

Government of the Province of Saskatchewan
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FIELD HUSBANDRY CIRCULAR NO. 6

THE SUMMERFALLOW

BY JOHN BRACKEN,

Professor of Field Husbandry, University of Saskatchewan.

Little more than a generation ago a large portion of the prairie land of Canada and the United States was spoken of as the "Great American Desert." The rainfall of this "Plains Region" was so small that the geographers considered it unsuitable for agricultural pursuits other than ranching. Yet today we are growing crops on this "desert" land.

Within the memory of men now living has grown up the science of "Dry Farming"—the science of making the best possible use of the moisture that falls in dry areas. In some parts of the world 12 feet of water reaches the earth in the form of rain yearly. In Central and Southwestern Saskatchewan we get from 13 to 18 inches per year on the average.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FALLOW.

Yet water in large quantities is absolutely essential to growing crops. The best "dry farmer" in the world cannot grow crops without rain. But he can grow crops in a limited rainfall if he understands and puts into practice the methods now understood of (1) storing the rainfall in the soil and (2) conserving it there for the use of crops. This is the first principle of "Dry Farming." In Saskatchewan we call it "Summerfallowing."

OUR RAINFALL INSUFFICIENT FOR A GOOD CROP EVERY YEAR.

Experiments and Experience—two good teachers—have shown that our low rainfall is not sufficient, at least under our present farming system, to grow good crops every year. So we do the next best thing and proceed to store as much as possible of one year's rainfall in the soil and keep it there for the next year's crop, thus in some years insuring that crop against failure from drought.

In farming practice it is not possible to store and retain in the soil all of the rain that falls in any year, but it is possible to store a large portion of it. In a foot of normal soil 2 to 3 or more inches of water can be stored and retained. At the end of the summer season the soil after a good fallow is moist to a depth of several feet, while adjoining cropped or prairie land is practically dry. (At the University in the dry year of 1914, fallowed land yielded 30¼ bushels of wheat; well cultivated fall plowing, 16 bushels 53 pounds, while spring breaking failed to produce a crop.)