15.6 "
Cow	"	"	butter	...	5.4 "
Poultry	"	"	eggs	...	5.1 "
Cattle	"	"	beef	...	2.8 "
Sheep	"	"	mutton	...	2.6 "

Livestock therefore must, in so far as possible, be dependent on grass.

To most farmers in the West Indies "all grass is just grass" (Paterson 1946). Moreover the bulk of the ration for livestock is inadequate as animals are used indiscriminately for work, meat and milk and the time allowed for grazing is insufficient (Paterson 1937). There is no grass culture except in a few selected areas and true pastures are unknown. Recognition of grass as a crop and the need for its proper utilisation is of primary importance to the West Indies.

Cattle are the dominant class of stock in the West Indies and the utilisation of herbage is considered in respect to those animals. The report also concerns itself with herbage which by majority is the most utilised for cattle. An attempt is made to group those grasses used according to their ecological requirements with the hope that future work may undertake the factor, so as little yet considered, of the rooting habit of these grasses in relation to soil conditions. A review is made of the utilisation of herbage as exists and some comparison is drawn by reference to the findings and trends of experiments conducted in the West Indies.