Farm Comments On McDowell County

By F. H. JETER

The folks are talking corn, pastures and dairy cows in the foothill counties of North Carolina, just as they are in the Piedmont. This is quickly learned in a trip to McDowell county. All through the central part of North Carolina there is evidence of more small grain than in many years. There is evidence also of more newly seeded pastures, established on well-prepared land. In parts of central and foothill Caroline, the summer dry spell played havoc with average corn yields but not so in McDowell county. Sam L. Homewood, county agent, says that the average yield of all field demonstration tests, last year, with hybrid corn was 77.43 bushels as compared with only 59.94 bushels for the open pollinated corn. This was an increase of 17.49 bushels in favor of hybrid strains. This season, the hybrid corn yielded 71.9 bushels an acre average compared with 49.5 for the old local varieties. This was just about as good as in 1947 and was an increase of 22.4 bushels per acre in favor of the hybrid strains.

Corn is selling in McDowell county for $1.50 a bushel and thus the net profit from the increased yields runs right at $33.60 an acre. But the significant thing about using these better yielding varieties of corn is that the corn acreage in that county has dropped from 14,000 acres in 1925 to 6,200 acres in 1948. Back in 1925, the county produced 296,380 bushels total, or an average of 21 bushels to the acre. Final figures for this year are not yet available but, in 1947, the county produced 210,000 bushels total with an average yield per acre of 34 bushels. In other words, McDowell farmers have reduced their corn acreage to less than one-half of what it was back in 1925 but are making equally as much corn. In the meantime, they can use this land so released for other crops.

In most cases these released acres are being put to pastures, dairy cows, and poultry. Three hundred acres of new Ladino pasture were seeded in the county this past fall to be added to over 200 acres planted last fall. There are three milk routes running through McDowell and over 100 farm families sell fresh fluid milk every day. Those who have been selling the grade "C" or "shade tree" milk for manufacturing purposes are fast converting over to grade "A" milk for bottling and are getting the better price. Mostly Guernsey and Jersey cows are favored by the local farmers. The dairymen are turning to alfalfa as a hay crop for their cows and quite a few small trial seedings of one acre and above have been made during the last two or three years.

Carl Whiteside, assistant agent, said that McDowell has one of the best dairy calf club foundations in the State. The local civic clubs, the Marion Merchants association and individual businessmen gave $3,000 to help the farm boys and girls of the county to buy 11 Jerseys, 13 Guernseys, and one milking shorthorn. From these 25 original heifers, five calves have been dropped and four heifers will soon be given to other boys and girls to keep the chain growing. The McDowell Calf Club Foundation paid an average of $129.34 each for the heifer calves placed, and Carl says that not one of the young people now owning these purebred animals would have had one had it not been for the foundation. The calves were placed in various parts of the county with selected individuals and each young person given a salf was pledged to grow a pasture and other feed supplies so that the animal would be well fed and would develop properly.

In addition to the dairy cattle and the poultry, there are six herds of beef cattle in McDowell with two of them being large breeding establishments from which first-clas Herefords of the best blood strains can be obtained.

McDowell county farmers are right on the job. Hal Lawing of Glenwood has a flock of 1,200 Parmenter Reds. That is, he did have 1,200 hens until the other day. Hal has a contract with the Valdese Hatchery down in Burke county to supply first-class hatching eggs. He gets 90 cents a dozen wholesale and so he tries to keep only those hens which produce the highest percentage of eggs constantly throughout the year. The other day, he decided that not everyone of those 1,200 hens were laying exactly as they should. He therefore, went into his laying houses and culled the 1,200 down to exactly 1,082 hens. The next day, when he gathered eggs, the 1,082 hens had produced 903 eggs. In other fords, nearly one hundred per cent of the hens were laying. Hal says that's the only kind of hen it pays to keep. If they don't lay he sells them on the market. He also milks ten or twelve cows the year around and, what with his hens and his cows, he and his family get along quite well. They grow lots of feed used by the cows and the hens and so the bi-monthly pay checks are pretty much all profit.

One of the best small farmers in that section of the State is another resident of the Glenwood community. He is W. E. Morgan who owns 220 acres of good McDowell land. I say he is a small farmer because he has only 59 acres in cultivation but he operates this with a tractor, a combine, and all the other mechnaized equipment that goes with tractor farming. Mr. Morgan grows corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, and alfalfa. The ordinary tobacco farmer would wonder how in the world he makes a living from such crops as these. Well, he sells a few beef animals all along during the year; he raises and sells dairy cows and hogs, and much of the food crops grown are sold in this way. He owns two fine Poland China brood sows and there are fifteen pigs out there at present.

He had 47 feeder pigs for sale and quickly disposed of everyone to those who want a pig or two to fatten for Christmas meat. There are lots of textile mills, furniture factories and other small industrial enterprises scattered over McDowell county and the folks who work full time in these plants like to keep a hog to fatten. Mr. Morgan knows about this and has capitalzied on it. He has sold over $500 worth of feedstuffs this season. He even sold $125 worth of oat straw that he raked up after combining his oat crop last June. He got 88 cents a bale wholesale for the straw to be used as stable bedding.

He has 2,000 pounds of excellent lespedeza seed on hand after having sold about 1,200 pounds. This lespedeza, by the way, was the second crop on the land, having followed 29 acres of small grain. Mr. Morgan figures he will save enough of the lespedeza seed to go over all of his present crop of small grain and then will sell the balance. He already has had many inquiries because there is a shortage of good lespedeza seed over most of the State this year.

This farmer grows only purebred stuff. For instance, he grows the new Letoria oat, so well suited to that section, and he sells nearly all of his crop as seed for $1.50 a bushel. Most of his wheat crop, not needed for bread at home, went to a milling company for $2.40 a bushel. Mr. Morgan grows the NC T-20 hybrid corn and says that it averaged 87.6 bushels an acre this year while his old corn produced only 64.16 bushels an acre. He grows about 20 acres of the hybrid and it takes from 7½ hours an acre longer in the field to harvest the old crop than it does the hybrid. Why? The old corn is higher on the stalk and is just naturally harder to gather, he says. He is a member of McDowell's 100-bushel corn club along with some 30 other adult farmers and 4-H club members. He keeps a farm flock of poultry with some extra broilers to sell. He is a member of the County Triple-A Committee and a director in the newly established artifical breeding association.

Nor does Mr. Morgan shy at community work. The Methodists of the Glenwood section will show you with great pride that fine new rural church which Mr. Morgan so greatly helped to build. It is said to be one of the nicest rural churches in that part of North Carolina and Mr. Morgan was one of the moving spirits in getting it constructed and furnished. "We needed a nice place to worship," he said.

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CONSERVATION NEWS

By L. B. HAIRR

Conservation farming pays off, according to A. C. Walker of Pinacle Church community. Mr. Walker recently pointed out that the fertility land of his farm has risen from seven bushels of corn per acre to over 50 bushels per acre within the last five years. He states that he bought and moved on this farm about six years ago. Mr. Walker says that he used terraces, crop rotations, cover crops, soil building crops, lime, fertilizer, barnyard manure, and other recommended land use practices to build up his farm.

P. M. Allison of Old Fort recently had his farm terraced. Mr. Allison was assisted by D. T. Bryant, his tenant, and the local Soil Conservation Service personnel in surveying out the terrace lines. Mr. Bryant and G. C. Tabor constructed the terraces for Mr. Allison.

John McWhirter of Old Fort, Route 1, reports that the terrace outlet channel that he built last fall is working fine. Mr. McWhirter says all the terraces in the field on the north side of the road empty into this channel.

ARMED FORCES

The combined strength of the armed forces reached a total of 1,582,411 on December 1, according to James F. Forrestal, Secretary of Defense. Enlistments and reenlistments for the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force totaled 64,625 during November.

Total agricultural exports for the year are expected to reach 3.4 billion dollars as compared with 3.9 billions in 1947.