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Seed Production in British Columbia

By H. O. English, Soil and Crop Instructor for B. C.—Address Delivered Before the Annual Convention of B. C. Dairymen's Association, 1916.

The subject of Seed Production in B. C. should need very little explanation in a meeting of Live Stock men. I have chosen to speak on this subject for that very reason. I am here advocating that you as dairymen lend your support to this movement, and I want you to understand that I am not asking any favor from you, but want to point but how important it is that you should co-operate in the inauguration of a practice, new to British Columbia, which will have a beneficial effect on all the agriculture of the province.

The need for this move on our part is threefold. First, let us consider the amount of seed which is brought into the province annually from outside sources. In 1915 over 10,000 bushels of oats and wheat were imported by this government alone. In addition to this, there were thousands of pounds of alfalfa, mangels, corn, etc., brought in as seed. This would be quite satisfactory from the standpoint of all concerned, but for two things. The first of these is that no matter how carefully this seed may be inspected, weed seeds creep in. The imported seed is the chief mode of entry of weed seeds and crop diseases. This is how most of the weed enemies of the farmer have already found entrance, and every year new pests arrive by the same gateway. The other argument which militates against the importation of seed is that of economy. British Columbia is so located as to be isolated commercially from the common sources of good seed, i.e., the prairie provinces and the United States. Seed is naturally rather more expensive than feed, and when one adds to this already high price the transportation charges and one or two middleman commissions, the selling price of the registered seed is so high as to prohibit its general use by the average farmer.

In consequence we have the small farmer saying "Well, I only want an acre or so of this for chicken feed, or to mix with the ration for my milch cows, so anything will do." He sows what grain he may have, weed seeds and all, with the natural result—the weeds mature first—the weed seeds fall before the grain is ripe, and thus seed the previously virgin soil down to a pest which it may take years of hard labor to eradicate.

The second argument in support of seed production in B. C. is quite as forcible. We bring pure registered seed into the province at considerable expense to the department. The farmer buys this seed at a price that seems to him unreasonably high. He sows the seed, but does not take any extra pains to preserve the high standard of purity or excellence. Inside of two years the identity of the seed is lost, and the good

work begun when the seed was brought in is undone, and a large part of the benefit which might have been derived is lost.

You, gentlemen, are either dairymen, or are interested in dairying. Naturally, in the past, when you wanted a new sire or a new female to build up your herd, you went outside the province to obtain it. Even yet you have occasionally to go a considerable distance to find good foundation stock. But the quality of the home grown dairy stock is improving, and now-a-days, if your neighbor has a good animal of the type and qualifications for which you are looking, in fact has an animal whose ancestry and record you are familiar with—you do not go back east or south to buy on somebody else's recommendation what you can buy subject to your own inspection from your neighbor. I doubt if any of you will admit that the breeders of any other province are producing or can produce anything better than our own breeders are producing right at home. Why then should we send off east, south or in any other direction for seed grain, corn, etc., when we can produce all we require right at home here just as good, if not a great deal better, quality. If you are producing good dairy stock you are doing so after making a careful study of the business. If you cannot at present grow seed that will satisfy all the wishes of a seed expert, study the question a little and it will not be long before you will be able to do so.

No argument should be necessary to persuade you that you ought to use good pure seed. You can ill afford to grow anything poorly on this high priced B. C. land. When you seed an acre of land down to anything, you need to get the very largest returns possible from it in the way of feed to pay the interest on the money invested. It is accordingly self evident that you cannot afford to use poor seed.

Having decided that it is advisable to devote some attention to the production of registered seed, not only in B. C., but on our own farms, the question arises as to how this is to be accomplished. The general procedure is very simple.

If you intend to grow wheat, oats, barley, corn or grass, the first step for you is to determine what variety is best suited to your district. Having determined this, secure sufficient Registered Seed of this variety to seed at least a quarter acre of land.

Select a plot of land relatively fertile and adapted to the culture of the crop chosen, free from weeds, and sow your Registered Seed. It is well to select this plot from a field that has been in roots or clover the previous year as there is less

likelihood of trouble through the presence of weed seeds.

The care and treatment of this plot is the most important part of the business of seed production.

1st. The hand pulling of all noxious weeds is absolutely necessary.

2nd. All plants which are off type should be removed.

3rd. A clean border should be maintained so that no other variety or weed may flourish in close proximity to it.

Finally, you should, when the plot is fully matured, select by hand from the standing crop enough heads, ears, etc., so that when they are threshed out you will have sufficient to plant a similar plot the following year.

The seed which is secured from the crop remaining on the plot is known as Elite Stock Seed. This should be carefully threshed and stored. This is the highest grade of seed on the market at the present day. But to register this seed you must follow the rules and regulations laid down by the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, i.e., you must apply for membership in the association early in the year. You will not be granted membership until you have proven to the C. S. G. inspector that you can and will produce good seed according to their rules. The C. S. G. appoints inspectors who score your plots while growing, and who also inspect the threshed seed. It is upon these two inspections that the C. S. G. base the registration of seed grain.

In the first place, one must be a member. In the second one's field plot and harvested product must pass inspection.

Those who go into seed production as a commercial proposition seldom dispose of their Elite Stock Seed. They retain this and plant it in what is known as a multiplying field. In this way they increase the quantity of seed without lessening the selling price very much. You will hear a lot about first, second, and third generation seed, which merely means that it is just this long since the original seed was grown on a hand selected plot.

You will see from the foregoing that it takes one year before a member can dispose of his seed as Registered Seed. Consequently, this year we are offering prizes for provincial competitions in seed production. These provincial seed production competitions will be open to all institute members who wish to begin the production of seed. To enter such a competition all that is necessary for you to do is to follow the outline I have given you, and send your applications in to the Soil and Crop Division before June 1st, 1916.

In this connection also we are holding Provincial Seed Fairs each year. The ob-