

Winter Wheat of Alberta

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There is a great need for such wheat in the Oriental market as the wheat produced on the Pacific Coast and in Manchuria is so starchy as to be almost useless for bread making.

Then too the Oriental demand which is now for low grade flour will become more exacting as the years go by. The orientals are only now being educated to like flour; they will gradually demand a better product. A people can be educated from a lower to a higher product, but never the reverse.

It may be of interest to recount some of the advantages of winter wheat to a wheat growing country. In the first place the average yield of winter wheat is greater than spring. This is probably due to the longer period in which it has to grow, and partly perhaps to better preparation of the soil previous to sowing. In any case the average in Alberta has been considerably greater for the autumn sown crop. There is less danger of winter wheat being damaged by frost. It matures much earlier and in a country that approaches the northern limit of cereal production that is of great importance. The growing of both winter and spring wheat distributes the farm work better over the season. Greater areas of land can be cultivated with the same amount of horse power where both are grown. Half the sowing is done in the fall; this leaves only half of the spring rush so dreaded by the farmer. Harvest time is extended and there is a better chance of harvesting all the crop at just the proper time. On account of the decreased amount of work in the spring, all the spring crop can be put in more promptly, thus the danger from fall frost is lessened. In case of a failure from winter wheat the result is not very serious.

Practically all that is lost is the seed. Land that was in proper condition for winter wheat in the preceding fall is in good condition for spring grains. Consequently if a crop is lost in an unusually unfavorable winter there is as good a chance for a spring crop as though the autumn crop had never been sown.

Since the introduction of winter wheat there has been only one failure and it not a complete one by any means. This occurred in the winter of 1905-06. There was practically no rain from August until May and as a consequence the more carelessly sown grain was killed. That one year was a blessing in disguise.

The idea had become prevalent that any kind of seed might be thrown in any kind of soil, in any way, at any depth, at any time with reasonable hopes of a crop. That had year was a lesson. One thing it taught was that sowing on late shallow breaking was a delusion.

To have a sure crop on breaking it should be early and deep, and the land well worked up. The seed itself should be put in moderately deep; the fields that lived through dry winter were almost invariably sown three inches deep. The time of sowing also makes a great difference. The best farmers are now in favor of sowing between the last of July and the middle of September. Later than that may succeed but one is taking long chance. The amount of seed to be sown is a debated question. The "Alberta Red" is noted for its tillage, and less seed is needed on account of that. In the dryer district a bushel per acre seems to be sufficient, but the amount varies with the district and can best be decided by experience. The past winter, 1906-07 has been the severest in the history of the west. Yet the winter wheat never looked better than it does now. This is perhaps partly due to better methods of farming learned from lessons of the preceding years. But in any case it is extremely encouraging to find after a winter of severity that prospects are of the brightest.

W. C. McKILLICAN,
Representative in Alberta of the
Seed Division of the Dominion
Department of Agriculture in
the Farmers' Advocate.

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