

Miracle Wheat Again in Saskatchewan

By Professor G. H. Cutler, University of Saskatchewan

ALASKA, or Miracle, wheat, which the late Pastor Russell sold for \$1.00 a pound or \$60 a bushel to his devoted followers, is again coming into prominence in Saskatchewan as a means of separating farmers from their surplus cash. Professor G. H. Cutler has kindly given *The Saturday Press and Prairie Farm* the following article on the subject:

During the past two years considerable interest has been aroused in Alaska wheat in Saskatchewan. It has received some publicity as a result of which some enquiries are reaching us concerning the advisability of growing this wheat in place of Marquis or Red Fife. It seems advisable therefore to present in pamphlet form such information as we have been able to gather concerning this wheat in order that those interested may have access to the facts regarding its relative value.

During the past four seasons Alaska wheat has been subjected to careful competitive tests with Marquis and other varieties of wheat in our investigation field. Much of the information included here has been gleaned from this test, but bulletins of the United States Department of Agriculture have also been drawn upon where our own data was incomplete.

Description

Alaska wheat belongs to the Poulard sub-species of wheat. It is therefore neither a typical flour wheat nor a durum wheat. The head of Alaska is branched or "seven-headed" as it is often termed. The head being branched presents a very fine appearance, and interested salesmen never neglect to exhibit the heads when attempting a sale of the seed. The head is somewhat flattened and bearded, although the beards detach very easily when the crop becomes mature. The straw is long, strong, large and somewhat resistant to rust. While it has been claimed that this wheat tillers very extensively, tests show that in this respect it does not even equal our commonly grown varieties.

False Claims Made

Among many other claims made for Alaska wheat, high yield is perhaps the foremost, but high quality is also often emphasized. Claims of phenomenal yields have come to us from Idaho. Bulletin No. 357 of the department of agriculture, Washington, quotes from a circular used in advertising this wheat, the following interesting—but erroneous—information: "Alaska wheat is a result of a bright idea on the part of Abraham Adams, an Idaho farmer, who realized the possibilities of a 'double' wheat crop if it could be perfected. After working several years he perfected a head of wheat with one single central head around which were nine other short heads. If this head would repeat in the planting, it meant a crop six or ten times greater than ordinary wheat. The double head was planted in 1904 and the next summer seven pounds resulted, and every head was double."

"The seven pounds planted in the spring of 1906 brought forth 1545 pounds or 222½ times the plant made, or at 1 bushel plant to the acre, 222½ bushels to the acre."

The reader will readily appreciate the weaknesses of the above statement, and yet several of the implications contained therein have been used on several occasions in Saskatchewan for purposes of selling the seed of this wheat at exorbitant prices. The use of the words "double" and "perfected" is very misleading. Again, the statement that "a wheat with one single central head around which were nine other short heads, and if this head would repeat in the planting it meant a crop six to ten times greater than ordinary wheat." The inference intended of course was that the reader should conclude that a wheat possessing such a composite form of from six to nine heads, must logically yield from six to nine times greater than a wheat with one head. The truth is that Alaska under most favored conditions never possesses more than from three to six heads, and under normal conditions, when the stand of the crop is uniform, one to three and four heads, consisting of one long and the remainder short ones. Offsetting the possibility of the big yields referred to, many of the flowers in each head are

found to be infertile or barren, and thus do not produce seed. The method employed above in arriving at the yielding power of this wheat is so obviously unfair that it hardly justifies comment. Alaska wheat has averaged in a four years' test here only 26.91 bushels or approximately 5 bushels per acre less than Marquis. What is still more surprising is the fact that during the past season even when Marquis rusted, it exceeded the yield of Alaska.

Table 1—Comparative Yields of Alaska and Marquis, University of Saskatchewan:

Name	Weight per measured bus., lbs.	Yield per Acre, Bus.
Alaska	62	26.91 (aver. 4 yrs.)
Marquis	64	31.83 (aver. 6 yrs.)

Quality of Alaska

Alaska produced only a fair yield of flour. The color of this flour, yellow-white, is not popular, as it bakes into a loaf of the same color. The gluten content, while quite high, is of very inferior quality, as revealed by the volume of loaf. It will therefore be seen that Marquis easily excels in all essential points, and when valued as a flour suitable for blending purposes, has been awarded a monetary recognition of 25 cents per bushel over Alaska.

Table 2.—Milling and Baking Test of Alaska and Marquis:

Name	Yield of flour per cent.	Color of Flour	Wet crude gluten
Marquis	75.2	Creamy-white	42 p.c.
Alaska	72.7	Yellow-white	41.6 p.c.

The relative value per bushel was as follows: Marquis, \$1.07; Alaska, .81.

The statement that Alaska is capable of grading No. 1 Hard or No. 1 Northern is from our experience absolutely unwarranted.

The Opinion of the Miller and Baker

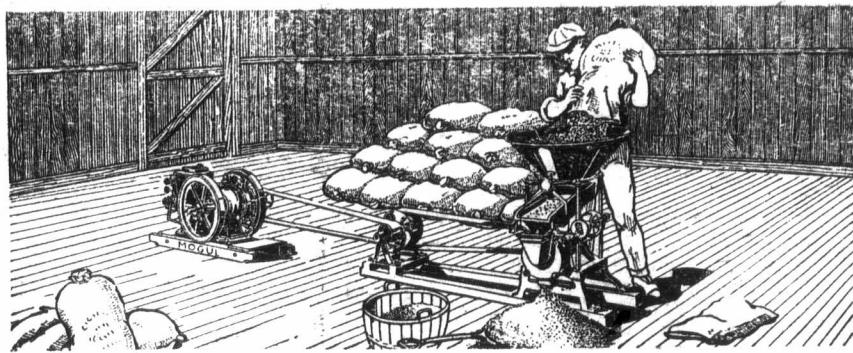
The milling qualities of Alaska wheat have been discussed in the following terms by different milling concerns: "It appears to lack all the characteristics that go to make ordinary wheat flour," "the middlings before being ground into flour were similar to corn meal," "because of its very coarse granular texture and sticky nature it is very difficult to mill by the usual process." The baker states that "flour from corn or barley would show up equally well in making bread," "it is almost impossible to handle the dough as it will not hold together like a typical flour wheat dough," "the loaf is heavy, yellow in color, coarse in texture and will scarcely rise in the oven, even after rising it has been known to fall."

Conclusions

The facts about this branch-headed wheat known variously as Alaska, Egyptian King, Mummy, Thousand Fold, Many Headed, Miracle, Eldorado, Jerusalem, Three Thousand Years Old, Wonder, and by many other names, are (1) It has been used in many parts of the United States and Canada very often as a means of leading people to purchase the seed at an exorbitant price; (2) under careful test it has failed to produce even fair yields, and has been known to produce extraordinary yields; (3) The branched head is not an evidence of superior yielding power; (4) As a wheat suitable for milling into a flour for bread-making it is the lowest in quality we have ever grown; (5) as a feed, because of its comparatively low yield it cannot compare with oats or barley.

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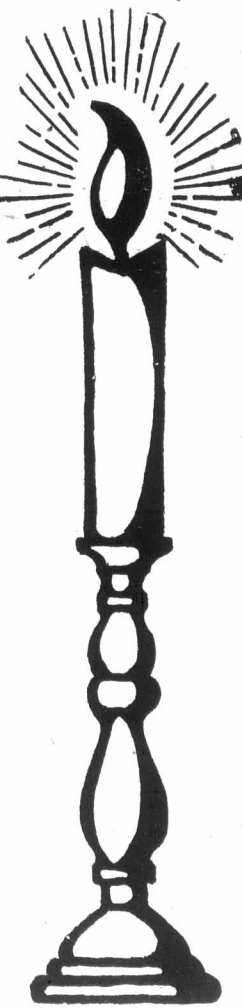
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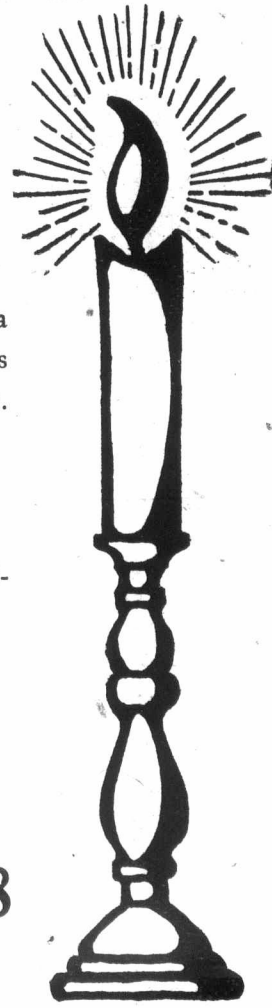
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