

FARMER WATSON AT ALLIANCE ON SUNDAY

One of The Best Known Farmers in the United States Visited Box Butte County This Week

H. D. Watson of Kearney, Nebraska, aged seventy-two years and known over the United States as "Alfalfa" Watson, visited Alliance on Sunday of this week, the guest of Lloyd Thomas, editor of The Herald. After learning that Box Butte county took the alfalfa prizes (and many others) at the state fair this year, Mr. Watson took time from his busy life to visit a section of the state which has been attracting his attention for several years.

Mr. Watson is known as a master farmer. In spite of his years he acts and talks like a young man and plans to accomplish much more during the remainder of his life. He is in thorough accord with the plan of Secretary Lane of the interior department, outlined in the Alliance Herald last week, to provide farms for the millions of soldiers who will return from the great war, eager to live an out of doors life, and is rendering Secretary Lane much assistance in getting the plan on a working basis.

Mr. Watson was astounded at the results achieved by the Box Butte county farmers. He was also astounded to see thousands of acres of level, fertile land lying idle in this county, and expressed the desire that the farmers of the high priced land farther east have the opportunity to know of the need here of men with a small amount of capital and the ability to farm along scientific lines, in order to carry on the good work being done by those who are now farming this rich and fertile district. He promised before leaving to come again to Box Butte county and learn more of our resources.

Liberty H. Bailey, Dean of Cornell Agricultural College, Ithaca, N. Y., recently wrote an article regarding Mr. Watson's famous farm at Kearney, Nebraska, under the title of "The Pivotal Farm of the Union", the article being published in The World's Work. This article was as follows:

The stake that marks the midway point between ocean and ocean is one of the most interesting in Watson's Ranch, lying just outside Kearney, Nebraska. It is a commercial farm of eight thousand acres stretching along the illimitable expanse of the Platte valley and ascending into the low rolling hills of the prairie. The farm is remarkable because it is trying to solve, on a large and commercial basis some of the problems of agriculture in the new west, in a region of light rain fall and of serious seasonal droughts.

I am glad to contrast, in The World's Work, two such unlike establishments as those of Luther Burbank (described in the number for September) and H. D. Watson, because they illustrate so well the varied nature of agricultural problems and show how efficiently these problems are being attacked by men of great ability. It would be difficult to find two types of rural endeavor more unlike than these—one a patient search for new and beautiful varieties of plants and the discovery of laws, the other a masterful organization of a large business founded on the scientific application of agricultural principles.

The Importance of Mr. Watson's Undertaking.

The agriculture problems of the plains are new and largely unsolved. An experiment like this, therefore,

has peculiar value for an immense geographical area these problems are not older than a generation of man, for it is not longer than this that productive farming has succeeded herding on these plains. Every recurring year of drought emphasizes the importance of undertaking fundamental studies of the agriculture of the plains and of making readjustments of farm practice to climatic limitations. Much of the old time practice of corn growing must be given up in some forms of agriculture must be adopted. Even in this dry and hot year, it find any man more sanguine of the agriculture of this region than Mr. Watson is of his.

Nebraska is essentially an agricultural state. It is estimated that its people are about equally divided between the farm and the town. Yet the fear of drought must have had a retarding influence on the development of the state, for a recent census percentage of increase during the last ten years (of population for 1890-1900) is that shown by Nebraska, being less than one-half of one per cent. If this check proves to be only temporary, it will be due in large part no doubt to improved farm practice.

Every great experiment in farm practice is immensely important to the whole country, since agriculture affords so large a proportion of our national wealth. It is to be hoped that the completion of the twelfth census will give us more detailed information of the agricultural status than we have had. It is difficult to engage in farming along with other agriculture is the largest single business measured by the number of persons employed. The census of 1890 reported that the number of persons of ten year and over "engaged" in each specific occupation was 26,650,252. Of these persons agriculture, fishers and mining had 9,692,859. Omitting lumbermen, miners, fishers, gardeners and others, it is found that the number engaged in real farming business is about one third of the entire number of occupied persons. Not all farmers live on farms, there is a tendency, apparently growing, for farmers to live in towns. In whatever way one looks at the problem, however, it will be seen that our self-sustaining farming population is very large, and that the working out of difficulties in any part of the country has interest to a vast constituency.

Watson Ranch.

The organizer and proprietor of this great Nebraska farm is Mr. H. D. Watson, a New Englander and for the greater part of his life a business man. He has had varied experiences east, west and south. Search for health finally took him to central Nebraska. Here he was attracted by the cheap and fertile meadows of the Platte. Land he bought primarily to sell; but the agricultural possibilities of the country had to be demonstrated before land could be sold, and thereby arose the inquiry that led him into being a land buyer and a farmer rather than a real estate dealer.

At first, his agricultural operations followed the customary lines of the region—the growing of grains, grasses. He was caught by the drought of 1890. He was forced to the conclusion that the farmer of central Nebraska must develop a business that shall provide for the contingency of carrying him over the dry years. This he could do in part by storing some of his surplus grain and forage. He should also be able to save more of the water that falls on his land in winter, and this could be accomplished by fall plowing, by preventing wash, by opening and deepening the

soil by means of humus. He could discover some crop that will persist, and if possible, yield a fair return in the dry years. Mr. Watson thought of irrigation, but this is very expensive and it was not immediately available. Moreover most of the farmers could not secure irrigation, and he wanted to aid them with the materials nearest at hand. It was in this dry year of 1890 that his attention was attracted to the behavior of a field of alfalfa standing on one of his pieces of land. This alfalfa withstood the drought. It set him to thinking. In 1893 he laid down twelve acres to alfalfa; now he has 2,500 acres and he is sowing more.

To save the moisture, to utilize this moisture in the growing of the maximum crop, to dispose of this crop to the greatest commercial advantage, to prevent the deterioration of the land—these are the problems which Mr. Watson has set for himself. They may seem simple enough to the uninitiated, but they are difficult of mastery. The fundamental elements in the attack of the problem are three; to grow alfalfa; to sell this alfalfa in the form of animal products; to use the manure for the growing of fruit.

The practical outcome of the business is a fight against drought. Alfalfa will endure much dry weather because of its habit of deep rooting. Like all good farmers, Watson believes in frequent shallow tillage in the growing season in order to reduce the evaporation of the life giving moisture. Many farmers there are, even yet, who till their lands only for the purpose of killing weeds, but these men are far behind the times.

Alfalfa has been chosen as the fundamental crop because it thrives in the region when given proper conditions; because it gathers nitrogen from the air, and thus does not impoverish the soil of this expensive element; because its deep root system brings up food and moisture from great depths and constantly improves the physical condition of the land because it is perennial and thereby does not need re-estabishment every year; and because it is an excellent food for domestic animals. By feeding the alfalfa to stock rather than sell it direct, the farmer should be able, if he is a good manager, to obtain a double profit, to secure an income that is continuous throughout the year, to afford employment to a greater number of men, and to save an important part of the crop in manure. The proof that this general scheme can be made a practical one, in Mr. Watson's estimation, is the fact that he has been able to rent 1500 acres of alfalfa for a term of three years at a rental of \$7,000.00 and in further fact that the income of the dairy already yields a like sum. This result is produced on land of an original selling value of \$7.00 to \$15.00 per acre and with a dairy of less than 200 cows.

To be successful in the growing of alfalfa requires a thorough preparation of the surface soil, and sowing early in the season when moisture is abundant and the land is cool. Sowing one week too late may mean a poor "stand" and an unprofitable series of crops. A fine uniform field of alfalfa may look to be a simple problem; but one has only to try it on a large scale to appreciate the skill that is required to secure it one year with another. Mr. Watson finds that he can average three cuttings of alfalfa every year and he has one field eighteen years old still in good condition. In some of his recent seedings he secured four cuttings. These cuttings average, for one year, from three to five tons of dry forage. This last August, when I visited Watson's

Ranch alfalfa hay was worth \$10.00 a ton; this winter it will probably bring more. This price is high because of the drought; yet it is easy to calculate that there is money in alfalfa, and that a stated income is largely a question of acres.

Never can one see a more satisfying prospect than the great stretches of thick knee-deep alfalfa, purple with its bloom, or the herds of sleek cattle slowly feeding on the soft green carpet of an alfalfa pasture; yet these sights could be seen daily at Watson's ranch in this year of discouraging droughts. One felt that the soft low hills and the wide bottom lands were overflowing with fatness.

Agreat Fruit Farm.

A success of alfalfa having been demonstrated, Mr. Watson's next important agricultural problem was the growing of fruit. In this he had few precedents, and it was thought that this region is not adapted to fruit. Yet, of peaches he now has 6,000 of charries 5,500; and other kinds of fruit. Aside from the apples, many of these fruits are in bearing, and so well assured is he of the practicability of this pomological enterprise that 500 young plum trees, and many young apple trees from which to make plantings in 1902 and 1903. The fruit is as fair and as good as that in any other region. Most of the fruit is planted on the low hills, on land worth \$7 to \$8 per acre, where the soil is hard and dry. The rows of trees follow the contour of the hills and a furrow is plowed just above them, thus is the rainfall caught as it flows down the slopes, and is thereby applied directly to the roots of the trees. The best of surface tillage, pruning, and all the approved methods practiced in the Eastern States or on the Pacific slope are here employed or adapted. For all this fruit the prairie states may be expected to furnish a good market.

While alfalfa, stock and fruit are intended to be the leading enterprises of this great ranch, other farm crops are not neglected; An alfalfa sod affords an excellent preparation for other crops. When plowed under it greatly improves the physical condition of the soil and affords a large store of quickly useable plant food. In the humus-rich soil-the moisture is held. The special crop is planted as early as possible in order that the moisture of the early season may be utilized. Thereafter, frequent surface tillage may be expected to carry the crop through even a dry season. In this present dry year, and without irrigation, Mr. Watson is harvesting good crops of rye, corn, and other things.

The material equipments of Watson's Ranch are now nearing completion, and they are remarkable in variety, extent and completeness. In all successful enterprises the man is more important than the equipment; yet a catalogue of the main features of the equipment will serve to illustrate the breadth of the establishment. The main barn on this ranch is said to be the largest of its kind. It is 317 feet long and 96 feet wide. With each cow in her stall there are accommodations for 350 animals. It has storage capacity for 700 tons of hay. An immense brick silo holds 1200 tons, or the product of 90 acres of corn. Other barns, enormous tool sheds, a creamery buildings to accommodate 300 laying hens and 2000 chicks, workmens cottages, a school house on the premises, comprise other features of the establishment.

All this great development is the result of a personality. Well past fifty years of age, spare of build, quick in movement, well preserved, Mr. Watson is the typical Yankee who has been drilled and steeled in the school of hard personal experience. He is a general in power of quick analysis and forceful organization. He sees things broadly. He quickly separates the great things from the small ones, a power that few men possess. His optimism is unbounded, else he could not have accomplished in thirteen years of his maturer life what would have been too great a task for the lifetime of most men. Unlike many men who have forced their way against great odds, he is an admirer of the student and scientist. For foreman he wants ambitious college trained men.

Such a man cannot be content with the mere establishment of a successful farm, however great the enterprise may be. Mr. Watson abounds in schemes—schemes which are bewildering in their boldness and captivating in their fertility of their imagination, and yet they do not run riot. Some of them reach far beyond this little farm of 8,000 acres on the River Platte. Ultimately, if the plans come to full fruition, this ranch will be a farm school for the central west, for Mr. Watson is by nature a philanthropist. Immediately however, he is planning for a co-partnership farm, on which worthy and energetic young men can be given an opportunity to become model farmers and to gain a competence. He would make 100 farms of 80 acres each, with complete set of buildings. Each farm will be a part of each farmer to rear and maintain all the stock which he is capable.

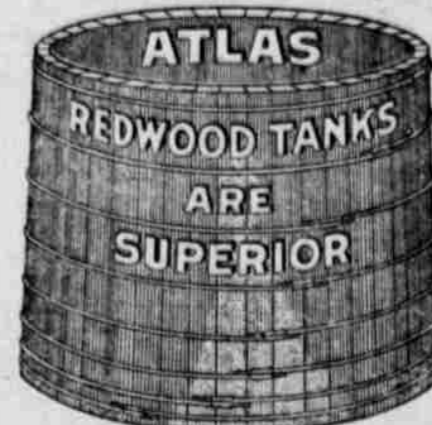
The central dairy herd is to be maintained at approximately 400 head, and the minimum standard butter yield is to be 400 pounds per cow annually. His creamery butter now sells for 20 1-2 cents whereas

common country butter sells for 11 to 12 cents. This difference in connection with abundant cheap feed and well organized labor, is sufficient to turn a handsome profit. For persons of special abilities he would build green houses, set fruit plantations, and establish other particular industries.

The Nose Dive.

"The nose dive is a dangerous maneuver," says an aviation teacher. The nose dive is not only dangerous in aviation, but in julepation as well. A nose dive into a julep is exhilarating, but at last it makes the nose look like a premium strawberry.—Houston Post.

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