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## THINGS WORTH KNOWING ABOUT WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR ALFALFA\*

Geo. Marsh, Peterboro Co., Ont.

### How You May Renovate a Patchy Field of Alfalfa. The Cause and the Remedy of Patchiness. Spring Work with This Great Crop.

UNTIL you have a good big acreage of alfalfa you should never plow up an alfalfa field, no matter how poor it looks or how much grass is in it; or, at least, not until you have all the alfalfa you need and are commencing to grow it in a rotation. Very often after paying high prices for seed the first thing a farmer thinks of is to plow it up because there is a little grass in it or because there are a few bare or sickly-looking spots. A little grass does not hurt the hay, and the poor spots can be



George Marsh

easily remedied by proper care, such as I shall here describe.

#### CAUSE OF POOR STANDS

Nine times out of 10 the cause of poor stands of alfalfa is lack of perfect inoculation. Occasionally failure is due to wet land, careless cultivation and sowing, unfavorable weather, too much clipping, too close pasturing, or too many weeds and grass. But usually when any of these causes are blamed the real trouble is lack of inoculation.

Alfalfa will grow on any soil that is dry enough for corn, oats, or red clover. It will grow on poor soil, good soil, flat rock with a couple of inches of soil, building sand or gravel, or brick clay. I have seen a small plot on fair ground stand the pasturing of 500 sheep and come up fresh and green in the spring. I have seen scattering stands of alfalfa stay in a hay field, infested with couch or twitch grass, and it grew there luxuriantly, and appeared to become stronger each year.

#### INOCULATION MOST IMPORTANT

I have also seen dozens of fields where the alfalfa was dying out on the very richest and cleanest soil simply for lack of the necessary inoculation. The typical patchy appearance of alfalfa fields, when grown for the first time in a district, is due entirely to this cause.

Where the foregoing is the real cause of poor

success with alfalfa, and it can be very easily proven by taking a shovel and examining the alfalfa roots for nodules, what is the use of plowing up what alfalfa you have and trying a fresh piece of land, which is not better adapted to alfalfa than the land whereon it is? I would counsel you never to plow up what alfalfa you have, but keep working with it until you get a good stand.

Examine your alfalfa the first thing in the spring; if there are lots of little nodules or lumps on the roots, similar to those on red clover plants, but larger, and more easily pulled off, nothing need be done, although a stroke with a spring tooth harrow or cultivator will help greatly ly



"Yes, Boys, We Can't Afford Not to Grow Alfalfa"

Some Pennsylvania State farmers are here shown as they were visiting a neighbor's old alfalfa field to learn of the wonders of this plant. The field as shown is a five year old alfalfa sod on the farm of L. D. May, Greenville Centre, Pa. Last year on this field, Mr. May grew the biggest crop of corn ever grown in his county; it was pronounced to be the record crop of corn last year within 25 miles.

—Photo by Mr. Marsh.

cultivating the alfalfa and tearing out the grass.

#### DOCTORING THE PATCHY FIELD

If the alfalfa is all living, but some patches are better than others and nodules are to be found only on a few of the plants, and these say within eight or ten feet of each other, all that is necessary is thorough cultivating, say two or three strokes of a spring tooth cultivator. I have seen such cultivation turn the color of the yellow spots to a dark green inside of a week, and start them off growing as well as the good patches. The reason for this change is that the cultivator carries the inoculated soil from the inoculated plants and scatters it all over the field, thus inoculating all the plants.

#### RE-SEED THE BARE PLACES

If the inoculated patches are farther apart than eight or 10 feet or a part of the alfalfa is dead, then soil from the inoculated places should be taken and sown over the whole field at the

rate of a couple of bags to the acre. The bare spots should be re-sown with alfalfa seed and the whole field thoroughly cultivated a number of times. Unless the field has been seeded some years and the grass has come in and formed a tough sod, a cultivator will cut it up all right. In any case a little grass does not do the alfalfa any harm. Many farmers think that they get heavier yields of hay by having some grass mixed with the alfalfa.

#### RENOVATE THE OLD FIELD

The chief point I wish to impress upon all Farm and Dairy readers is, do not plow up one piece of alfalfa to start another field, as it is very much easier to renovate a poor piece than to start a new field. As soon as alfalfa has been grown for three or four years on a farm there will likely be no need for further inoculation, as all live stock, birds, etc., help to distribute the bacteria, and the farm will be found to be thoroughly inoculated.

#### WHO HAS MET WITH FAILURE?

I have been looking for some months, and am still looking, for the man who sowed 20 lbs. of good alfalfa seed, with either the nitro-culture from Guelph, or soil from an old field, and has made a failure of growing alfalfa. I cannot find such a man. If there are any such who read this article in Farm and Dairy, I should like to hear from him, with full particulars. We have talked with dozens of farmers in the vicinity of Peterboro, and where the right conditions were fulfilled they all report excellent results.

One man near Peterboro who sowed alfalfa on a poor field, where he never get a crop before, when asked why he did not sow more replied that he wished to buy the farm, and if he put in more alfalfa the owner would double the price he now asked for the farm. This should be a good tip to a man who owns land he wishes to sell.

#### INCREASES THE PRICE OF LAND

The growing of alfalfa should double the price of land because the production of such land would thereby be doubled.

Again, I state that the question every Farm and Dairy subscriber should ask himself is not "Can I grow alfalfa?" but rather "Can I afford not to grow alfalfa?" I am thoroughly convinced that you should grow alfalfa and that it will pay you handsomely. Simply sow 20 lbs. of the best alfalfa seed you can get, provide inoculation for it, and sow it in any of the ways I have described in preceding articles of this series, and you will be sure of satisfactory results.

No implement that we can buy will till the soil to such a depth as the alfalfa root. These roots open the subsoil, aerate and drain it. Why waste horse flesh plowing deeply to aerate and stir the soil when the various clovers will do it all for you and do it better!—Anson Grob, Waterloo Co., Ont.

\*This article is the fourth of a series prepared especially for Farm and Dairy readers by Mr. Marsh and which are now creating such a widespread interest amongst our readers in regard to alfalfa. Subsequent articles in this series will be equally valuable and practical. Have you told one or more of your neighbors about these articles? If you would do so he would appreciate your kindness and in all probability would like to subscribe to Farm and Dairy. A limited number of back numbers in which these articles appear are yet available to new subscribers who may request them.