

Farming Strips Along Highways

BY E. H. BROWN.

NOT infrequently in driving along the country roads, one comes upon a strip that has been broken up and planted to a crop. A little further along, perhaps, one sees the road all grown up to ragweed, quack grass, sumach, or the like, and wonders why there are not more farmers who farm clear out to the road.

Why not, to be sure? Probably the principal reason is that there are too many shade trees, fences or other obstructions in the way. Local conditions must determine whether or not it will be wise to attempt the cropping of the strips along the roads and lanes. Our purpose, however, is to tell of cases in which such a venture has been tried and the results accomplished thereby.

Of all places for raising root crops, the last that would suggest itself to a sober minded person would probably be the lane down which the dairy herd is driven to pasture daily. Mr. L. C. Cornell, of Michigan, has such a lane. He plowed it up this year, and by running the back furrow in the center of the road, made it so that it shed water. The furrows looked so nice and straight that he could not resist the temptation to try some rutabagas, and so he sowed a quarter of a pound of the seed about July 10, and dragged it in.

On September 29 the writer drove down the lane and found that there were rutabagas growing, among some weeds to be sure, and promising a yield of 150 bushels. The lane is about 80 rods long, and there cannot be much more than one-fourth of an acre into the roots. Mr. Cornell thinks he can turn them off at 45 cents a bushel without much trouble.

Several years ago, Mr. J. Fred Smith, a Holstein breeder at Byron, Mich., had a roadside that was full of brush. There being no fence to hinder, he plowed clear out to the road, and put the field into sugar beets. That summer there were Belgians who looked after the weeding, that being part of the contract with the sugar factory. Perhaps it was rather hard on the Belgians, but Mr. Smith took a great deal of satisfaction in telling how he was smoothing down the roadside, and getting it in shape so that he could seed it down later and have it free from brush or weeds.

Mr. J. J. Seel is a fruit grower and since no stock is running loose, he needs no fencing on his farm. The roadside was all grown up to June grass. Two years ago the whole length of the road, which divides the farm in two, was broken up. To get rid of the sod, Mr. Seel forked it into wagons and hauled it off to certain parts of his sloping orchard, where gullies and washouts had formed. These sods, together with corn stalks and other refuse, made splendid material to soak up the rain and prevent further erosion in treacherous places.

After working the roadside down with the drag until the sods were not much in evidence, Mr. Seel planted Beauty of Hebron potatoes, and took good care as to spraying, using bordeaux and Paris green. The roadside potato patch was an object lesson to all the passers by. The foliage was so luxuriant, and the weeds so well subdued, that one would think the land had been cropped for all it was worth. At harvest time Mr. Seel dug 225 bushels of marketable potatoes along his roadside patch, comprising some one and a half acres. This year he repeated the performance.

Perhaps these examples are sufficient to show what may be done by anyone who crops the roadside. As a usual thing, he may expect a good yield of potatoes or corn, at least so far as the fertility of decaying sod will contribute to the welfare of these crops. There are several advantages to be gained, aside from the use of the land free from taxes or rental, when the roadside is used for cropping purposes.

The fact that the crop is being watched by all the passers-by is an advantage in that one feels spurred on to make as good a showing as possible for the public inspection. The long, narrow rows are much easier of cultivation than numerous short rows; less time is required in turning the horse at the ends. The nesting places of mice, gophers, grasshoppers, cutworms, June beetles, clover-root borers, and other farmer's

foes are destroyed. Frequently, too, the roadside harbors Hessian fly in the volunteer wheat, rust in the barley, woolly aphis in the elm sprouts, burdock, beggar ticks, and other stick-tight seeds that get into clothing and wool; these are gotten rid of by cropping the roadside.

The only objection to such work from a utility standpoint is that if the roadside is grown up to brush and hedgerows, the birds will be found to make their nests in such places. By all means the farmer should encourage the birds to nest around him, for they are his best friends in destroying insects. From the aesthetic standpoint, too, most of us agree that there is nothing prettier than a change of scenery along the road, and so a bit of thicket looks all the more attractive by contrast to a cropped strip parallel to the road.

When potatoes are grown along the highway, and poison used to control the bugs, it is required by law that a sign of warning, "Poison," be posted up for the benefit of those who might drive stock along the road.

If it is necessary for teams to pass and turn out onto the cropped land, the owner of the crop must be liable for all damages. We have been told of a case, however, in which an obstinate neighbor declared that no one had a right to plow and crop the highway, and to prove it, wilfully and without cause, drove over the cropped strip. The case being carried into court, a decision was reached in favor of the farmer who planted the crop, and the obstinate neighbor paid damages. As a rule, however, there will be no trouble whatever from traffic on the cropped land.

Frozen Beets as Feed.

Kellner, a German authority on feed and feed values, says that frozen sugar beets can be utilized to good advantage by cutting them up with a shovel and siloing them with the tops. The frozen beets turned down at the dumps can be taken back home and used to the best of advantage in this way.

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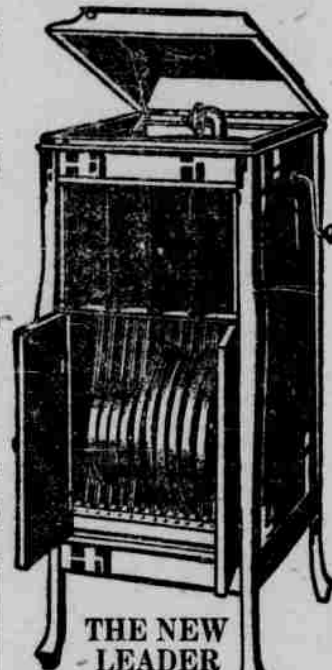
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