

Crook County Journal.

COUNTY OFFICIAL PAPER.

THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 1902.

FORAGE PLANT TESTS.

Result of Experiments Made by the O. R. & N. Co.

The O. R. & N. Co. has recently carried out some extensive and successful experiments in the matter of restoring grass to the lands of the country tributary to its lines which have been rendered barren by overuse for grazing purposes. An interesting account is given in the following letter from R. C. Judson, industrial agent at Portland, Oregon:

In the spring of 1898 the O. R. & N. Co., realizing the necessity of regrassing the ranges, found, upon investigation, that adjacent to the lines of this road there were 4,968,296 acres of grazing lands belonging to the government, which were almost denuded of their native grasses, and that the same would be destroyed unless something was done to regrass them. The chief problem for the management to determine was, how shall we restore or bring back the grasses on lands which have been denuded by overstocking? It was ascertained from the agricultural department at Washington that the carrying capacity of the ranges was 40 per cent less at the beginning of 1897 than it had been in 1880.

The money value lost by ill treatment of the ranges is hard to estimate. I would hazard the opinion, however, that it would reach \$20,000,000 in the state of Oregon alone. To make it more clear. If the natural pastures or ranges of Oregon were now covered with as luxuriant growths of grasses as they were 15 years ago, the additional number of livestock which would be carried thereon would be worth upwards of \$50,000,000. The regrassing of overstocked lands is in the interest of the individual stockowner, the commonwealth and the railroad company. The small losses sustained by each one becomes in the aggregate a sum which materially affects the welfare of the whole country. The range owners agree that the better grasses have been run out by overstocking during years of drouth, and at the present time very little grass remains; and it is a fact that on the semi-arid ranges as they are at present, it will take a large number of acres to keep one steer. The amount of money invested in the cattle and sheep industry of Oregon alone is reckoned by the millions of dollars, and the outcome of every dollar of that value is absolutely dependent on the subject of forage.

It was determined to take steps at once to bring about the desired end, and for that purpose to institute upon land belonging to the railroad at Walla Walla in the state of Washington, a series of experiments to determine what grasses and forage plants could be grown without irrigation. A plot was set aside and 136 varieties of grasses and forage plants were put in during the month of May, 1898, testing the same under different conditions. It was found that out of the number sown some seven varieties only would do well on the ranges. The next spring 2 1/2 acres of land at Telocasset, in Eastern Oregon, at an altitude of 3521 feet above sea level and having an average annual rainfall of 13.84 inches, was secured; the same was fenced, plowed and seeded to brome grass (*bromus intermus*), an English wheat grass. It proved a great success, and the estimated yield was 3 1/2 tons to the acre. The plot was opened in the

fall and fed down by range horses, and the result was that it made no diminution in the yield, thus demonstrating that it would grow and do as well as bunch grass, and yield four times the amount of forage. Another plot was put out at Blalocks, on sandy land, 71 feet above the Columbia river, with only 10.40 inches of average annual rainfall, and a mean temperature of 53.06. On this plot was put alfalfa, the seed being obtained in Utah. This plot was not irrigated. The alfalfa came up finely, and the yield was enormous, the first cut, which was saved for seed, yielding four tons per acre and standing four feet in height. Another small piece was put in on the high plateau back of Blalocks, some 150 feet above the river, where the soil was light and friable, and that also did finely; thus demonstrating to my mind that alfalfa could be raised on the semi-arid lands along the Columbia. A plot was put in on the railroad right of way near Baker City, and that also proved a success.

Since then the brome grass has been tested along the line of the railroad in Eastern Oregon from Huntington to Pendleton, average altitude over 3000 feet above the sea, and up Butter creek, 10 miles southerly from Pendleton, on alkali lands, the yield being fully as heavy as on the high lands. Alfalfa has been tested at five points on the semi-arid lands with perfect success, where properly fenced and put in at the right time of year.

The past season the company has fenced in a tract of 40 acres of semi-arid lands along the banks of the Columbia, 65 feet above the river, and distant from Portland 165 miles. There is being tested on this plot alfalfa, flax and four different kinds of rye. It will also be determined, at this station, the best time to sow alfalfa, as the plots were put in at different times, and I trust that the next season will determine that point.—Railway Age.

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