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Mixed Farming and Grain Growing

The subject I have chosen for today's discussion is "Mixed Farming versus Grain Growing," or, in other words, "Is mixed farming or grain growing the more profitable and desirable for the Manitoba farmer, and especially to the farmer in this district?" The object of this paper is not to teach anyone how to farm properly and scientifically—that is the purpose of the farm journals—but rather to bring forth a few points which will serve to create such a discussion as will help to reduce some of our difficulties and perhaps solve others.

Mixed farming is a very wide subject, one on which a large volume might be written and still be incomplete. Before going further, it will be well to ask ourselves, "What is mixed farming?" and the definition I would give myself is that it is a system of farming whereby a large proportion of the area of the farm is devoted to the maintenance of live stock of various kinds, and where the revenue derived from the sale of the products of such stock forms a very considerable part of the year's income. The balance of the farm, of course, is devoted to cereals.

In contra-distinction to this, grain growing is the system under which the farmer depends almost solely upon the sale of the cereals he raises for his income, and if he should happen to have an extra cow or steer or half a dozen hogs to sell, that is looked upon as a side line. I might almost say a by-product of little importance. Assuming this comparison to be correct, I am sure you will agree with me that in this Reston district there are a very few mixed farmers.

There is more than one reason for this state of affairs. In the early days most of us came here with little or no capital, and by the time we had secured land and purchased a few necessities it behooved us to secure a living by such methods as ensured the quickest returns. Consequently, once launched upon grain growing, we have not yet seen good and sufficient reason why we should mend our ways. Again, the markets for live stock are anything but inviting, and while they continue so unsatisfactory farmers will be slow to undertake anything so precarious.

There is no doubt in my mind that mixed farming is the ideal system, but in the limited time at our disposal today we can only touch on a few reasons why it is so, and the most important I believe to be the maintenance of fertility in our soils. In all older countries it is found to be absolutely necessary to use fertilizers of some description in order to produce any crop, and while we, in this newer west, have not yet been compelled to resort to this practice, we cannot expect long to escape the penalties of continually taking from the soil without adding to it. No soil on the face of the earth is inexhaustible, and scientists tell us that it is much easier to maintain fertility than to restore it. Already we are told that in the older parts of Manitoba the land shows signs of wearing out, for while good crops of straw can still be produced there, the elements which go to form the grain are lacking and consequently the yield is disappointing. It seems to me that this reason alone should be quite strong enough to induce us to keep more live stock if other conditions were favorable, as by so doing we would have enough manure for our purpose without being obliged to fall back on the expensive, and I might almost say, make-shift, way of using artificial manures.

Most men, I believe, have a natural liking for some particular kind of live stock. It may be horses, it may be cattle, it may be hogs or sheep, and even the insignificant hen is not unworthy of notice as a source of income, especially from the housewife's point of view. I think it would be the part of wisdom before entering into the live stock industry for the farmer to decide for himself the kind of livestock he would take most interest in and what his farm is best fitted for. Also he must consider the conditions

under which he will be placed as regards labor, markets, etc.

Every farmer must keep horses. Would it not be well, especially for those who have no breaking or hacketting to do, to keep as many brood mares as possible, and raise enough colts, not only to keep up their full complement of horse-flesh, but also to have some for sale every year after they reach three or four years of age.

Usually there is a slack time after seeding, when farmers could be well spared for a few weeks for the purpose of raising their off-spring. Or they might be bred to produce foals in the fall just before the cold weather sets in. Then, if suitable feed were provided, they would be making money for the farmer instead of eating their heads off in idleness during the winter. Some will tell us there is too much risk in breeding valuable mares, and that it is as cheap in the long run to buy their horses as to chance losing the mares and paying for dead foals. I admit there is a heavy risk, but would submit that this may be reduced by insurance, a precaution which is almost invariably practiced by British farmers. By the payment of a few dollars one can be protected to the extent of two-thirds or three-quarters of the value of the mare, and also a certain amount for the foal. As we all know, the present price of horses is very high, and the prospects for the future look decidedly bright for those who will have any to spare. However, attractive horse breeding may be, it is to the horned stock the average farmer must look for means to maintain his farm in good condition, and I venture to think that from 30 to 50 head of cattle of all ages could be kept by every farmer and considerable more by some. Further, I say, not only "can," but in the not far distant future "will" be kept.

Let us look at some of the advantages of this system. Some form of crop rotation must be practiced which will make substantial provision for growing feed. This will no doubt reduce the acreage devoted to wheat and to bare summer-fallow and increase the amount of coarse grains and hay and pasture.

It will also mean cleaner farms as fencing must be done to keep stock in their places and at the same time keep stray stock away and prevent trails being made through the fields thereby preventing the introduction of many weed seeds. The weeds already on the farm can be kept under better control by growing more coarse grains and artificial grasses.

As there would be less wheat to handle, fewer extra men would be required for harvest and that problem, instead of increasing, with every succeeding year would become less acute than at present.

Farmers within reasonable distance of a station might find it profitable to keep, say, ten or more dairy cows, either for home butter making or for the purpose of shipping cream and also as an adjunct to this branch a few brood sows from which two litters yearly should be raised and fattened.

Other farmers living more remote from market might prefer to give their attention to raising beef or perhaps stockers which should find ready sale among those who can stall-feed during the winter. The mixed farmer, by proper planning, should have something to turn into cash every month in the year.

Of course, mixed farming has its drawbacks, too. There is something to occupy the time all day and every day from January 1st to December 31st, especially where dairying is followed, and suitable help is not always available. Most hired men have a strong antipathy to milking cows, feeding pigs and the hundred and one other little things that require to be done, but such matters can usually be adjusted in one way or another.

Dairying, too, almost invariably adds to the work of the already overburdened wife, so that where domestic help is not within reach I think no man would be justified in expecting his better half to

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