

PART 1

General Information Regarding Alfalfa

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Special Value of Alfalfa

Alfalfa not only serves to balance the ration for the farm live stock, but it also provides a means whereby nitrogen can be secured cheaply from the soil air. Alfalfa has a deep rooting system, and it may thus take the place of a sub-soiler in opening up the lower soil layers. It may be observed, as well, that such a crop leaves considerable organic residue in the soil. The latter material is important in that it increases the moisture holding capacity of the soil, and in the process of decomposition assists in liberating plant food for the growing crop. With the introduction of alfalfa—and this will apply equally well to the clovers—better systems of crop rotations can be organized, and the farm income can be made somewhat more regular. Moreover, the production of forage crops is directly related to a better seasonal distribution of farm labor.

Previous Cropping

In selecting a field for alfalfa some attention should be given to the crop which has been grown the preceding season. To get the best results, well defined plans should be made one or two years prior to seeding. Summerfallow which has been well cultivated and is reasonably free from noxious weeds gives the grower an excellent starting point. This or any hoed crop suggests at least three advantages. In the first place, the cultivation given will eradicate many of the weeds which have come into the field; secondly, moisture will be stored for the young alfalfa; and, thirdly, the field will be left in an excellent physical condition.

Character of the Soil

Alfalfa requires a deep mellow soil if maximum crops are to be expected. The alluvial river bottom lands of this continent provide an ideal home for this deep-rooted legume; large yields are invariably obtained on these areas. The crop can be grown on all types of soil, from the heavy clays to the coarser grained sandy soils; and it may even be cultivated on gravelly soil, provided the subsoil furnishes a suitable reservoir for moisture, thus affording a complete and continuous supply for the crop. While a loose open soil is not the best type for alfalfa, the other extreme, an impervious subsoil, is sometimes a controlling factor, and root development may be interfered with materially. A friable soil makes the best home for alfalfa.

The Seed Bed

A firm, well prepared seed bed will assist materially in getting a catch the first season. Where the seed is to be sown on summer-fallow, corn or root land, the drag harrow (and if very compact the disc) can be used to work up a mulch one and one-half to two inches