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THE HIGH SCHOOL AGRICULTURE NOTES

The matter of liming the soil is of interest to the fruit growers. Evidence has been had locally that lime application increases production to a very appreciable extent.

Lime is perhaps peculiar in its action, in that it tends to make a light sandy soil more compact, more retentive; while it opens up a heavy clay, allowing free movement of air and soil moisture thus causing a quicker drying out and an earlier warming up in the spring. Aside from the correcting of acidity, this physical action is of great importance.

Excessive or long-continued use of manures, cover-crops, and commercial fertilizers will make a soil sour or acid. This is but natural, as certain organic acids are continually being formed by the decaying organic matter. These acids are necessary to the breaking down of the more complex chemical compounds to the end that there may be greater availability of plant food in the form of simpler compounds or even elements.

The fact that few farm crops grow well in sour soils makes it imperative that lime be applied to most soils. This is especially true when any of the legumes, such as clover and alfalfa are grown.

The most favorable action for the production of large crops is noted when decaying vegetable or other matters are used in combination with lime. For clover and most of the legumes, lime seems to act as a direct plant food. In most cases it acts mainly as a liberator of plant foods. A sweetened soil is a good medium for the growth and increase of beneficial bacteria.

Quite often the first and most logical step in the building up of a worn-out soil is liberal lime application. Other improvement steps follow upon and supplement the beginning.

The plants growing on a soil will be the best indication of lime content or need. The weak growth or absence of lime-loving plants; or the plentiful and vigorous growth of such plants as horse sorrel, white daisy, and redtop, will indicate a need for lime.

A simple chemical test may be easily made. Get a small amount of blue litmus paper at any drug store. To a half cup of soil add water until a thick porridge is formed, then insert litmus paper without handling the end put into the soil. In an hour or two remove and rinse the lower end. If the end inserted is intensely reddened, acidity is indicated, and lime may undoubtedly be profitably applied.

The form of lime to apply is important. If much organic matter has been turned under and a rapid growing crop such as cabbage is to be taken off, then quicklime, or calcium oxide should be used preferably. If the soil is well supplied with humus and a more permanent crop like hay, grain, or corn is to be grown, then use ground limestone. Plant food should not be unlocked or liberated (made available) more rapidly than the growing crop can make use of it, or there will be waste.

One thousand pounds of quicklime to the acre every year or two is a good application. Or, one to two tons per acre of ground limestone may be applied every four or five years. The quicklime should be air-slaked before spreading, by leaving in a pile, and perhaps adding a little water to hurry the process.

Lime is best spread on top of the plowed field and harrowed in. It is not considered wise to spread and plow it under. In such case it tends to work downward through the soil rapidly, and there is often a certain top layer that does not get full benefit from the application.

Oliver F. Kilham,
Director Agriculture Department
Newberg High School.

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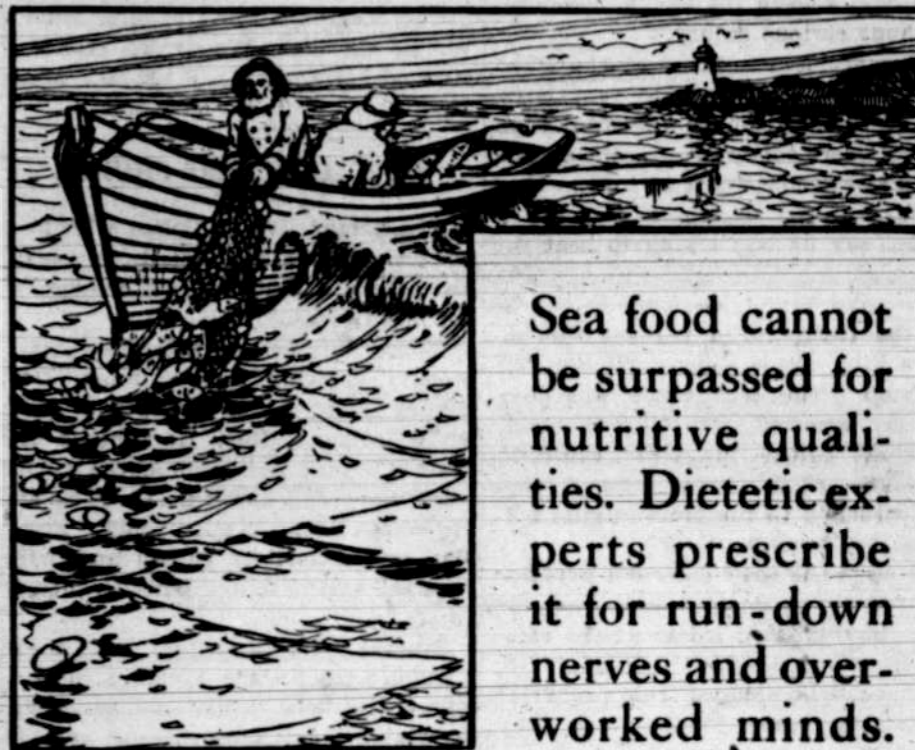
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