INTRODUCTION:

This pamphlet gives an overview of some of the plant species that have been introduced into Jamaica. Amazingly, all of these plants have adapted extremely well and have become so widespread that they are now an inescapable part of our landscape. They are no longer "strangers" in our land. Instead they have become an integral part of our culture to the extent that some are indistinguishable from our native plants. They have become:

1. Staples in our diet (eg. yam, orange, bananas, ackee)

2. The foundation of major industries which are of benefit to Jamaica's economy via both regional and international trade (eg. coffee, banana sugar)

3. A provider of employment for many

SUGAR CANE (*Saccharum officinarum*: Poaceae)

Native to New Guinea where it has long been grown for eating. Granular sugar was first extracted from it in India which, with Brazil and Cuba, are the world's largest producers. Columbus brought cane to Hispaniola to 1493 but Captain William Bligh brought the Otaheite or Bourbon variety of " Noble" cane from Tahiti to Jamaica in 1796. Molasses a by-product of sugar manufacture is fragmented then distilled to yield rum. Cane, a large perennial grass, is propagated by pieces of its stem.

COCONUT (*Cocos nucifera*: Arecaceae)

The economically most important palm. Probably originally from tropical Southeast Asia. Introduced by the European explorers during the late fifteen hundreds. The major source of dietary fat for millions. Provides food, drink, oil, fibre, medicine, timber, thatch, mats, fuel, ornaments and domestic utensils. The coconut is one of the largest fruits known, and is botanically a drupe (fruit), not a nut. It thrives in well-drained sand and high humidity: generally grown commercially in Jamaica at sea level to 500ft. Tall palms are susceptible to " Lethal Yellowing" disease; dwarf palms are resistant and more frequently planted in Jamaica.

TOMATO (*Lycopersicon esculentum*: Solanaceae)

Native to South America. Now widely grown and naturalized in tropical America, West Indies, Bahamas and Bermuda. Today there are many cultivated varieties in most regions of the world. Eaten raw, cooked or canned and processed as juice, paste or ketchup.

RED PEAS (*Phaseolus vulgaris*: Fabaceae)

Native to Central and South America, the Red Pea is not a "true" pea (like species of *Pisum*) but rather a bean like the broad bean. Containing about 25% protein, easily stored and handled, it is one of the most important protein sources for people of the American tropics. String Beans are the immature "pods" of this annual herb.

ESCALLION (*Allium fistulosum*: Liliaceae)

Native to China and a favorite vegetable in the Orient. It is a perennial closely related to the onion, but reproducing by offsets (lateral buds) rather than bulbs. Jamaica is evidently the only West Indian Island where it is an important crop. It is commonly grown up to 5,000ft. Cultivated chiefly in St. Elizabeth and St. Andrew. Used both cooked and raw, Escallion is widely used for seasoning dishes in Jamaica.

YAM (*Dioscorea spp*.: Discoreaceae)

Several types of yams are grown in Jamaica: White Yam, Indian Yam, Sweet Yam, St. Vincent, Lucea and Renta, (all white Yams), and the Yellow Yam. Cultivated in Jamaica from sea-level to about 4,000ft. Yams are swollen underground stems, called stem-tubers and are a vitally important part of the West Indian and West African diet. They are boiled, roasted, fried, baked, and eaten sliced, or grated in pies or puddings. The different varieties are native of South Asia, tropical Africa and South America. The Yams from Africa probably reached Jamaica on slave ships.

BREADFRUIT (*Artocarpus altilis*: Moraceae)

Native to southwestern Pacific Islands and brought to Jamaica in 1793 by Captain William Bligh on the H.M.S. Providence. The Breadfruit, which is a multiple fruit, is eaten, boiled, baked, steamed, roasted, fried, dried, made into dough or fermented into a paste. The spikes of the male flowers are also stewed and eaten. Breadfruit was introduced as a bread substitute for slaves and is still an important staple. The trees are propagated by suckers.

IRISH POTATAO (*Solnum tuberosum*: Solanaceae)

Native to the Andes Mts. of South America, brought to Bermuda in 1961, and probably to Jamaica soon after. A crop that yields poorly when temperatures rise above 70 F., so the cool central uplands produce most of the potatoes in Jamaica. Potatoes are stem timber (swollen underground stems). They are an economical source of starch, but contain little protein (concentrated under the peel). One of the world's most important foods, especially in northern European countries. It is eaten fried, baked, boiled, as chips, mashed, and
even as pancakes.

PEANUT (*Arachis hypogaea*: Fabaceae)

Native to Brazil, but carried to tropical Africa, India, China, and the West Indies soon after the European discovery of the Americas. It is rich in oil and protein, and very important to human nutrition in tropical regions. The Peanut is the true legume (like Red Peas) rather than a fruit. Its seeds (which we eat) are borne in a shell-like pod. The fruit matures underground, which is quite unusual for a member of the Legume family.

RICE (*Oryza sativa*: Poaceae)

Native to southern China and Southeast Asia. It was brought to Jamaica by Europeans before the late 1600's but never was cultivated here in large quantities, despite its dietary importance. It's the most

important carbohydrate source for the world's most densely populated tropical regions. Cultivation of this annual grass usually requires much hand labour, and an abundance of water.

ORANGE (*Citrus sinensis*: Rutaceae)

Native to southern China, Columbus brought orange seeds to Haiti in 1493. It must have reached Jamaica soon after. Oils from the flowers are extracted for perfume in Europe, and the oil from the Orange peel is used as flavouring. The fruit is eaten fresh or its juice extracted. Orange juice is a very good source of vitamin C. Most Orange trees are now propagated by buds or cuttings.

COFFEE (*Coffea arabica*: Rubiaceae)

Native of Ethiopia. Introduced into Arabia and from there to other countries in the tropics. Introduced to Jamaica from Martinique by Sir Nicolas Lawes in 1732. Parliamentary Act was passed to foster the coffee cultivation in Jamaica. Now naturalized in the hilly regions of the island it grows at 3,000-6000ft. Jamaica exports Coffee and is well known for its Blue Mountain brand. Coffee seeds are roasted before being ground for brewing.

MANGO (*Mangifera indica*: Anacardiaceae)

Native to Southeast Asia. Several varieties of Mango were among the plants taken from a captured French ship in 1782 and presented to Jamaica by Lord Rodney. The plants flourished and produced many varieties of Mangoes, which were numbered for identity. Two of the mangoes were similar in appearance and fragrance but differed in color and sweetness. The name No. 32 has disappeared but the no. 11 of today probably include the No. 32 as they are green or yellow in colour and sweet or slightly sour. In later years new varieties were introduced from the East, including the Bombay Mango, imported in 1869 by Sir John Peter Grant, then Governor of Jamaica

GINGER (*Zingiber officinale*: Zingiberaceae)

Native to Tropical Asia but brought to Jamaica by the Spaniards. Large quantities were exported to Spain as early as 1547. China must be one of the largest producers, but Jamaican Ginger is considered the best quality. Ginger "fingers" are actually rhizomes (underground stems). Oil extracted from Ginger is used to Oriental perfumes. In Jamaica, Ginger is used in making beverages and in baked products.

ACKEE (*Blighia sapida*: Sapindaceae)

An attractive evergreen up to 75ft. tall and native to West Africa. It was brought to Jamaica in 1778 probably on a slave ship. Its scientific name honours Capt. William Bligh (of the Bounty) who carried specimens to England in 1793 for cultivation and study. Each ackee fruit, (botanically a capsule), contains three black seeds, each with a large edible creamy-white fleshy aril. The fruit can be poisonous if not properly prepared before cooking. The unopened fruit are also poisonous. The ackee is Jamaica's national fruit.

BANANA (*Musa spp*.: Musaceae)

Native to Southeast Asia and brought to the Americas soon after the European discovery. Bananas are the most important fruits in the tropical lands around the world. Banana "trees" are not really trees at all; they are huge herbaceous plants that quickly shoot up to a height of 15 to 30ft. The plant's true stem is underground and has buds, or "eyes", like a potato. These underground stems or rhizomes are transplanted to establish new plantings; as with potatoes, each may be cut into several pieces. The botanical name of the common Banana of commerce, *Musa sapientum*, means "Fruit of the Wise Man".

PIMENTO / ALLSPICE (*Pimenta dioica*: Myrtaceae)

Native to Jamaica, Cuba, and Central America. Pimento once grew in great abundance in many parts of the Island, particularly on the north side in hilly places near the sea. The plants grew in such abundance that they formed groves, filling the air with their fragrance. These groves were called "Pimento Walks". All parts of the tree: the wood: flowers and the leaves are aromatic. The berries have a warm, spicy taste like cloves and nutmeg; hence the name Allspice. The Pimento was considered the most temperate and mild of all the common spice.

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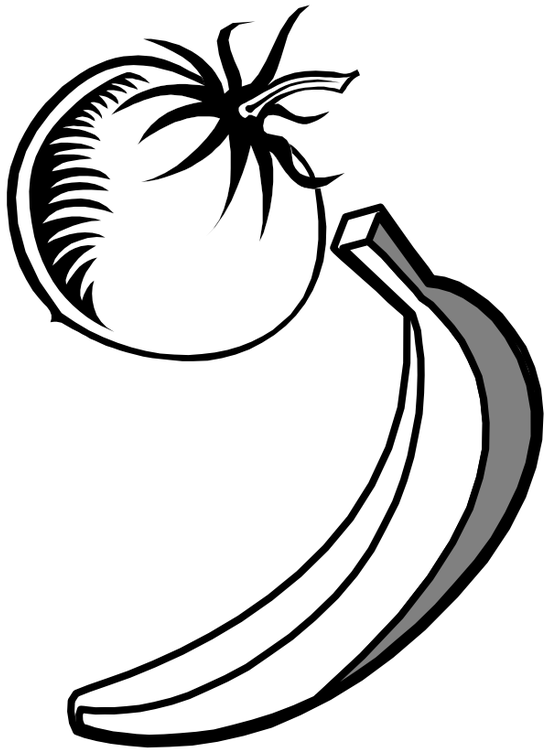
Origin of Some of Jamaica's Economic Plants



Prepared by the
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