

PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Dry Farming in Saskatchewan

Extracts from an address delivered by the Honourable
W. R. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture, before the
fifth Dry Farming Congress at Spokane,
Washington, October 5, 1910.

In the pioneer days of Saskatchewan scores and hundreds of settlers left the country believing that no solution of this problem was within the realm of probability; but, as has often previously proven the case, "necessity was the mother of invention," and the sturdy pioneer farmers of those days, assisted by the experimental farms and agricultural press, demonstrated very clearly that our strong, retentive, heavy clay soil was capable of producing good crops with very much less, even, than seventeen inches of annual precipitation. While this is true, it must be admitted that this could not be done year after year in succession without stopping at varying intervals of three or more years, and storing up moisture under a system of approved and improved modern summer tillage (commonly called summerfallow) that will be alluded to later.

Some writers have undertaken to lay down a hard and fast rule with regard to the best method of tillage to pursue under semi-arid conditions; but, so far as Saskatchewan is concerned, such rigidity applied to our varying soils, altitudes, exposures, precipitation and climatic conditions would only lead to loss and disappointment. Variations in method must and can be pursued without departing from principles, and herein lies the importance of every farmer understanding something of the science of soil physics in order to have the ability to prescribe such crops and tillage methods as will meet the requirements of his particular farm, just as a physician prescribes to suit the individuality of his patient.

The "Dry Farm" Summerfallow.

The modern summerfallow was introduced into Saskatchewan over twenty-five years ago, not for the purpose of renewing a worn-out soil, as was once commonly thought, but for the purpose of getting the soil into the best condition to absorb moisture and then holding it there for the use of succeeding crops. Thus the shortage in each year's precipitation was overcome and full crops ensured. In order to do this thoroughly and most effectively in Saskatchewan it was found that the land intended for fallow after receiving some form of fall tillage, should be ploughed as early as possible in the spring after seeding that it might be in the most receptive condition to fully absorb and save from waste all the early and later rains. This should be immediately followed by surface tillage to put the necessary nonconducting soil mulch on the