

# The Commercial

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## CROP PROSPECTS.

In view of the fact that the spring season in this part of Canada has been unusually backward this year, some anxiety is experienced in some quarters regarding the crop outlook. The seed has been sown latter than usual, and this leads to an occasional expression of the fear that the wheat crop may not ripen before frost comes in the fall. It will, therefore, be interesting to look up past experiences regarding the time of sowing grain crops. At the Manitoba experimental farm last year tests were made with the object of showing the best time to sow wheat. The first plots in the test were sown on April 23, one week later other plots of grain were seeded and so on once a week plots of grain were sown each week up to July 4. The wheat sown on April 23, ripened on August 26, that sown on May 7 ripened on August 28, and the sowing on May 14 ripened on August 29. Thus wheat sown three weeks later than the first sowing, ripened only three days later, having gained eighteen days in maturing, as compared with the first sowing. The first sowing ripened in 125 days, while that sown on May 14 ripened in 107 days. The wheat sown on May 21, however, was 110 days in ripening, thus showing a loss of three days. Sowings were also made on May 21 and June 4, the former ripening in 108 days and the latter in 103 days. These experiments would appear to indicate that very early sowing does not mean an early harvest, and that wheat sown the first half of May will ripen almost as early as that sown in April. It may be noted that the plots sown on May 7 and May 14 gave considerably larger yields than either the April or late May and June sowings. Red fife wheat was used.

With similar tests of Banner oats, the first sowing ripened in 121 days, the second (two weeks later) in 111 days, the third in 105 days, the fourth in 100 days, the fifth in 96 days and the sixth in 95 days. These sowings were one week apart, except as noted.

Similar experiments were made at the experimental farm at Indian Head, with more marked results. The sowings began earlier in this case, the first plots of wheat having been sown on April 15, and thereafter each week up to May 20, excepting the last week in April, which had to be missed on account of unfavorable weather. Two varieties of wheat were sown on each date, five sowings of each kind in all, one week having been missed. What is remarkable about the experiment is, that the first three plots and the last plot sown, with red fife wheat, all ripened on the same date. Thus the wheat sown on May 20 ripened as soon as that sown on April 15, April 22 and May 6. That sown on May 13 was two days ahead of the other plots. The sowings of May 6 and 13 gave decidedly the best yields. The other variety of wheat used in this experiment was Campbell's white chaff, and it was sown on the same days as the red fife. The result with this wheat was still more remarkable, the order

in which the different plots ripened being the reversal of the order of sowing. Thus the last sowing, on May 20, ripened four days ahead of the first two sowings; the second last sowing, on May 13, ripened three days sooner than the first two sowings, and that sown on May 6 was ripe one day sooner than the first two sowings, the latter being sown on April 15 and April 22 respectively. The first sowing of red fife was 145 days in maturing, and the last sowing was only 110 days in maturing, the latter gaining 35 days and making up for the full time between the date of sowing the first plot. Experiments with barley and oats at the Indian Head farm also indicated, that so far as last year was concerned, there is nothing to be gained by early sowing in the date of maturing, while the earliest sowings gave poor yields. It may be noted that experiments carried on the previous year at this farm gave similar results.

These experiments and their results should relieve the anxiety felt as to the late date of sowing the general crop this year. The great bulk of the wheat crop this year has been sown within the dates which gave the best results, in the experimental farm tests, these experiments indicating that the best yield is obtained from wheat sown during the first two weeks of May, while the date of ripening is not likely to be materially later than if the grain had been sown early in April. The theory is that early sown grain is liable to be thinned by late frosts, which reduce the yield and so weaken the plant that it is longer in maturing.

## BUTTER.

The butter season is now opening again, and a word to the trade upon this matter may not be out of place. Country merchants in Manitoba have not made much money out of their butter trade as a general rule, though there are perhaps a few exceptional instances where merchants have made it pay them fairly well. One reason for the unprofitableness of the butter trade is that the price paid is too high. Some dealers make the price of butter a leader, in order to draw trade. They pay a higher price than the market will legitimately warrant, in order to draw the farmers' wives and daughters to their stores. Butter is often taken in trade for store goods, and some merchants think that they can afford to pay higher in goods than they could if buying for cash. It is not wise to throw away the profit on goods by taking butter for more than it is worth. Another trouble about handling butter is the lack of facilities for storing it. Few country merchants have proper accommodation for handling butter. It is a delicate commodity, which readily loses its flavor or becomes tainted by storing under unfavorable conditions. The best plan, we believe, is for country dealers to ship frequently, and not store or hold large quantities. Even those who have good facilities for storing will perhaps come out better in the end by following the plan of shipping their butter frequently.

Another great drawback to the butter trade is the fact that little or no discrimination is made in taking butter. Butter is butter, and

everything goes. This is the rule in most country towns. Of course, when the merchant comes to sell, it is a different story, as he can only sell according to quality, and must lose on his low grade stuff. This is perhaps the most unsatisfactory feature of the butter trade. In grain and other products, the buyers discriminate as to quality, and pay the farmer what the grain is worth according to grade. But in butter there is no grade to the country merchant. He must take everything that comes. The rule has been established, and if an individual storkeeper were to break away from it and discriminate as to quality, he would lose a great many of his customers. Under this system the price of butter must be fixed high, or those who make good butter do not get a fair price. As a rule the price paid is too high for the average quality, and the merchant loses accordingly.

An attempt has been made at a few points in Manitoba to grade butter, and it has worked well. An inspector is appointed, who grades the butter, the local dealers having first agreed among themselves to take butter only upon inspection. This is of course a purely local arrangement, and there is nothing official at all about the system. The difficulty to be encountered under this plan would no doubt be to secure a competent local man to act as inspector. It would not do to have an inspector who was himself a buyer of butter. At the town of Birtle, where this plan has been tried, three grades of butter are made. The price for No. 1 grade having been arrived at by agreement among the merchants, the price of No. 2 is made 2 cents lower than No. 1, and No. 3 quality is 5 cents lower than No. 1.

It is said that where this local plan of inspection has been in operation, the average quality of the butter marketed has greatly increased. The makers exercise care so as to secure the highest grade, and consequently the highest price. Those who are too slovenly to make good butter, give up making it at all. The grading system is therefore a great benefit, and it would be a decided advantage to the country if it could be generally adopted. So long as one price is paid for all qualities, many makers will be careless as to the class of butter they turn out, while those who strive to make a choice article, do not get justice. Under the grading system the average quality is vastly improved, and the quantity of inferior stuff is decidedly diminished. This is exactly what is wanted in the butter trade. Poor butter is poor property, while the choice article never has to go begging for a market.

## DRAINAGE NEEDED.

It is understood the provincial government of Manitoba intends entering upon a comprehensive system of drainage, and the present season will be a favorable one to do preliminary work. The very heavy snowfall last winter left an unusual amount of water on the prairies this spring. This has not only indicated the need of drainage, but it has shown where drainage is most needed. In some sections the country was almost like a lake after the melting of the snow, with water standing everywhere. Farm work was delayed for many days in some sec-