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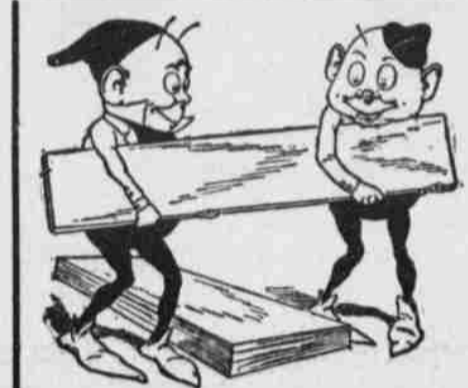
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Making Money On the Farm

IX.—Clover and Alfalfa Growing

By C. V. GREGORY,
Author of "Home Course in Modern Agriculture"
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THERE is no crop grown on the farm which is more necessary or more profitable, all things considered, than some legume. Such a crop is profitable from the standpoint of the returns from an acre and doubly profitable when the fertility of the soil is considered. On the farm where much stock is kept legumes serve another purpose, that of furnishing cheap protein.

Clover Versus Alfalfa.
Throughout the corn belt clover is the most important legume. In western United States alfalfa is largely grown, while in the south cowpeas, soy beans and vetch are the principal legumes. The legume best adapted to your own locality is the best one to grow, at least until careful experiments have shown that some other is more profitable. In the west, where the soil is loose and dry, alfalfa sends down its long roots to a source of permanent water supply and yields abundant crops. Farther east, where the water table is so near the surface of the ground that the plants have "wet feet" during a considerable portion of the year, it does not do as well. In states east of the Missouri river clover is much more desirable. A small patch of alfalfa may be grown, but it does not fit into the system of farming well enough to be adopted on a large scale. It cannot be sown with the small grain in the spring with any surety of getting a stand. The seed is expensive, and the hay is more difficult to cure than clover.

Alfalfa does not come to its prime for about three years, so that it is not profitable to plow it up the second year, as is done with clover. For this reason it does not work well in the standard rotation of corn, oats and clover that meets with so much favor in the corn belt. It does not fit in with the rest of the work as well as clover either, as the first crop must be cut just when the corn is being laid by. When a good stand of alfalfa has been secured it yields twice as much as clover, but this extra yield is counterbalanced in most instances by its disadvantages.

Getting a Stand of Clover.
The question of getting a stand of clover is a troublesome one on many farms. This is due largely to improper methods. The first point to consider is the soil. Land that has been farmed a number of years is likely to be acid, a condition which makes it ill fitted to grow clover. This acidity can be overcome by adding ground limestone as suggested in article No. 2.

A seed bed in good tilth and free from weed seeds is also an important consideration. Little clover plants are very tender and cannot well compete with weeds or force their way through clods. Land that has been kept reasonably free from weeds the previous season is best for clover. Such land, prepared as for oats as described in article No. 4, makes an ideal seed bed for clover.

Clover seed should be tested for germination before sowing. If it does not germinate very well a larger amount

the oats directly and covered at the same depth. Where there is much clay in the soil or when the soil is rather wet at time of sowing the chances are that much of the clover seed will fall to come up at all if put in so deep. A better way is to go over the ground with a wheelbarrow seeder after the oats have been disked in and cover the clover seed with the harrow. Most drills have a grass seed attachment which sows the clover broadcast between the rows of small grain. The harrowing which follows drilling will cover the clover seed.

Drilled grain, especially if drilled north and south, is a much better nurse crop than that sown broadcast. The sun gets in between the rows to the little clover plants, and they grow much more rapidly than they do in broadcasted grain. Late grain does not make a satisfactory nurse crop. It stools out too much, and the ground is so dry and hard when it is finally harvested that the spindling clover cannot make much of a growth before winter. A luxuriant fall growth is the best guarantee against winter killing. Early oats or barley make an ideal nurse crop. They do not stool out much and are ripe early in July, thus giving the clover several months in which to grow before it is stopped by freezing weather. The first fall's growth should not be cut or pastured if a crop is wanted the following year. It is needed to hold the snow to protect the tender roots. In the spring the clover field should be examined early to see how it has come through the winter. The stand may need thick-



FIG. XVIII—LOADING BY HAND.

ening by scattering a little seed over some of the thin spots, or the whole field may possibly be so badly damaged that it will be necessary to plow it up.

Curing Clover Hay.

Clover should be cut as soon as it is in full bloom and before many of the heads have turned brown. If cut earlier it is sappy and hard to cure. If left later it becomes woody. As soon as the cut clover has wilted a little in the swath it should be thrown together into light windrows, preferably with a side delivery rake. Cured in this way the leaves are less liable to become brittle and shake off. Well cured clover leaves are almost as valuable for feed as bran, so care should be taken to save as many of them as possible. As soon as the hay has cured sufficiently in the windrow it should be gathered up with a loader—if one can be had—and put in the barn. Clover has the reputation of being a troublesome crop to harvest, and many farmers are shy of it on that account. It is true that clover growing for profit demands a good deal of intelligence, but that is also the very factor which brings success in all agricultural enterprises. With proper attention to the habit of the plant and with the exercise of a modicum of judgment in its culture and harvesting there is nothing to be feared for the outcome.

Where it is desired to obtain a crop of seed the second crop should be used. The first crop seldom fills well and is always more valuable for hay than for seed. Most thrashing machines have a clover hulling attachment. It should be carefully adjusted so as to get all the seed. A bushel to a bushel and a half of seed per acre is a good yield. The yield of hay is from one to two tons to the acre for the first crop and a little more than half as much for the second crop. Where the fields are fenced the second crop may often be pastured to advantage.

Alsike clover finds a place on land that is too wet for the red variety. It does not yield as well, but it makes better pasture. By loosening up the sod in the low corners of the pasture with the disk and sowing four pounds of alsike to the acre its value may be greatly increased. In seeding a field to red clover it is well to scatter a little alsike in the low spots. It will be sure to grow whether the other does or not.

Handling Alfalfa.

What has been said about alfalfa does not mean that it is not to be grown at all except in the drier regions of the west, but that it is to be introduced into new regions carefully and on a small scale. The surest way to get a stand of alfalfa is to follow the land during the spring and early summer. About the middle of July a seed bed may be prepared and the alfalfa sown at the rate of twenty to twenty-five pounds to the acre. If the ground is not too dry a stand will usually be secured in this way, since the following will have destroyed most of the weeds. The objection to this plan is that no crop is obtained from the land that year.

A more economical way is to start with a crop of early oats or barley. As soon as this is harvested the land should be disked thoroughly and the alfalfa seed sown. If the ground is so dry and hard that the disk will not take hold it will have to be plowed. The main thing is to get the seed in as quickly as possible. The chances of securing a stand are much improved if a thin dressing of manure is given the land before sowing. After the alfalfa once gets a start it is very hard and a good yielder, giving four to six tons of hay a year. It should be cut when about one-tenth of the plants are in bloom. The second spring a disk run over the field will split up the crowns and thicken the stand, discouraging the weeds and loosening the soil as well.

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