



What Farmers Want to Know

By W. F. MASSEY

Go Slow With Untried Crops

MR. C. F. White, who dated his letter from Lonwood, Ala., asked about the advisability of planting several acres in tomatoes and getting a canning outfit as a means of reducing the cotton crop, he proposing to put his product on the general market. I gave a careful reply, and the letter came back, "No such office in Alabama." Hence the inquirer will have to be satisfied with a reply in the paper, since he did not tell me his postoffice address.

I think any such attempt will result in absolute failure. Where I live there are thousands of acres planted in tomatoes for the canning houses, and the price they paid the past season was from \$8 to \$9 a ton for the tomatoes delivered at the factory. Now from what I know of the tomato in the South I am sure that south of Virginia no one can grow tomatoes at the above prices, owing to the prevalence of the Southern bacterial blight. These large canning houses do everything on the most economical scale. No human hand touches the tomatoes after they are skinned, for the whole process is done automatically by machinery, sealing and all. Now these factories, buying tomatoes at the low prices named, say that this season they have worked at a loss, and the product is selling for less than cost. No small canner can compete with these factories on the general markets. You might do some canning for a local market, where you could get the retail price, but small canning is only profitable under these conditions.

What the South really needs is good farming and not experimenting with perishable crops about which we know nothing. Reduce the cotton acreage to one-third of your land and grow small grain, corn, pea hay, and clover on the two-thirds and feed cattle and hogs, and drop all idea of a little trucking, for trucking is a business distinct from general farming, and a farmer with a little truck is handicapped as to freights and commissions, and risks a failure. There is going to be more profit in cattle and hogs than in truck for the general farmer, and the man who farms right, with a good rotation, and grows plenty of forage, will find his land improving till the one-third in cotton will make as much as the whole does now. Don't speculate in "piddling" crops, but go into real farming.

The Usual Idea

FROM Alabama: "I want to reduce my cotton acreage. Do you think it will pay me to buy a small canning outfit and plant one or two acres in tomatoes, and put them on the market? How many cans ought I to get from an acre? Are there any other crops that would pay better here?"

Yes, there are other and less perishable crops. If you have a local market, at a paying price at retail you might make a little. But to can tomatoes for the general market you could not make a cent in competition with the large commercial canneries. In fact they are not making anything this season, though they paid only \$7 to \$9 a ton for the tomatoes.

What one can grow on an acre will depend on the soil and the skill of the cultivator. I live in the greatest tomato-canning section of the United States, and every farmer plants a field of tomatoes for the canning houses, and like every other crop grown, some will make a small crop or about three to four tons an acre, while others will make 10 to 15 tons. Some of the large canners claim that tomatoes are now selling below the cost of canning, even at the prices they paid for the tomatoes, and these

large establishments, where machinery does nearly all the work, can put up the tomatoes cheaper than any small operator, especially in the South, where the crop is so subject to destruction by bacterial blight.

Reduce the cotton acreage, surely, but reduce it by going into regular systematic farming, growing plenty of winter oats, peavine hay, crimson clover, and feeding stock. There is more money for the South in feeding beef cattle and hogs than in canning tomatoes, and more plenty for the farmer who has something to sell besides cotton and at different seasons of the year. Good farming, with a smaller area in cotton and more in small grain and corn and hay is the lesson for Southern farmers to learn now.

Resting Land Is Poor Business

AS MR. Johnson well says, resting land and idle horses are a great expense to the farmer. Land lying out, with old dead corn stalks and dead weeds, is idle and bringing no

lespedeza might do very well. But there is no better summer pasture than cowpeas. Let these get a good growth, and by turning on them before they bloom you can graze them down and take the stock off, and they will start up nicely again. I once pastured a lot of peas down three times before they gave it up. Of course care must be used in turning on them. Do not turn cattle on them hungry, and at first let them stay a short time to avoid danger of bloating. You cannot have any temporary summer pasture better than peas.

There is a Mr. Darling, whose initials I do not remember, who has more oyster shells than any man I know. He is at Hampton, Va., and when I was there last he had a perfect mountain of shells.

Pasturing Clover and Vetch

FROM North Carolina: "I have sown some crimson clover and vetch, and wish to pasture my cattle and hogs on it. But some one tells me that if cattle or hogs eat it when wet it will kill them. What do you say?"

You should never turn cattle on green clover and vetch when they are hungry, as they will gorge themselves and be apt to get bloated. Turn on after feeding and when the crop is

TWELVE THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH

1. Do *not* burn the cotton and corn stalks; plow them under.
2. Keep the plows running every sunny day; now is the time to turn under trash that it may rot and not be in the way of cultivation.
3. Give the garden a liberal fertilization and get the earlier vegetables started.
4. Write your representatives in the Legislature—tonight—about the legislation for farmers so repeatedly urged in *The Progressive Farmer*.
5. Let your United States Senators and Representatives hear from you about our need for a rural credits law.
6. Coöperate with a few of your neighbors and buy your fertilizers in car lots.
7. Roll the stored cotton out and look it over carefully to see whether it is entirely dry and not rotting.
8. Give the farm implements and harness a thorough going over, to see that everything is ship-shape for the spring rush.
9. In plowing the rolling fields don't forget to keep the broad terraces plowed up to the proper height and width.
10. Open all half-filled ditches and drains, that the water may keep moving and that the fields may dry out for spring plowing.
11. Keep after the stumps, weeds and briars that make too many of our fields look slovenly and unbusinesslike.
12. Keep the road drag going that the spring hauling may be made easier.

income, while the field covered now with crimson clover or vetch is making food for the future crops and putting money in your pocket. The best way to rest land is to keep it at work between sale crops, growing something either to feed the soil direct or through its feeding to stock to feed the soil too.

Resting land by letting it merely grow up in weeds is making brow-sweatings for the next season. Then, in reducing the cotton acreage do not let the remainder of the land lie idle, but put it into a rotation, and while planting one-third in cotton have the two-thirds in feed and forage crops. Diversify, of course, but not in a random way by planting a few crops you are unfamiliar with and of a perishable nature, but diversify in a systematic way and go into real farming.

Temporary Pasture

FROM North Carolina: "Please give me a mixture of some kind of clover and grass or something I can seed in spring, and use for grazing cattle in the summer. I have plenty of crimson clover, rye, etc., for the winter, having saved 50 bushels or more of crimson clover seed myself and have bought as many more. Where can I buy oyster shells to grind?"

I do not know any clover and grass mixture that you could sow in the spring and make much of a pasture the same summer. A good sowing of

dry, and at first let them stay but a short time. If the clover is wet it will be more apt to bloat them till they get accustomed to it. Otherwise it will not hurt them. But it will not be good for the land to have stock run on it in wet weather.

Veneer Dirt Bands

FROM Mississippi: "How do you manage the veneer dirt bands for getting early tomato plants? Are the seed planted in these folded bands, and bands taken out of the hotbed and set in the cold frames? A neighbor did his watermelons that way once, but did not plant the seed till March under cloth, but if a hotbed is to be made to start the seed in January or February it would require a great deal of space for the hotbed. Will the Earliana do as a shipping tomato? I intend to plant several acres for the St. Louis and Chicago markets. The land is fairly well drained bottom land. Those who planted such land near here did best, but the season was unusually dry."

Those who use the dirt bands for tomatoes sow the seed either in greenhouse or hot bed and transplant the plants when large enough to the bands in the cold frames. I do not use the bands, for I have found the earthenware pots more convenient and in the long run far cheaper. I can buy three-inch pots, freight included, for about \$4 a thousand, and they last many years, and it is very

easy to knock the plants out with the balls. I use the greenhouse and sow the seed in shallow boxes, and then get them into pots as soon as large enough, and later knock them out of the pots and set them in the cold frames, four inches apart each way. They are there hardened off, and they lift with a ball of earth and are as easily transplanted as from bands and never wilt with me. They can be set up on a light board carrier and taken to the field. For an early crop I would prefer to plant on high sandy loam soil, rather than on the bottom land, as the fruiting will certainly be earlier. A good strain of Earliana will do well for the first shipping, but Bonny Best is a close second and a much better tomato.

Top-dressing Pastures

I HAVE often told of the pastures in northern Maryland which have for many years been top-dressed with bone meal. Dr. Henry Wallace tells in Wallace's Farmer of the experiments made by Prof. Brooks, at the Massachusetts Experiment Station, where he saw pasture land top-dressed with basic slag on which was the densest sod he had ever seen in this country, while the part of the field left without top-dressing had no grass worth pasturing.

In the South the pasture is usually a piece of waste land that is allowed to take care of itself, and grows everything but grass. There is no part of the farm that pays better for being taken care of and fertilized than the permanent pasture. Grass needs feeding as much as any crop grown.

Fighting Rats

FROM Alabama: "What can I do to prevent rats destroying my corn in my barn? My corn crib is part of the barn. Is there anything I can put in the corn when housing it that will drive the rats or kill them?"

The best way to get rid of rats is to build a rat-proof corn crib apart from any other building. There is nothing you could put with the corn to kill rats without spoiling the corn for use. If you are compelled to keep it in the barn, then keep plenty of cats. I have cats that never come into the dwelling house, but they keep all rats and mice out of all the outbuildings, as every door has a hole to admit them.

Planting Magnolia Seed

FROM Arkansas: "I have some magnolia seed and would like to know the correct way to plant them, as I am anxious to grow some trees."

Clean off the pulp from the seed and sow them at once in a well prepared bed and cover about two inches, and they will grow in spring. Let them remain one season in the seed bed, and the following spring take them up and pull off all the leaves and transplant to rows where they can be well cultivated till large enough for the final transplanting. But in transplanting always take off the leaves, so that the roots will have a chance to recover before much evaporation takes place.

Coal Ashes

COAL ashes are worthless as a fertilizer, but I have found that fine sifted coal ashes are valuable as a mulch to retain moisture in dry weather. I have found nothing better for tomatoes than a mulch of sifted coal ashes, applied rather thickly around the plants. I have had tomato plants go straight through the entire summer green and healthy and productive till frost when mulched with coal ashes from which the coarse parts have been screened. In the driest weather the soil will keep moist under them.

If J. R. L., whose letter is from Linwood, N. C., will send his name I will answer his letter. I do not answer unsigned letters.