CUBAN FARMING.

HOW THE GOVERNMENT IS DEVELOPING THE ISLAND.

The Agricultural Stations Run by Americans—New Vegetables and Fruits—Cuba as Uncle Sam's Winter Garden—Experiments With Stock—A Visit to an American Plantation and Its Big Orchards of Oranges and Grape Fruit—How One Yankee Farms in Cuba.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

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SANTIAGO DE LAS VEGAS.—The Cuban government is preparing to develop the island. It has established a department of agriculture, and is sending out experts to prospect the different provinces testing the land and reporting upon its value. Many samples of soil have been sent to the United States agricultural department for analysis and advice, and a variety of experiments are being made in fertilizers and new branches of farming. This is so not only as to sugar and tobacco, which are the main crops of the island, but also as to fruits, vegetables, henneqen, sea island cotton and other things. The experiments are largely carried on by Americans. The most of the employes are graduates of our agricultural department at Washington, and here at Santiago de Las Vegas, about 15 miles from Havana, a government experimental farm is in operation, under such management, with an American director, who was brought here on the recommendation of Secy. Wilson.

CUBA A BIG FARM.

Before I describe the station let me say a word about this island. It is one of the biggest farming propositions on earth. It has more good soil than the valley of the Nile, and it promises to be the great winter fruit and vegetable garden of the United States. Cuba lies in Uncle Sam's front yard, with a short water road to his kitchen door. The island is about as big as Pennsylvania, and, although it is mountainous in places, the soil is good to the tops of the hills and almost every bit of it can be farmed.

Japan has a greater area, and it supports between 40,000,000 and 50,000,000 people; but only about 10 per cent of it is tillable. Java is as big as Cuba, but it is largely taken up by mountain ranges, with active volcanoes and arid lands. Nevertheless Java supports 25,000,000.

Cuba today has less than 1,500,000 and it is safe to say that it will some time rival Java in its products, though it will always have a less population, for a Javanese can live where a Cuban would starve. The two islands raise about the same crops—sugar, tobacco and tropical fruits, with coffee on the uplands. Java is now growing tea and quinine, but these articles have not been subject to experiment in Cuba.

So far less than one-third of this island has been laid out in farms, and at the close of the war only 3 per cent of area was under cultivation. There is more now, but it is safe to say that not one-sixth of the island is used. The best cultivation is done in the provinces of Havana and Matanzas, and also in the tobacco fields of Pinar del Rio. At present sugar is the most important crop, being produced in all the provinces. Tobacco comes next, raised chiefly in Pinar del Rio, and away down at the foot is coffee, which was once more important than sugar, and which now, owing to the tariff and other conditions, will again come to the front.

CUBA'S EXPERIMENTAL STATION.

The agricultural farm at Santiago de Las Vegas is the center of this new agricultural development. It is run by the government, which gives it large appropriations and pushes its work in every possible way. The director is Prof. F. S. Earle, who was for years connected with the United States department of agriculture, and who at the time the Cuban government asked for a man for this work, was about to go to Porto Rico to take charge of our experimental station there. The Cuban salary was a large one—I think $5,000—and as Secy. Wilson had other good men he allowed Mr. Earle to come to Cuba. This was about a year ago. The farm has been purchased, the buildings equipped and an agricultural department, with a corps of scientists from Washington, are now here at work.

The farm itself comprises 180 acres. Its buildings are great Spanish barracks, running around a central patio of an acre of flowers and plants, and also many cottages which have been erected for the farmers. The barracks are of one story. They are of great extent and are well fitted for government work.

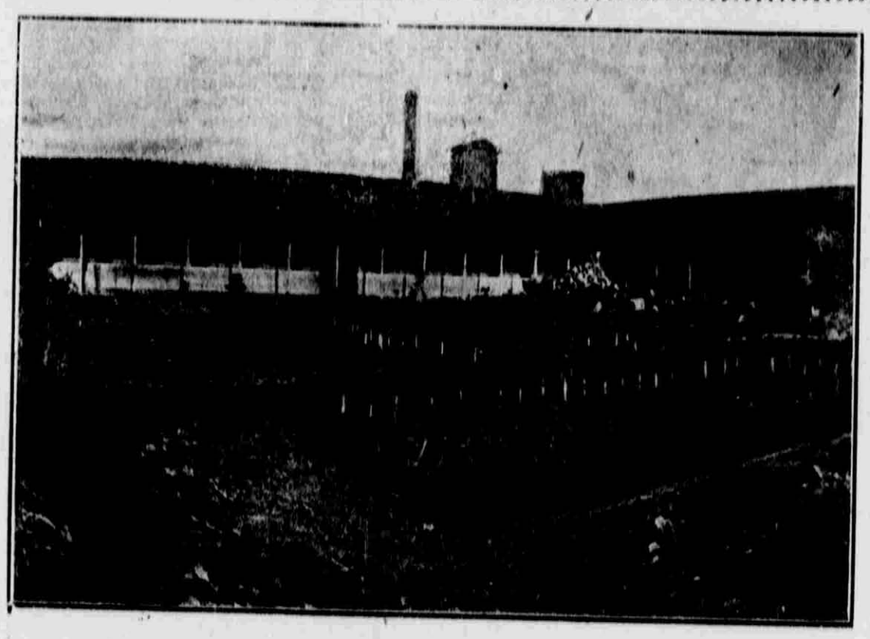
I spent some time going through the buildings, and afterward took a walk with Prof. Earle over the farm. The establishment is thoroughly systematized, and in it all sorts of investigations as to plant breeding, fertilizer testing and plant and animal diseases are going on. In the botanical department I was shown about 20,000 specimens of Cuban plants and flowers, and in the gardens near by saw many new vegetables and fruits growing.

NEW FRUITS FOR CUBA.

In the banana fields there are a score of varieties which have just been introduced from Porto Rico, and near by 20 varieties of peaches and 15 varieties of Japanese persimmons have been planted. There are figs from California, Japanese walnuts and all sorts of grapes which grow well in the southern parts of the United States.

Among the most important experiments are those with citrus fruits. All the best known limes, lemons and pomelos are now being planted or budded. More than 40 different varieties of oranges have been planted for comparison and study, and also a large number of pineapples of different kinds.

The pineapple industry is rapidly increasing and the department is making great efforts to get the best varieties. The exports of pines last year were in the neighborhood of three quarters of a million dollars, and 99 per cent of these went to the United States. The two chief Cuban pines are the Piña de la Tierra and the Havana white pine. The latter is the sweeter and larger, but it does not keep well. There are other pines which are smaller and less juicy, but more hardy and better for export. The white pineapples are consumed in Cuba. They sell from 40 cents to $1.37 a dozen.



CUBAN AGRICULTURAL STATION.
Main Part of the Building Photographed for the "News" by Frank G. Carpenter.

VEGETABLES FOR OUR MARKETS.

Prof. Earle tells me that Cuba will largely supply our winter market with vegetables. He has been experimenting with lettuces and finds that they grow well. The choicest varieties thrive and are more tender and juicy than our lettuces. In walking through the garden I saw lettuce heads as big as small cabbages, and Mr. Earle said he had raised one this year which weighed more than three pounds. Lettuces can easily be shipped abroad, and there is no reason why they should not go from here to our chief cities.

It is the same with celery. This plant is supposed to thrive only in a temperate climate, but it grows luxuriantly in the station gardens. The stalks are large and tender, and they can be bleached just as easily as at home.

The experiments with tomatoes have resulted in excellent yields, and a number of Americans have begun to raise tomatoes for export. They grow well and the profits are great. Indeed the stories told are so rosy that I hesitate to repeat them. It is said that tomatoes, cabbages, egg plans, potatoes and cucumbers, if properly handled, will yield anywhere from $50 to $500 per acre, according to soil and shipping facilities, and oranges, pineapples and lemons much more.

EXPERIMENTS IN STOCK.

The government is making experiments in stock breeding. It has recently imported some choice Durham, Hereford, Jersey, Polled Angus and other bulls and cows and many of these are kept at Santiago de Las Vegas. They will be shipped, I suppose, to the provinces best fitted for stock. Prof. Earle tells me that most of the cattle now here come from native animals crossed by importations from South America and Jamaica, Porto Rico and others of the West Indies. The common beasts imported are mostly of the long-horned, rawboned variety and so far the Venezuela stock seem to thrive best. The agricultural department expects to take this stock as a basis and cross it with the best of foreign breeds.

The department is also experimenting in raising beets and the various grasses for cattle food. I am told that one acre of the best of Cuban grass will keep a cow the year around. There is one variety of pasture known as guinea grass, which grows so high that it is above your head as you ride through it on horseback.

ON AN AMERICAN PLANTATION.

Leaving the agricultural station I drove about two miles farther on to visit a fruit plantation belonging to Mr. Adam Gray, an insurance man of Cincinnati. Mr. Gray came to Cuba about five years ago and bought several hundred acres of land at $25 an acre. He has added to his purchases since then at higher prices, his last one costing him more than $150 per acre, and he has now all told 800 acres within a half hour's ride of Havana. The land is near the railroad, and a switch has been constructed to it, so that his fruit can be sent to the Havana harbor at the lowest possible cost. At present he is shipping pineapples. It costs him only $7 a car load, and I am told that he can put pineapples, oranges and grape fruit into the markets of New York and Chicago more cheaply than they can be sent there from any orchard in Florida or California. He has now about 200 acres of pineapples under cultivation, and his crop this year will be worth about $40,000, amounting to in the neighborhood of 25,000 crates. He has 260 acres of oranges and grape fruit, embracing about 120,000 trees; and when he has set out the full 500 acres which he expects to plant the orchard should yield in the neighborhood of 500,000 boxes of oranges and grape fruit every year.

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION.

A plantation like this is a business proposition. It requires large capital and it will probably bring large profits. The work upon it is thoroughly systematized and the business will be run like a great American factory, with due regard to the cost element. As soon as Mr. Gray bought the farm he put it in charge of an expert agriculturist named Schmidt, who had been employed by him in the United States. Mr. Schmidt is a graduate of one of the chief agricultural colleges of Germany. He had charge of the emperor's gardens in Berlin at one time and later studied fruit culture in France. He aided Mr. Gray in picking out the property and then started to clear it. It had all been under cultivation but had run down during the war, and parts of it were covered with trees and underbrush. The trees were all cut and the timber made into charcoal. Charcoal is the chief fuel of Havana, and Gray had no trouble in disposing of his 10,000 bags which came from the clearing. After this he began to set out the fruit and has gradually increased the cultivated area until he now has almost 500 acres of oranges, grape fruit and pineapples.

HUNDREDS OF ACRES OF PINEAPPLES.

I wish I could show you this farm as it appeared when I rode through it today. It extends for more than a mile along the road and at the front and side of it runs a long row of magnificent palms, each from 100 to 150 feet high, with a trunk like a marble column, out of the top of which great fan-like leaves quiver in the wind. The roads are of a rich red loam, as soft and as smooth as a race track. They are wide and in many places shaded by palms and mango trees. We rode a long distance through the pineapple fields, the pines extending out on all sides of us in a great bronze carpet. Near the carriage the fruit was distinctly seen, the the great round balls of red and yellow set in long green leaves tipped with pink. Farther away pines and leaves blended together, and the whole under the sun became a gorgeous cloth more splendid than the dress of a queen.

The pineapples are planted in rows, but the plants are not close together and they yield a great number per acre. I am told they bring on the average about two cents apiece when sold, and that each costs the farmer about one cent to raise. The pineapples of Cuba are large, and those which I had on the Gray farm, fresh from the field, were delicious.

ORANGES IN CUBA.

From the pineapple fields I went on into the orange orchard, where I met the manager, Mr. Schmidt, and the son of Adam Gray, a young man of 22, who has just graduated at Yale college and has come to Cuba to help work this farm. When I saw him he was superintending the spraying of the fruit trees. He tells me that Cuba has five different varieties of scale and that it pays to spray.

In company with Mr. Schmidt, I walked through the groves. The orange trees are planted 20 feet apart. They are carefully plowed and hoed and are watched like a choice orchard at home. The trees are now about four years old, and they have begun to produce. At eight years they will each yield from eight to ten boxes of oranges per year, which will make a product of about 1,000 boxes per acre. The oranges here run on the average about 250 to the box, and at this rate the possibilities of this 500-acre orchard, as it is to be in the future, are 125,000,000 oranges per annum or enough to give an orange to every man, woman and child in our country, with plenty over for the rest of North America and the greater part of the people below the isthmus of Panama.

GRAPE FRUIT IN CUBA.

Mr. Gray believes that grape fruit culture will prove profitable. His orchard has now 100 acres devoted to this fruit. The trees look much like orange trees and they are grown the same way. They begin to bear about the same time as oranges and a good tree at the age of eight years should yield about 20 boxes of fruit. Mr. Schmidt tells me that the United States market for grape fruit is steadily increasing, and that the demand promises to be permanent.

I asked as to the quality of the Cuban varieties in comparison with those of California and Florida. Mr. Schmidt replied:

"We grow a better grape fruit here than any raised in America. It is sweeter, but it has nevertheless the quinine taste, which makes it desirable. We have raised fruit of that variety so large that 36 would fill a box. Grape fruit keeps well, and there is no great hurry about picking it or selling it after it is ripened.

CUBAN ORANGES.

"As to oranges, the Cuban varieties are sweeter than any raised in America. They are better flavored, and we hope to produce a Cuban orange which shall be popular throughout the United States. As it is, there are 25 different varieties of oranges growing on this farm. We are always looking for the best, and are budding from them. We are raising the choice varieties of California and Florida oranges as well. We plant the seeds of the Cuban sour orange and bud these with the other varieties."

"How about frost?"

"There is no danger of that. During my five years in Cuba the weather has not hurt the trees nor fruit, and we are told that it never grows cold enough to do so. This fact alone will make Cuba the orange grove of the United States."

"How about your labor, Mr. Schmidt?" I asked.

"We use the natives, and so far have found them satisfactory. They work well and we can get all we need for a dollar a day in silver. We work 10 hours. We have also some to whom we pay regular salaries of $15 or $20 a month, including their board."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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