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Table of Contents.

The Cultivation of Oats	33
Rotation, Weeds, and Seeding	37
Two New Wheat Insects—Inquiries	38
Milk Yields of Shorthorn Cows	38
Tomatoes in Glass	38
Our Engravings	39
How to tell the age of a horse	39
Food and the quality of milk	43
How I Judge	44
Ram sales	45
How to Save the British Farmer	46
Questions about Fertilizers, etc	46
Questions and answers	46
The Model Cow	47

The Cultivation of Oats

Lincoln College, Sorel, Feb, 4th 1885.

The principal grain cultivated in the Province of Quebec is oats. I say cultivated, though, in truth very little cultivation is given to this crop. Anything less likely to produce a full yield of this cereal than the customary method of treating it, would be difficult to find. The land is ploughed, generally in autumn, an uncertain quantity of seed is scattered over the surface, a couple of strokes of a worn out harrow, always in the same direction, completes the job, and, at harvest, the result is, as might be expected, in proportion to the trouble and time expended in the spring. If oats are worth growing, and nothing has ever been found to equal them as horse-food, they are worth taking pains about, and I think a few thoughts on the subject will not be thrown away on the readers of this Journal.

We cannot hope to grow such oats here as we see in Scotland. There, the climate is as well suited to them as it is unsuited to the growth of wheat, and, consequently they are the main crop of the country. I have seen them, at the Mark Lane market in London, weighing 47 lbs. a bushel, with a bright, silvery skin, and so full of meal, that they

almost appeared to be bursting out of their envelope.⁽¹⁾ In fact, I saw one sample, sent from the Lothians to be sold for seed, that the corn factors declared was "doctored" or sulphured, so beautiful was their appearance. Now, these same oats, sown in the south-east of England, on our best land, soon retrograded, and the second year from their importation only weighed, the usual weight with us, 37 lbs. a bushel! It was not an unusually hot year, but the climatic influence had thus affected them. The Scotch, then, have reason on their side, and the south of England farmers too, for we sow very few oats, particularly on the lighter soils; rarely more than sufficient for our horses.

Compare the growth of wheat in England and in Scotland. The figures I quote will probably surprise many of my readers, who do not seem to comprehend that nothing can be more contrary to their true interests than to grow crops for which their land is not suited, when they can exchange their own natural production for imported produce. Now, the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk grow hardly any oats, the farmers buy Russian oats, but, in revenge, these two counties grow 267,000 more acres of wheat and barley than does the whole of Scotland, and, a few years ago, the single county of Norfolk produced 1 290,373 more bushels of wheat than all the land north of the Tweed.

But, in spite of all this natural causes, originating in the soil and climate, are, or can be, modified in their results by cultivation, and hence we manage, if we think it advisable, to render the cultivation of oats in this province a matter of greater certainty and success than it has hitherto been.

The best soils for oats are the alluvial tracts which form the lower parts of valleys, such as are called "intervalles" in the Eastern Townships. The richer class of granite soils are also well fitted for this crop. As a general rule, it may be stated, that whenever a soil has been formed by the alluvium of rocks or strata not characterised by the presence of too great an amount of aluminous or clayey matter, there we

(1) I saw a statement in the *Country G.* last week that oats in Scotland often weigh from 50 lbs. to 55 lbs per bushel. This is of course ridiculously untrue, and I wonder it escaped the editor's eye.
A. R. J. F.