

Government of the Province of Saskatchewan

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FIELD HUSBANDRY CIRCULAR NO. 20

SWEET CLOVER

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The so-called Sweet Clover (*Melilotus Alba*) is a tall growing, biennial plant, having coarse branching stems which bear white blossoms, and except when young, carry relatively few leaves. It is a "legume," but not a real clover. Nevertheless it has the power in common with clover, alfalfa, and other legumes, when inoculated with suitable bacteria, to gather nitrogen from the air.

During recent months, extravagant claims, and, from different sources, quite disparaging statements have been made concerning the value of Sweet Clover for forage purposes. The contrary views expressed have created in the public mind a state of confusion regarding its real worth as a cultivated crop. Under these circumstances we have been asked to summarize the results of our experience with this crop under Western Prairie conditions.

We have grown Sweet Clover here three different seasons. In 1912, broad-casted Sweet Clover, sown in June of the previous year was partly killed out, but the remaining plants grew as high as a man. In 1913 we had no Sweet Clover, but in 1914 when sown in rows 40 inches apart, at the rate of 4 pounds per acre, it yielded nearly thirteen tons, green weight, per acre, or considerably more than corn sown in rows the same distance apart. This year (1915) it produced about the same yield, which was also heavier than the average yield of corn, and much heavier than the yield of any of the hay crops we had under observation.

UNDESIRABLE QUALITIES

Sweet Clover has several very undesirable qualities. It is bitter, coarse, hard to cure, apt to become an impurity in alfalfa seed, and in waste places may become a weed.

It has been our experience that cattle, hogs and sheep will pasture it quite satisfactorily when it is young, but they do not like it when mature, nor can it be made into hay that is palatable after the blossoming stage. Most animals dislike the plant even in the young green condition at first, but they generally get to like it if kept from other feed for a short time. This experience is borne out by many practical farmers.

On account of its coarseness we have not been able to use Sweet Clover hay cut after the blossoming stage. It would seem that the crop must be either pastured while young, or cut for hay before blossoms develop. Its value for hay, even when cut early, has not yet been demonstrated in this country, but in portions of the Central Western States it is regularly used for hay.

