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Dry Farming

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frosts before harvesting is completed. Nevertheless deep tillage is necessary to provide against drought particularly, and will be accompanied by the risk of slow maturity only in the first succeeding crop. This risk could be off-set by special attention to packing and growing for the first year crop suited to such a condition of soil. During the subsequent eight or ten years the land should be ploughed to a normal depth of say four or five inches, which will tend to hasten maturity and yet provide a satisfactory seed-bed. I believe that sub-soiling will in time become a recognized necessity, particularly in our heavy clay soils that are, under shallow tillage, comparatively impervious to moisture. Under present conditions a great deal of the copious rainfall of June and early July runs off into adjoining sloughs, creeks, and coulees, and is lost, whereas if subsoiling had been performed even once this excess of rain would freely percolate into the soil as it fell and remain there in reserve to be drawn upon during a period of subsequent possible drought. This is one way whereby all of us can assist in conserving one of the most important natural resources of our semi-arid open plains—the rain and snow fall.

Sow Deeply

We do not know who is responsible for teaching the agricultural heresy that sowing deeply insures the crop against drought. The argument implies that a shallow rooting plant can be converted into a deep rooting one simply by planting deeply. But anyone who has given any attention to cereal growth must have noticed that any of the small grains, if planted in a moist soil deeper than about two and one-half inches will, immediately upon showing the surface growth, assert its shallow growing tendencies by throwing out a new set of rootlets about one and one-half or two inches below the surface, or immediately below the moisture line. Thus with us it is a mistake to sow too deeply with the idea that such a practice assists in resisting drought. In addition too, this too deep sowing has other serious disadvantages, such as delayed germination, disposition to smut, tardy maturity, and a weakened vitality of the plant generally.

All the best thinkers in the dry farming world claim that better results can be secured from moderately thin sowing than from thicker sowing. The usual reasoning of those who support thick sowing as being best in dry countries, is that it will produce a heavy thick foliage, which by quickly and thoroughly shading the ground economises and conserves much moisture. But a little inquiry into this popular fallacy will soon dispel it. Recognizing that the moisture supply is our limiting factor in crop production, with a given amount in a cubic yard of land it is obvious that, say fifty plants, will exhaust that moisture more quickly than a less number would do, as each plant is a miniature suction pump continually drawing upon the soil moisture and evaporating it through its leaves. This process is accelerated by the dry winds which sometimes blow during the hot summer. Given, however, a good reserve of moisture in the land and a reasonable number of plants thereon, the ill-effects of such drying winds are not only averted but turned to good account by stimulating rapid maturity. Were the cubic yard of soil in question loaded with one hundred plants instead of fifty, it is evident that its moisture would be exhausted in about half the time, and that the supply would be insufficient to meet the heavy demands made upon it during a period of drying winds and excessive evaporation. On the other hand if the cubic yard of soil has been deeply worked in a district where the soil is peculiarly retentive of moisture, and precipitation is unusually generous, too thin sowing would induce excessive stooling and correspondingly delayed maturity, both of which must be avoided in Saskatchewan.

How to Sow

What then should govern us in the amount to sow? If our previous reasoning is correct, that thick sowing is likely to be more susceptible to damage by drought, while too thin sowing runs one into danger by frost, this is a question in the solving of which the tiller of the soil will require to exercise sound judgment, based upon local conditions. As much discretion as would be used in loading a team for a trip to market should be exercised in determining the amount of seed to be sown on an acre of land, for as many factors enter into the question. Just as the weight, condition, and temperament

of the team, the nature of the load and the condition of the wagon, the character of the trail, its present condition, its length, and the weather on the day in question, all enter into the decision as to what load shall be hauled, so the mechanical condition of the field, its probable reserve of moisture, the stage to which the season has advanced, the presence or absence of weeds, and the variety of seed being used, are among the factors that must be considered by the careful farmer when he is determining the quantity of seed he will sow to the acre. In short, land should be sown according to its known capacity to carry a large or small crop. Experience has demonstrated that in Saskatchewan the quantity of wheat to be sown per acre should vary from three pecks to two bushels.

New Methods Bring Success

In Saskatchewan the season just closed has given ample and profitable opportunities to study the system of dry farming practised here as against the methods of newer settlers who have brought their old-time practices with them, and who invariably let go old methods with a great deal of natural reluctance. While the eastern half of Saskatchewan, being that portion east of the third meridian, certainly had slightly more precipitation than the western half this season (13 and 11 inches respectively) that fact in itself does not account for the marked difference in the crops in these respective areas. A great portion of eastern Saskatchewan has been settled for from ten to twenty-five years, and farmers located therein are familiar with the best methods of tillage necessary to secure the best results under semi-arid conditions. In the western and newer portion, however, large tracts of land have recently been taken up by settlers unfamiliar with such conditions, or possibly insufficiently equipped with the result that such have experienced some loss and disappointment during the summer of 1910, and yet ample rain fell practically throughout the whole province to give profitable and satisfactory results, had the principles underlying dry farming been understood and carried into effect.

This Year a Lesson

Saskatchewan, however, as a whole, has a magnificent crop, even with the dry season it has just passed through. Where

approved methods of tillage have been practised the results have been most gratifying—the yield in many localities running from twenty-five to forty bushels of wheat to the acre, while the provincial average on acreage sown will not exceed approximately fifteen bushels. Had the principles of scientific farming been observed throughout the whole province it is believed that the total yield of wheat for this season, instead of being approximately seventy millions would have bordered around the one hundred million mark. But the newer settlers are not discouraged by any means, as they see what has been accomplished by the occasional experienced settler, one or more of whom is to be found in almost every new locality. With such innumerable illustrations to be found on all sides in Saskatchewan during 1910, of the imperative necessity of employing dry farming methods if best and most satisfactory results are to be obtained, it is confidently expected that the cause of scientific soil culture will be given such an impetus that it will be only a matter of a few years until practically all will accept its teachings.

In the foregoing I have dealt with some of the dry farming teachings which, while doubtless applicable to more southern climes, have in practice been found to require modification to suit conditions in Saskatchewan.

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