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Redmond, Oregon, Feb. 8, 1912

AN ALFALFA SCIENCE FARM

STORY OF HOW ALFALFA IS

MADE TO PAY AND ITS VALUE

AS A CATTLE AND HOG FOOD

TOLD BY AN EXPERT THAT

ALL MAY LEARN

Continued from last week

One of the greatest mistakes of the average farmer, contends Doctor Sudduth, is that of over seeding. And this mistake is especially fatal to the highest success in dry farm regions, or in any region where the rainfall is less than reliably abundant—except, of course, where there is irrigation.

Heavy seeding of any kind of grain or alfalfa has no place in successful dry farming. The heaviest yields of wheat I have ever had were secured by using only thirty pounds of seed to the acre as against the ordinary portion of seventy five pounds; in fact, a great many farmers use a hundred or more pounds. The English practice calls for two to three bushels to the acre, which means one hundred and twenty to one hundred and eighty pounds. My crop of Turkey red wheat on 250 acres was seeded with only 30 pounds to the acre and it was the best produced anywhere in my locality.

The lands on which most of the big dry farming operations are carried on are strong soils, that have not been leached by constant rains. Much of this land has a considerable element of volcanic ash. This means that it is a virile and vigorous soil, and that its natural effect is to make grain of alfalfa stool heavily—that is, to send up numerous sprouts from the same root.

Now, if you seed heavily on this soil and there is a shortage of moisture, the result is that, in the case of grain, the moisture goes in to making straw instead of grain; and, with alfalfa, it is absorbed in producing stalk and stem growth instead of properly matured foliage.

When, however, the alfalfa plants are in rows 14 inches apart and 8 inches apart in the rows, as I plant them for forage purposes, what is the result? The limited moisture in the soil is not exhausted through the growth of valueless straw and stems, for only so many sprouts will come up as will find sufficient moisture to bring them to maturity, full foliage, and a state of highest protein value. They get a splendid root growth. Where plants are grown for seed purposes, I get the best results by placing them 20 to 28 inches apart in the row and the rows 30 inches apart. If, under this system, there is a year of sufficient moisture, the plants stool to full capacity and mature all their foliage.

Out of over 100 varieties of alfalfa now growing in my experimental gardens, there are only about 15 that are to be classed as thoroughly commercial. These require different treatment as to the amount of growing room which each plant should be given, and I regard my experiments in this particular as incomplete. I have only laid down a general rule, which must be qualified as to certain varieties. This adaptation of seeding to the amount of moisture that can be conserved under average conditions is one of the finest and most vital problems in any kind of dry farming, and it is to some extent a local problem, of course; but its scientific and practical solution for any large dry farming section is so important to material results that any man who works it out in definite terms will be entitled to all the credit that one man needs to have.

In the humid regions the general practice is to use 20, 25 and some-

times 30 pounds of alfalfa seed to the acre. This is too much. Four or five pounds will put all the sprouts on an acre of land that any soil can take proper care of, provided germinating conditions are right. All of the rest of the seed is wasted—and worse than wasted. Good alfalfa seed costs money and no farmer can afford to throw away 75 per cent of his seed just to guard against the chance that the other 25 per cent may not germinate. He should put that wasted money into putting every seed of the 25 per cent into the right place and under right conditions.

The foremost specification which Doctor Sudduth makes under the head of right conditions is a seed bed, as clean, as mellow and as firm as that which a skilled Italian makes for his onions or a German prepares for his sugar beets.

This specialist declares that it is most difficult to make the average alfalfa grower realize that intensive cultivation pays as well in alfalfa growing as in the production of onions or sugar beets, but that all the cultivation must be done before the crop is put in. Because weeds are the great enemy of alfalfa, Doctor Sudduth has no use for the practice of spring seeding, as it gives no opportunity to have every weed seed in the soil send up its shoot where it can be destroyed. His seeding is never done before the middle of June and more often is delayed until the last of June or the first of July. His land is plowed the previous season as soon as the crop of grain is removed. The soil from the field is first subjected to a chemical analysis before any work is done on it, and if there is any indication of the need of lime salts these are applied.

Alfalfa's Chief Enemies

In the preparation of the soil a subsurface packer is used to firm the subsoil. Then the ground is repeatedly disked. He regards the type of harrow commonly known as the Achme an almost ideal instrument for the fitting of dry farming land to retain moisture. This throws the dirt both to right and left and is a great exterminator of weeds. One of these harrows follows his tractor plow and is in turn followed by a smoothing harrow. The result of this working, when continued over a sufficient period, is to pump all the weeds and foulness out of the ground, close the lower air spaces in the soil and leave a well granulated mulch over the level surface of the field. It is a mistake, according to Doctor Sudduth's findings, to use a surface roller on dry farming land. A granular mulch is a much better moisture conserver than a fine dust mulch.

During its first season of growth no alfalfa field in the Broad View Ranch is ever disturbed by cultivation. Before the weeds that have outlived the ordeal of the seedbed preparation are ready to go to seed the young alfalfa is clipped and the cuttings allowed to remain as a mulch where they fall. All that should be expected of an alfalfa field the first season is to build up a strong root system.

"A good many farmers in the humid sections," says Doctor Sudduth, "can't understand why they cannot get a healthy stand and growth of alfalfa on land that has been cropped to corn for several seasons. There is one thing that alfalfa will not tolerate and that is acidity in the soil. One of the most interesting experiments I ever made was in demonstrating that corn roots throw off an acid. This was way back in 1886, after I had returned from several years of work in European laboratories. Somehow American corn looked good to me then; it interested me. I was then connected with the Medical-Chirurgical College in Philadelphia, and had quarters in a quaint old Quaker house in Arch street. That house had marble window sills, and one day it occurred to me to make a window garden of corn. The window box which I used had no bottom and the soil rested directly on the marble sill. I had been raised in the richest corn section of Illinois and had long held the theory that corn threw off an acid secretion in the process of its growth.

Continued next week

VACATION

Written by an Eighth Grade Pupil of School District 65.

Vacation days are here at last. And we will act our very best. For to-morrow school will close.

Oh, won't we have some jolly fun,

Because vacation has begun.

We'll go fishing in the brook, And then we'll find a little nook,

Where all nature we can hear.

Oh, won't we have some jolly fun

Because vacation has begun.

And when vacation days are o'er

We will roam the woods no more,

But our lessons we will study,

And we will have no jolly fun

After the school days have begun.

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