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Dominion Illustration Stations

Good Results being obtained on Demonstrating Improved Farming Methods

THE old adage "seeing is believing," carries more weight today than it did when the phrase was coined. Much may be said of the value of good seed, a suitable crop rotation, proper cultural methods, and the many other practices that are related with increased crop yields, or publications may be written by the volume on such subjects, but in the end they frequently fail to get action. On the other hand, when such methods are actually worked out and proven to be of value under local conditions of climate, soil and other factors that influence crop production and the results are manifest, then it requires no talking or writing to drive these facts home.

With this idea in mind the Dominion Department of Agriculture, through the system of Experimental Farms, established what is called the Division of Illustration Stations. Starting in Western Canada four years ago, there are now 31 of these stations located in different parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta in addition to several in the province of Quebec. John Fixter, who has supervision of the work, was a visitor at The Guide office a short time ago, and I took advantage of his visit to obtain some information relating to this work.

The department undertakes to carry on special cultural methods and to grow crops in rotation on privately-owned farms. The seed which is the best that can be procured, is supplied free, and information and advice as to the best methods of planting, cultivating and growing these crops is given. "Our aim," said Mr. Fixter, "is to get better seed into the district and to introduce grasses that are suitable."

In selecting the farms to be used for demonstration purposes, the idea is to choose some farmer whose land is located along a public road, reasonably close to a town, a man absolutely reliable and who takes a keen interest in better farming methods. It is only by keeping these factors in mind that the desirable results can be obtained. From 40 to 60 acres is the area arranged for. The owner agrees to release the land for a three-year term, to be worked under the direction of a supervisor. Five dollars an acre rent is allowed. The seed is supplied free and the product of the land to remain the property of the owner on the understanding that all surplus grain must be sold for seed at a reasonable price to farmers in the district.

Different systems of crop rotation are now established in Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, a three and four-year rotation is followed. The three-year rotation adopted is one year summerfallow followed by two years of wheat, and another very similar—first year summerfallow and second and third oats. The four-year rotation outlined is first year summerfallow, second year wheat, seeded to western rye grass and left two years in hay. A word of explanation regarding the rotations mentioned. The three-year rotation is carried on to demonstrate whether or not it is profitable to grow two crops of either wheat or oats in succession after summerfallow. Another point kept in mind is to provide a sufficient supply of clean seed for distribution, and by growing two crops of either wheat or oats after summerfallow, there is not the same probability of getting the grains mixed, and in addition a liberal amount of seed is obtained. The four-year rotation has the advantage of introducing a forage crop which is an advantage when mixed farming is practised. In discussing a crop rotation for the drier sections in the southern part of the provinces, Mr. Fixter said if he were farming he would follow a two-year rotation, i.e., summerfallow every second year and a grain crop between.

In northern Saskatchewan and Alberta a five-year rotation is followed—first year summerfallow, second year wheat, third year oats, seeded to western rye grass and cut for hay the fourth and fifth year. The two years of western rye grass makes this rotation well adapted for those districts where considerable feed is required.

Good Results Already Secured

Mr. Fixter is enthusiastic in regard to the value of these stations, more particularly as it effected the results obtained from the use of good seed. "During my recent visit," he said, "I ran across numerous cases where the seed obtained from our seed plots was giving excellent results. At Foremost the crop this year was very light. On some farms there was scarcely enough to feed a chicken, and yet one man there that had secured seed through us will thrash 2,000 bushels wheat." At Milk River and Maple Creek the same was true. In another case one farmer who had obtained seed from the department two years ago had 2,000 bushels this year.

Alfalfa and Corn

Considerable work has also been done in the growing of alfalfa and corn. When the owner of the farm on which these stations are located shows a special interest in the work, an effort is made to meet the interest by providing seed for growing corn and alfalfa. Mr. Fixter is convinced that both these crops can be grown successfully in Alberta and Saskatchewan. For fodder corn the variety recommended is North Western Dent, and for grain both the Squaw and Quebec Yellow have proven good. Mr. Fixter had this to say regarding corn:—

"I am of the opinion that a corn crop properly cultivated could be substituted in part at least for summerfallow. Our experiments so far would go to show that wheat after a corn crop will yield about two bushels per acre less than after summerfallow, and this slight decrease in yield is very much more than made up for by the return from the corn crop." Wheat following corn has given an increase of ten bushels per acre as compared with wheat sown on stubble land, he figures.

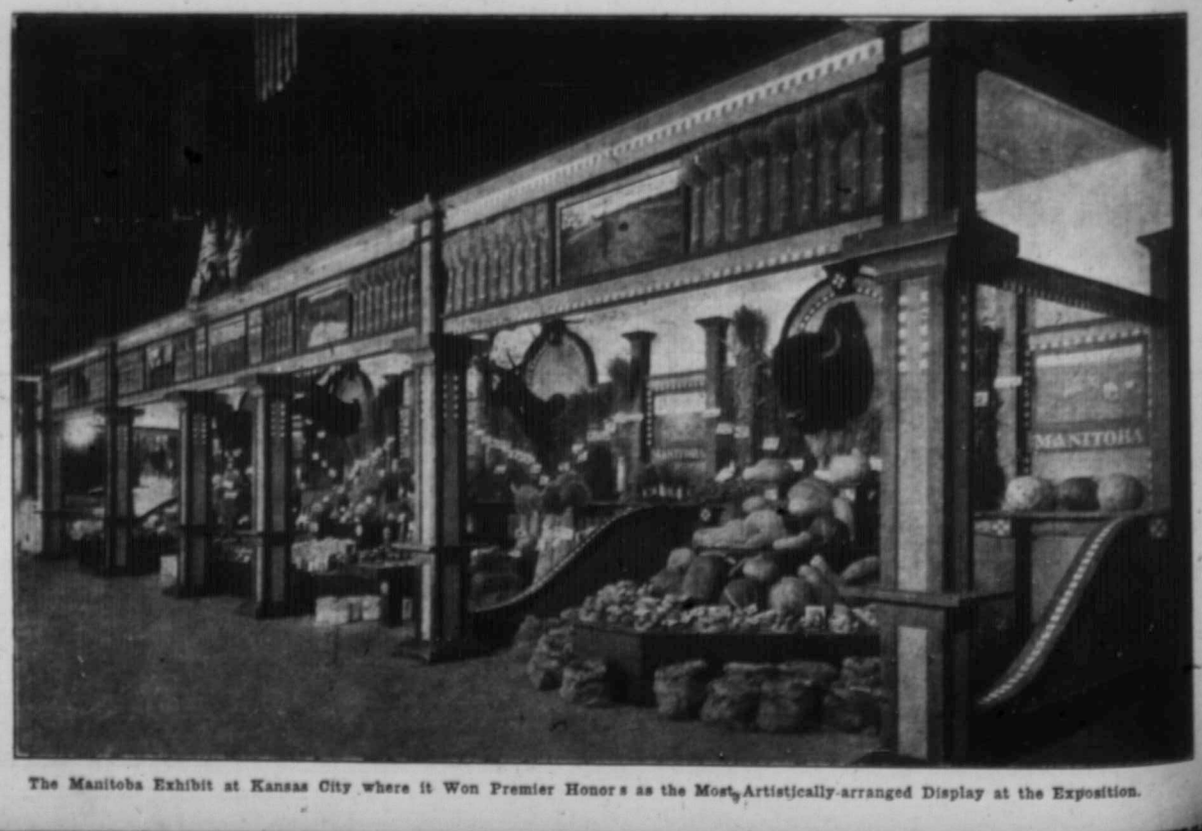
In a dry season alfalfa has given better results than western rye grass, but for best results it is claimed it should be sown in rows to allow for cultivation. Splendid results have been secured by discing alfalfa thoroughly immediately after the crop is harvested. Mr. Fixter mentioned one case that came under his notice a year ago last spring. On one farm the stand was apparently so badly winter killed that the crop was not considered worth leaving. The owner decided to disc the land well and seed to oats. The following summer the alfalfa had come along so well that it was difficult to estimate whether it was a crop of oats or alfalfa, and an additional surprising feature was that the alfalfa plants were loaded with seed. Thorough discing of the ground in the spring and the same directly after each cutting will mean much in maintaining a good stand is the experience so far as Mr. Fixter's observations go.

The old standby, western rye grass, is worthy of a very prominent place in western Canada as a fodder crop, and from results obtained at the various stations it would warrant extending the area of this valuable grass. Mr. Fixter reports a great demand for the seed and part of this demand is the outcome of encouragement of its growth on the various plots.—J. P. Sackville.

A Dockage Question

Q.—I loaded a car of wheat at a local elevator and consigned and sold it through a grain company in Winnipeg. I have storage tickets for 977¼ bushels. The agent made a deduction of one per cent. for dirt, and now he tells me that they took three per cent. off when the car was unloaded. Do I have to stand the loss of the two per cent?

A.—We judge from your letter that you hold special binned storage tickets for the grain in question, and if such



The Manitoba Exhibit at Kansas City where it Won Premier Honors as the Most Artistically-arranged Display at the Exposition.