NOTES

THE PARTRIDGE PEA, CHAMAECRISTA FASCICULATA, 
A PROMISING PLANT FOR SOIL CONSERVATION

The partridge pea, Chamaecrista fasciculata, (Michx) Greene, a native legume of the eastern United States, was used both as a cover crop and as a forage crop 140 to 70 years ago but has been neglected in recent years. Preliminary tests by the Soil Conservation Service in Alabama indicate that this species may be useful on certain soils in the Southeast as a soil-conserving crop.

It has been sowed successfully on idle crop land, in orchards, on small grain, and in alternate rows with corn. Successful reseeding has occurred in each situation.

Chamaecrista fasciculata has several characteristics needed by the ideal soil-conserving crop in the Southeast. It will grow well on poor soil, its seedlings withstand frost well, its vegetation is not toxic to farm animals, and it competes well with weeds. C. fasciculata has a marked ability to reseed itself and will maintain itself on an area in competition with other vegetation for a number of years if undisturbed (Fig. 1). The seeds are relatively hard and will winter over in the soil with ease. They germinate over a long period the following spring. Harvested seed, however, may be sown in the spring with good results without having been scarified.

Fig. 1.—Plot of partridge pea seeded March, 1938. Photograph shows volunteer stand in 1939, giving a complete and thoroughly satisfactory ground cover.

Seed crops are usually large but difficult to gather because of a long, uneven maturity date, and a strong tendency for each pod to pop or shatter soon after maturity. Seed collections have been successful by cutting the plants when most of the seed are in the dough stage,