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PLEASE MENTION THE GUIDE

## Growing Flax for Fibre

By Louis Hartvigsen

The writer states that Canadian Farmers Annually Destroy One Million Acres of Flax Straw which might be Sold for Two Hundred Dollars per ton.  
How to Prepare Flax Fibre for Market

The cultivation of flax in Western Canada hitherto has been characterized by a very wasteful practice which only needs to be stopped in order to bring greatly increased profits to farmers who grow this crop. I refer to the burning of the flax straw. The fibre contained in the flax straw, when properly ret'ed, has a value of upwards of \$200 per ton. This money can be obtained by flax growers in Western Canada if they take the trouble to prepare the flax fibre for market. The growing of flax for fibre as well as for seed is a big industry in Europe, but owing to the great war, the European supply will fall far short of the demand. Here is the golden opportunity for the farmers of Western Canada to grasp this trade. Let me state a few facts.

This year there will be no flax exported from Belgium, France or Germany. The supply from Holland will be small, as they need the bulk of it for home use. Russia will contribute only 35 per cent. of her usual supply, or even less, because the amount of linen required in Russia at the present time is enormous. In a normal season the export of flax, tow and cordage from Russia to Great Britain and Ireland is 81,000 tons. The British consumption of flax is normally about 150,000 tons per year. One can readily see that there will be a great shortage

In this process the flax is steeped in tanks in which water, heated to the temperature of the River Lys, is kept in circulation.

It is estimated that Canadian farmers burn one million acres of flax straw every year. What would this mean if turned into fibre and sold for \$200 per ton? An expensive smoke, is it not?

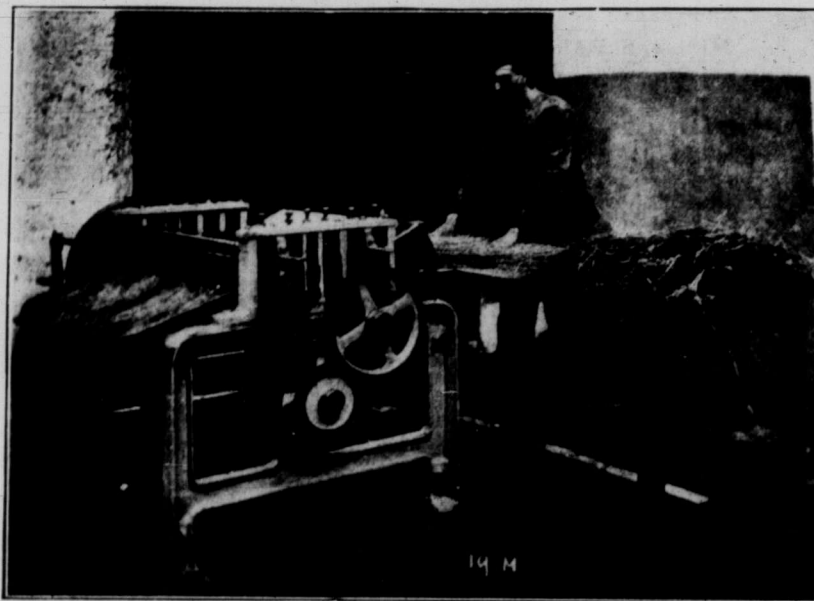
### Pulling and Ret'ing

In harvesting flax for the fibre as well as for the seed, the flax is pulled either by hand or with the flax puller. There are two well known flax pullers on the market. It is claimed for one of these machines that it will pull, brush the earth from the root and at the same time bind the straw into sheaves. The seed pods must be threshed out or combed off. The fibre must have the natural length, because the longer the flax straw and the fibre, the greater the worth. Threshed flax straw is worthless.

After the seed has been removed the flax straw has to be ret'ed. This may be done in four different ways:—

1.—Dew Ret'ed: The flax straw is spread on the prairie and allowed to lie there to ret and bleach until the fibre can be easily removed from the straw.

2.—Snow Ret'ed: The flax straw is spread on the prairie in the fall and left there under the snow until the fibre can



The flax straw breaker at work

and consequent high prices paid this year, and probably during the next few years.

### Canada's Opportunity

There is no reason why Canada should not produce flax fibre just as well as Russia. The possibilities are here. The climate of Western Canada compares with that of the three Russian provinces, Pskof, Ostrof and Witebsk. The soil here is very much richer than in these Russian provinces, which nevertheless yield a good quality of flax and seed. I have recently seen some flax in the possession of L. T. Macdonald, of the Board of Trade, Regina. The sample was dewret'ed. I compared it with the high Livonian quality and concluded that the climate here is too dry for dewret'ing. At the same time the flax I saw has a use and I estimate that it would fetch \$178 per ton. Now if the same flax had been ret'ed in water holes, as is done in most of the Russian districts, the flax would be worth an additional \$40 per ton, or \$218 at Regina and \$234 at Montreal. My own experience in the trade, which is also the experience of experts I know, is that the flax ret'ed in water holes is of a much better quality and has "more life," as we say.

Belgian flax is ret'ed in the River Lys. This is the best quality of flax in the world. The water in the river is fairly warm and has a peculiar softness. Another method used in Belgium is the so-called "Feuillette" system, which is an attempt to reproduce the Courtrai method of ret'ing.

be easily removed from the straw. This may occur at the end of February or the beginning of March. These two methods of ret'ing are not always certain to give good results.

3.—The "Feuillette" Method: This method of working flax consists in establishing central depots to which the flax straw is brought to be worked. The flax is steeped in tanks with circulating water which is heated to the temperature of the Lys.

4.—Ret'ing in Waterholes: This is the oldest and a safe method of ret'ing; it is done when harvest time is over; it is a little more expensive in labor, but is sure. To soften and to make the temperature of the water warmer, place manure from cattle in the bottom (swampy bottoms are to be avoided); the warmer and softer the water, the quicker the ret'ing process and the better the quality. The flax straw has to lie in a temperature of the water of about 45° about six days, 40° about eight days, 35° about ten days, 30° Fahrenheit about thirteen to fourteen days. When a handful is taken and beaten on the surface of the water and the straw falls off, it is ready to be spread on the stubblefield to dry and bleach.

### Breaking the Straw

Most farmers of Western Canada seem to be of the opinion that they cannot profitably raise flax for flax fibre unless they have sufficient waterholes on their land to ret the whole acreage of flax raised. This is an erroneous opinion; on the

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