WHAT THE SOW THISTLE IS LIKE

THERE are still thousands of farmers in Manitoba who cannot identify the Perennial Sow Thistle on sight. Especially is this true in the areas where it is not generally distributed, and as prevention is better than cure and recognition of the plant when it first appears on a farm is the secret of easy combat, the Manitoba Department of Agriculture sends out this intimate word description, by which any farmer may identify this exceedingly dangerous weed. There is no other plant growing in Manitoba that will answer this description in all its details, and we suggest that every farmer who does not know the weed should paste this description on his granary door or somewhere else where he can refer to it.

Roots.—This plant produces a system of brown root-stalks, running horizontally through the soil from two to six inches below the surface. A few fibrous roots grow from these root-stalks, but their main function is to act as storehouses of plant food, and to aid in propagation. On these root-stalks buds are produced, and from these upright shoots of a whiter color are sent to form new plants. From the upright root a great mass of fibrous roots are thrown out, and it is largely through these that the plant feeds. When undisturbed the roots will form a very dense mass, and the plants will come up very thickly. The roots and all other parts of the plant are filled with a milky sap.

Leaves.—At its first appearance above ground the plant produces a rosette of leaves quite similar in general appearance to that of the dandelion, the leaves being much the same shape. The leaves are of a light green color, rather soft, have a heavy mid-rib and are very distinctly veined. In the rosette stage the greatest width of the leaf is about one-quarter way back from the tip. An unvarying characteristic that helps greatly in identification is that in all stages the leaves have a continuous fringe of spines or "prickles." These spines are about one-sixteenth inch long, and are set one-eighth to one-sixteenth inch apart. They are very regular as to size. After two or three weeks in the rosette stage, the plant produces an upright stalk, and the leaves borne higher up from its sides are somewhat differently shaped and larger. On a strong plant these stem leaves are from six to twelve inches long close to the ground, but quite small toward the top of the plant. Each leaf clasps the stem tightly, having no leaf-stem, or petiole, as in the case, say, a poplar leaf. These stem leaves lose the regularity of outline, and are usually deeply cut with divisions directed backwards. They still preserve the fringe of spines.

Stems and Branches. — The stems are of a lighter green than the leaves, usually devoid of noticeable hairs or spines, of rather soft character and hollow. The plants grow from one to five feet tall. Side branches are shot out from the angles at the base of the leaves, and the plant becomes considerably branched, especially if given plenty of room.

Buds and Flowers. — When about one-third developed the flower bud is much the shape of a binder twine ball. Then it lengthens. The flower is very similar in appearance to the dandelion, but rather larger and a faint shade darker. They are so much alike, however, as to be undistinguishable, except to an expert. They open in the morning and close at night. The outside row of petals have very fine serrations at the tip. The bloom first appears about July 4th, and the buds continue to open for several weeks. In most cases after the first flower has bloomed there is a series of flowers on surrounding stems, and these latter grow longer than the earliest flower stems.

Seeds.—The seeds are about one-sixteenth inch long, dark reddish brown, oblong and ridged lengthwise.