

POTASH IN AGRICULTURE.

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Among the evil effects resulting from the terrible and disastrous war now raging in Europe is to be counted the cutting off from the markets of the world of the supply of potash from the Stassfurt mines. For many years these mines have been practically the sole source of the potash compounds used for fertilizing purposes, and it is little wonder, therefore, in these days when the employment of fertilizers is ever on the increase, that this stoppage of the supply should have caused consternation.

But on looking more deeply into the matter and considering it especially from the standpoint of the Canadian farmer, we find the case is not so serious nor fraught with such dire consequences as might be imagined from the superficial view expressed by many interested in our agriculture. There is, in the opinion of the writer, very little cause for real alarm or anxiety, even if the supply from the German mines be not resumed for a year or two. There is no need to anticipate any material falling off in yields, even of those of the potash-loving crops, for although the quantity of German potash compounds used for fertilizing has been annually increasing for the past few years, the total amount used to-day in Canada is comparatively small, certainly not more than 8,000 tons per annum. Indeed this calamity, if such it may be called, will have its useful lessons, drawing attention to our home sources of potash, their use and conservation, to the crops for which potash is more particularly beneficial and lastly to those rational methods for maintaining soil fertility which put into practice, will alone render the farmer largely independent of fertilizers.

THE ROLE OF POTASH.

There is no desire on the part of the writer to disguise the fact or minimize its importance, that potash is one of the three "essential elements of fertility," the elements that have received this appellation not because they are any more essential to the growth of crops than the other nine or ten elements entering into the composition of plant tissues, but because they are the three—nitrogen, phosphoric acid and potash—which must be constantly returned to the soil if its productiveness is to be maintained under our ordinary systems of farming, and which, as we well know, entail the removal and sale of at least a portion of our crops.

But at the outset there is this consoling fact that of the three, potash is the least important from the standpoint of the necessity of application. It is "more widely distributed and less frequently deficient in soils than nitrogen and phosphoric acid." Clay loams as a rule are well supplied with potash and seldom respond profitably to an application of a special potassic fertilizer. Indeed upon heavy clays such an application may depress the yield by bringing about an unfavourable condition of tilth. It is more particularly sandy and gravelly loams, calcareous soils and soils rich in vegetable matter, as mucks and peaty loams, which are poor in potash and upon which this element may be expected to give a profitable return.