

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY MAN REBUILDS HIS LAND WITH LIVE STOCK AND LEGUMES

Worn-Out Cotton and Tobacco Farms Made Rich - Anyone Can Follow the Method Outlined Herewith - Peas, Clovers and Other Legumes Planted With Corn and Small Grain Crop - Good Pasture Quickly Made By Using Waste Fertilizer.

(By F. M. Runnels in Southern Farming.)

Recently I spent two days looking over a string of farms in the Dan Meadows of Rockingham county, owned by B. Frank Mebane. These farms are so sensibly and economically managed, and so successful, that they immediately become an object lesson to the farmers of the South. On these farms I was constantly looking for some ground upon which to base the argument that what applied to these several farms could not be made to apply to the general run of farms in North Carolina and the South, but found none.

I walked over miles of lands that gave every evidence that they were newly transformed. I had testimony of men who had resided for years in that community that fields now rich in blue grass, clover and alfalfa had been a little while ago tracts abandoned by their owners. Mr. Mebane has not as yet gone into the instruction of modern barns and silos. "There is time enough for these things," he said, "when we have proved to the small farmer that soil evolution is of first consideration. I have studiously avoided doing anything on any one of these places that the most helpless farmer could not do. I save what I need of my hay and store it in the old ramshackle buildings constructed a generation ago. My corn is put away in cribs or stalls just as nine-tenths of the farmers of the South put it away.

CORN YIELD INCREASING EACH YEAR.

Just before reaching the Dan River crossing, I saw cornfields that would not yield more than three or four barrels to the acre. Across the bridge in identically the same type of land, we entered cornfields where the yield is from 10 to 12 barrels per acre. On the poor corn commercial fertilizer has been used lavishly, but across the river the land is enriched and made productive by crop rotations, by the planting of peas, and of the clovers, and soy beans.

Here is an instance of how Mr. Mebane increases his own corn yield each year without artificial stimulant, and I give just this instance alone. The field contained about 40 to 50 acres. Although the corn had gotten a late start due to an unusually cold May and June, followed by a threatening drouth, in early August, the plants were vigorous and heavily fruited, in one part of this field the black variety of soy beans had been planted at regular intervals between the corn when the stalks were not quite knee-high. At the last cultivation crimson clover was put in broadcast. At the time I saw this corn, just before maturing, the soy beans were in full fruit, hip high, and the crimson clover was coming on at

as fast a clip as the shade would permit. The roots of the soy beans were a mass of nodules, each as large as a pea. The fine mesh of roots feeding each stalk could not be packed into a quart measure.

A well-known expert, who had visited the fields a few days previous and marveled at the number and size of nodules on these roots, gave it as his opinion that the nitrogen deposited in the soil by reason of them had an actual fertilizing value of \$20 per acre. It is a peculiar fact coming under my personal observation that where a bunch of six or eight vigorous soy bean plants were growing in immediate touch with a stalk of corn, it stimulated rather than retarded the earing.

In another field adjoining, the soy beans had been planted between the corn rows at the time of the last working. The plants were knee high and in full bloom and the roots of each were clustered with nitrogen, drawing bacteria. Just beyond was another field of corn that is equal to anything in the Western corn belt, and between the rows, there was a perfect mass of peas and soy beans, both well fruited. From the first field there will be taken a full corn crop and soy beans that will equal the corn value on the market. Behind them comes the crimson clover. The second field will afford splendid crops of hay from the cutting of the beans. The third field will yield abundantly in peas for marketing, and pea vines and soy beans for winter feeding in addition to the corn; and over the whole, cattle and hogs will graze until January. This thing that I saw can be duplicated by any farmer in the South.

AN INSTANCE WHERE BRAINS HELPED.

On the former old and worn-out places, Mr. Mebane has established his breeding and grazing pasture. He did not do this at once, but these magnificent grass and hayfields are today the result of a period of soil development by natural processes. On the washed hillsides, Mr. Mebane began by planting wheat in the fall, followed by peas and clover as soon as the grain crop was taken off. In September he would put these hillside lands into grass and rye, at each sowing adding a little blue grass seed, some alfalfa and always clover. The following spring would bring on grain again, with more peas and grass.

I saw one demonstration of the application of a practical mind to soil betterment. Just below a rambling old barn surrounded by the usual stock area was a hillside of 15 or 20 acres, which when I walked over it was rank with a growth of mixed blue grass, alfalfa and Japan clover, and here and there some orchard grass. Mr. Mebane had

observed that he was losing a good deal of manure during heavy rains or frosts. With one man and a spade he laid out two or three shallow surface drains that would collect washings from manure piles and focus the waste at a point just outside the corral fence, conveying it in a plain box drain 6 inches under ground to a point 200 feet inside the barren pasture. Laterals started this water in a fan shape down the hill. That simple device with proper rotation results in making a \$100-acre pasture in four years time out of land that was not worth its taxes.

In a pasture of 20 acres, divided about equally between steep sidehill and first bottom, Mr. Mebane had sown blue grass, alfalfa and clover. I saw this pasture early in June. It was grazing then a few sows each with a bunch of six or eight-week-old pigs. In September I walked through this pasture and saw 25 handsome shotes weighing from 100 to 140 pounds, and ready for the packer. I asked Mr. Mebane what it cost him to produce hogs by that system. "By charging land taxes to them," he said, "these hogs have cost me around 10 cents each to raise." Mr. Mebane raises perhaps 500 hogs each year and he does it in this simple, intelligent way. He is a large breeder of registered Herefords, Guernseys and Jerseys, and, as a result, there are many calves on these lands that must be wintered. I asked him how he held down his expense account and he took me through pastures each of about 25 acres. He waded waste high in the roughest mixture of blue grass, clover and orchard grass I ever saw. "Here," he said, "is the answer. The snow may come, but underneath it will be this blanket of nutritious winter feed. I never cut this but allow it to work all summer and fall, storing up as much natural winter feed as it will."

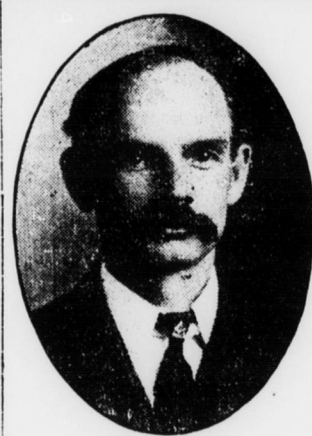
LABOR QUESTION SETTLED.

I was interested in the labor question and asked Mr. Mebane if he had any trouble with tenants on farms given over almost inclusively to grain, grass and livestock. "At first I did," he said, "but I soon found that a little money was a dangerous thing. By selection, I gradually get rid of the tenant who is always in need of a little change and begin to drill the others in the business of helping themselves."

If a tenant wanted one, two, three or four milch cows from my herd, I let him have just as long as he took good care of them paying me a nominal monthly rental. He and his wife were encouraged to produce milk and butter on a small scale, but sufficient to bring in a cash income without interfering with their affairs. I let them take care of on shares; in that way a tenant becomes a meat producer. He is encouraged to raise chickens and sell eggs, adding to his weekly support. I let him have a good, strong mare to make a grain crop, but he must take care of her foal until such time as I want to turn the young mule colt out to pasture. He gets a comfortable home to live in and the usual proportion of hay and grain crops. He farms his land and takes care of the stock according to my instructions, and I am no longer bothered with the tenant problem."

These Dan Meadows farms with their simplicity and economy of operation offer a University training or object lesson to any farmers in the South who can spare expense or take the trouble to spend a day or two there, and see for themselves how success can come, not from disbursement of money but by the employment of man's intelligence, and see a veritable garden of five thousand acres.

The banks of the United States now have so much money they hardly know what to do with it. A year ago banks began piling up reserves and these funds reached such proportions that Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo criticised the bankers for not lending the money to the farmers on easy terms to finance their crops. At that time it was shown that the banks in some instances were carrying reserves as high as 75 per cent. This fall, however, the situation is different. These reserves now represent an actual excess of wealth, for which there is no legitimate demand, whereas a year ago the farmers and small dealers were eager to get loans which the banking institutions withheld from them. -Statesville Landmark.



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