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The Field.

Preparation of Potato Seed.

A correspondent enquires.—“What is the proper method of preparing potato seeds from the potato balls or apples, as they are called, so as to have them fit to sow? Should they be washed out of the glutinous stuff in which they are enveloped, and then dried, or merely squeezed out without washing, and then dried?”

The method usually pursued is to wash the seeds clean from the pulp, and then thoroughly dry them before sowing. In the fall, the berries or apples of the old stock are hung in a warm room, and toward the end of winter the seed is washed out, dried, and preserved in a dry place, in cloth or paper bags, until sowing time.

Some prefer taking the ball or apple when perfectly ripe, drying it, and disengaging the seed by rubbing it out with the hand. When this course is taken, the seed is preserved in bags, in a dry place, until spring, precisely as is done on the other method.

We infer from the tenor of our correspondent's queries, that he has the balls or apples in their entire state, and that they are more or less moist, so as to admit of squeezing. He will do well at once to wash out the seed, dry it, and have it ready for use.

Though our correspondent's enquiries extend no farther, we may as well briefly mention the methods practiced in raising the young plants, and obtaining tubers worthy of culture. In order to get as large tubers as possible the first year, some have recourse to hot-bed culture. Very moderate heat is got up, and the seed sown in drills, about half an inch in depth and nine inches apart. Water is given pretty freely, and earth drawn about the stems of the young plants until they are a few inches in height, when, having been gradually accustomed to the ordinary temperature of the air, they are transplanted to the open ground, set in rows, and earthed up in the usual way. The only advantage of this plan is that the seed being sown earlier, the young potatoes grow to a larger size than when the entire growth is obtained out of doors.

In out-door culture, it is usual to sow the seed a little closer than in the hot-bed. Half an inch deep and six inches apart, is the common rule. The plants are weeded so soon as they can be distinguished, and a little earth is drawn up to their stems. When three inches in height, they are transplanted into hills, sixteen inches apart each way, and earthed up two or three times during their future growth.

The tubers of every seedling should be kept separate. Scarcely two will be of similar habit and quality. Most of them will be comparatively worthless. A few will be good, and still fewer excellent. Only such should be preserved as are of superior size, flavor and productiveness. It has been confidently

stated, as an indication of these qualities during the growing stage of the plant, that a rough, uneven surface in the foliage, which in excess constitutes “the curl,” is an unfailing sign of a good potato, while smooth and polished leaves indicate inferiority, if not worthlessness.

It requires no small patience and judgment to originate a potato really worth cultivating. Success must not be too readily taken for granted. A variety should be thoroughly tested before its excellencies are blazoned forth in advertisements. Any one who undertakes to experiment in this line of things will arrive at appreciation and admiration of the persevering labors of others who have given choice varieties of potatoes to the world, before he will achieve distinction in this direction himself. We do not make these remarks to discourage endeavors by any means, but simply to suggest to experimenters the wisdom and propriety of counting the cost of the undertaking. What man has done man can do, and just as there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, so assuredly there are as good potatoes to be originated in the future as have ever been produced in the past, and possibly better.

The Waste of Fences.

We commend the following sensible article from the *N. Y. Times*, to the serious attention of our readers. It deals with a subject to which we have often adverted, and to the practical consideration of which the entire farming community must sooner or later wake up:—

It is certainly within the bounds of fact to state that the absolute cost of fences in the United States is equal to the value of all the live stock kept upon the farms. But, unfortunately, this vast sum does not include the annual loss arising from the waste of land consequent upon our costly system of fencing, which, including the damage done to crops by the encouragement of weeds and their encroachment upon our fields, and, doubtless, reach every year to fully six per cent. upon the cost of the fences, and thus will represent a capital sum equal to that cost. Then the value of the fences, upon the whole, and their annual cost, may be estimated as equivalent to double the value of all our live stock. The Commissioner of the Agricultural Department, in his last monthly report, estimates the cost of fencing a farm of 100 acres in Pennsylvania, with chestnut posts and rails, at \$1,610 62, a sum actually far in excess of the average value of the stock kept on a farms in that State. We, therefore, claim for our own estimate a very close approximation to the actual facts.

When we come to realize that this ruinous expense is in large part unnecessary; that it is, in fact, maintained in defiance of common sense and better knowledge, and that its abolition in a great part is entirely and easily practicable, it becomes matter for astonishment that such a costly system should be continued. No wonder that farming does not pay. What business can be made to pay when the principles of economy are so defied?

In our article last week we spoke of this waste as being one of the first that should be remedied under a system of improved farming. We wish to point

out how this has been done, is how done, and may be done. There are two ways in which this wasteful system may be either totally or partially abolished. One is, by following the soiling system of feeding and confining the stock altogether to yards, thus entirely doing away with the need for inside fences, and the other by fencing off a field which is used for pasture, and removing all other inside fences. At the outset we are met with the objection that soiling stock requires so much labor that it is not possible for the poorer farmers to follow that plan. But we have passed through extensive districts in France and Germany, where the farmers are much poorer than any here, and cultivate only very small farms, or rather patches, seldom equal to twenty acres each, and, curiously enough, they agree that they cannot afford to do anything else with their stock but shut them up, and grow, cut, and carry feed for them, to be consumed in the stable or the yard. In their case it is “their poverty and not their will consents,” and they adopt the system because they cannot afford any other. For many miles through the richest and most closely-populated country in that part of Europe, the boundaries between the farms are low, narrow banks, mere furrows covered with grass or clover, and no other fence is visible, not even upon the roads. And yet the choicest dairy products are there made in abundance. At the same time it is the boast of the farmers who cultivate with most success and profit the high-rented farms in Great Britain that their land all lies within a ring fence, with nothing to obstruct its cultivation. It may, therefore, be taken as demonstrated, that so far from it being impossible for the poorer farmer to keep his stock upon what is known as the soiling system, it may be accepted as a good reason for his poverty that he keeps his stock in any other way. It must be understood that we refer to these cases in which the farming is mixed, and where land is scarce and high, and not to those in which sheep farming is carried on, or where the dairy is a special pursuit, and pasturing altogether followed, nor where land is so low in price that a small crop upon a large area is for the present more desirable than a large crop upon a small area.

Wherever it is desired to farm with the greatest economy we would recommend that all interior fences should be removed, a simple wagon road or path being maintained between them, and sown to clover and grass, which is mowed as any other crop, and as far as possible that a portion of the farm most conveniently situated for the purpose should be appropriated to a succession of crops, which should be devoted to the maintenance of the stock in sheds and yards. The good results of this system have been found to be: First, an actual saving of time and labor in growing the feed and feeding it; second, a better yield of milk from cows, and of beef or pork from feeding stock, and better health in all the animals subjected to it, third, an immense gain in the quantity and the quality of the manure saved; fourth, a greatly increased product from the same area of ground, and, lastly, but not least, a far greater subordination of all the business of the farm to methodical and consequently easy and profitable management. When we assure our readers that our own experience has resulted in the plentiful feeding of one cow upon the product of one acre for the whole year, and that others who have fed their stock upon this system have done even better than that, it is to be hoped that some enterprising farmers at least, who are looking to the most profitable management of their farms, will, as soon as may be, inaugurate this system, and give an example of its benefits to their neighbors; and in so doing help to show that the present great waste of fences need exist no longer.