

INTRODUCTION

"Where plantation agriculture, worked by imported labour, predominated, the effect has been for economies mainly dependent on imported food to grow up; plantations depending on the cultivation of one or two export staples naturally tended to rely on imported food paid for by exports rather than to produce it themselves. This has occurred in the West Indies, Mauritius, Malaya and Ceylon; it has not occurred to anything like the same extent in Africa. For example, before the last war food imports into the West Indies averaged over £2 per head of population, and into Malaya £3 per head; in the British African Colonial Dependencies, by contrast, they averaged 2s. per head.

The danger had long been appreciated in some non-British territories, such as the former Dutch East Indies, which placed food production in the forefront of policy, as did the Philippines. It began to be appreciated in some British dependencies in the 1930's - e.g., Malaya, where as a result of the recommendations of the 1931 Rice Committee, considerable efforts were inaugurated to step up rice production.

It was this which impelled the Hot Springs Conference on Food Agriculture in 1944, out of which arose the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, to lay down that a cardinal point of agricultural policy should be the production locally, of as large a proportion as is economically practicable, of a country's food requirements."

The above extract (12) written by the late Sir Harold Tempany, clearly indicates the part locally grown food crops can play in the economy of British Colonial territories and any work in this direction is both desirable and necessary.

In the Pacific region Colocasia esculenta (L.) Schott. has from the very beginning, been a very important food crop,

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but with the exception of Hawaii little or no scientific or agronomic work on the crop has been carried out in this region until very recently and some work is now being done, particularly by the South Pacific Commission.

In the West Indies Colocasia has been used to a much more limited extent and the present tendency is for rice to supersede root crops in the diet of the local people. This tendency should not prevent work and improvement on root crops in general as these can still play a very important role in the economy of this region as a whole. With this end in view a plant breeder to work on food crops has recently been appointed by the Regional Research Scheme.