

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The sweet potato (Impomea batatas) belongs to the family Convulvulaceae; it is the only member of the family of any economic significance (Cobley 1962).

Probably of tropical south or central american origin, (Purseglove 1964) the crop is now widely grown throughout the world between latitudes 40°N and 42°S.

The crop is in some ways similar to the 'irish' potato (Solanum tuberosum) the main difference being that it is normally propagated by stem cuttings instead of by tubers. The edible portion is a swollen root and not a stem structure as S. tuberosum.

With the exception of the U.S.A. the crop is largely cultivated on a small scale in peasant small holdings and gardens. For this reason there are few exact records of the extent of production, compared with starchy staples such as S. tuberosum.

Production figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the most recent figures of the Trinidad Government statistics office (1958), show that the crop is of considerable importance. For example in the U.S.A. the sweet potato acreage is about a quarter of that of the irish potato, and considerably greater than that of any other vegetable crop.