

# COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE: LARGE-SCALE PRODUCTION vs. SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION OF YAMS AND SWEET POTATOES IN THE CARIBBEAN

C.B. Rankine\*

## SUMMARY

Sample surveys in the islands of Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis and Jamaica have shown that yam and sweet potato production are financially very unattractive. At the present time small farm production achieves higher productivity to land than that on large farms. Improved technology is not adopted and yields are far below those achieved in experiments. Analyses are provided for each island of the costs and returns for each crop under different farming systems.

## RESUME

Des résultats d'enquêtes menées dans les îles de Barbados, de St. Vincent, de St. Kitts-Nevis et de la Jamaïque indiquent que la production d'igname et de la patate douce n'a pas d'attrait du point de vue financier. Actuellement la production obtenue dans les petites fermes ont une productivité plus élevée que celle des grandes fermes. Les techniques améliorées ne sont pas adoptées et les rendements sont de loin en dessous de ceux qu'on obtient sur les parcelles expérimentales. Les coûts et les bénéfices pour chaque culture selon des systèmes adoptés ont été analysés par île.

## RESUMEN

La producción de ñame y camote es muy poco atractiva desde el punto de vista financiero según nuestras encuestas en las Islas de Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis y Jamaica. Actualmente la producción en las fincas pequeñas alcanza una mayor productividad de la tierra que en las fincas grandes. La tecnología mejorada no se adopta y los rendimientos se encuentran muy por debajo de los que se alcanzan en los experimentos. Se proveen análisis de costos y utilidades para cada cultivo bajo diferentes sistemas agrícolas.

## INTRODUCTION

Root crop investigations using satisfactory experimental techniques in the English-speaking Caribbean countries have included agronomic, physiological and bio-chemical studies. Little attention however has been paid to economic and social aspects of root crop production although these crops are staples in the diet of most of the population and contribute to an important extent to the growth and development of their economies. Domestic consumption of root crops is estimated at about 80 percent of production with 20 percent being exported to the growing markets in North America and Europe. Domestic consumption has increased rapidly because of recent shortages of other foods in many of the Caribbean countries. Many people preferred other foods to root crops because of their high starch content and the form of their presentation in the market. Today the situation is gradually changing, not only because of the apparent food shortage but also because of the tight monetary situation.

A recent review of agricultural policies by Edwards and Cropper<sup>1</sup> of many Caribbean countries has shown heavy emphasis on programmes to stimulate the production of food crops and programmes designed to encourage the consumption of more locally produced foods in order to reduce the national food import bill. However, production is not keeping pace with demand. This has resulted in price increases for these commodities.

Two major reasons for the failure of supply to keep up with demand is the lack of knowledge or application of the techniques appropriate for large-scale commercial production. These crops are still considered as 'peasant crops' despite efforts to stimulate their production on large farms. Large-scale farmers have not yet shown much interest in root crops, some because they are preoccupied with other crops, and others who resent the fact that they are required by law to change their pattern of land utilization to accommodate these crops. Other farmers are enthusiastic but lack sufficient knowledge to make a success of the crop. Because of the numerous problems which have reduced the effectiveness of the Food Crop Laws, at least one country is contemplating repeal of the laws.

\*Agricultural Economist, Faculty of Agriculture, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.