

Dry Farming in Western Canada

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in China and Mesopotamia was possible, or where natural irrigation, as in the Valley of the Nile, furnished water for the thirsty crops. Whatever dry farming practices may have been used in early days were largely if not wholly lost to Americans most of whom are of European descent, and Europe has a humid climate.

Before the present dry farming movement began the Chinese on the dry lands of Western China and the American Indians in the arid States and in parts of Mexico are known to have been growing crops under arid and semi-arid conditions. It is also believed that olives and other crops were produced in Northern Africa without irrigation.

But the modern movement was in no wise an outgrowth of ancient custom, at least in America. Here the system developed in four different parts of the continent: in the state of Utah, the southern part of the intermountain region; in Western Kansas and Nebraska, the central part of the great plains; in Western Canada, the Northern great plains; and in California and Oregon. In each of these areas a system of crop growing developed, apparently without knowledge of the methods followed in any of the others, until the modern movement was initiated within the last 30 years.

To the Mormons of Utah belongs the distinction of being the first civilized people to initiate dry farm practices in America. From their arrival in the Salt Lake valley in 1847, irrigated land was used for crop growing, but in the sixties it was observed that cultivated land above the ditch was capable of producing fair crops without irrigation. In the early eighties dry farming was an established practice in many of the unirrigated portions of the state.

In California dry land cultivation commenced in the late sixties. In Nebraska and Kansas the eighties witnessed the unsuccessful colonization of much of the dry lands of those states, but in the late eighties more satisfactory practices came into vogue. The tide of emigration commenced to return to the abandoned homesteads of the earlier era only to be turned eastward again by the unfavorable seasons in the middle nineties. It was in the earlier eighties that H. W. Campbell of "Dry Farm" fame, was getting his early experiences in the dry part of South Dakota. His ideas were developed here and later in Nebraska, and were organized and published at various times during the late nineties.

Dry Farming in the West

In Western Canada the settlement that followed the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the eighties slowly spread itself westward from the Red River valley. The first settlements developed in these areas along the North Dakota boundary, along the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway west to Qu'Appelle and Moose Jaw and to the northeast in the Yorkton and Prince Albert districts. It was in the Qu'Appelle valley that the first organized effort to introduce the summerfallow into general farm practice originated. At the time of the last Reil rebellion in 1885 most of the settlers sent their horses and oxen with the military transport, their allowance being so much more than they hoped to get from the cultivated land. A few remained behind, and after putting in what crop they could commenced to plow the land that was still unsown. The following year 1886 it was observed that the land which had borne no crop the previous season, but which had lain fallow, produced a very much better crop than the other. This marked the beginning of the summer fallow in the Central Canadian West. The methods of fallowing were later studied and improved upon by Mr. Angus McKay, who, from 1885 to 1917 was superintendent of the experimental farm at Indian Head.

In recent years the United States department of agriculture, the different state experiment stations, the experimental farms on the Canadian prairies and the dry farming congress have each

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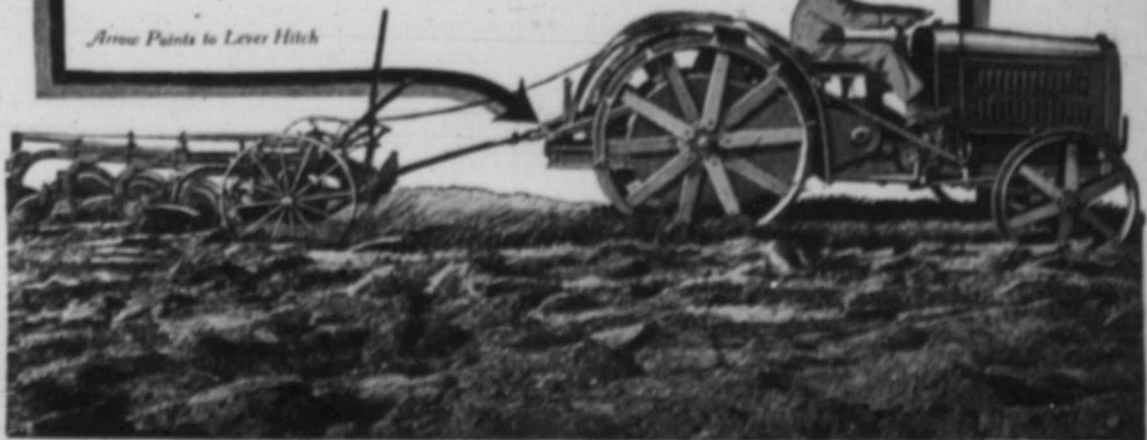
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