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Timely Farm Suggestions

By TAIT BUTLER

Compare Different Grades of Lime by the Analyses

OUR readers are again reminded that we cannot give an opinion on the relative values of different kinds or brands of lime without knowing the analysis or the degree of purity.

A reader wants to know how "oyster shell lime" compares with "burned lime." All that can be told him is that oyster shell lime, if well burned, is usually of a high grade of purity; but we can tell him nothing about how it compares with any given sample of burned rock lime. The purity of rock lime varies. It may or may not be equal to oyster shell lime.

Why is it that it is so difficult to make it understood that all lime is not of the same degree of purity and, hence, not all of the same value? To ask which of two samples of lime, or which of two samples of ground limestone, is cheaper without stating the analyses, or indicating the degree of purity, is like asking the size of an ear of corn. Buy lime on its analysis, and if you do not understand this analysis send it to us and we will be glad to help you; but it is useless to ask us for an opinion regarding different samples of lime unless you send the analyses.

Buying Feed for Hogs

A CORRESPONDENT who has a sow and six pigs and seven shoats, and must buy all feed except four barrels of slops a week, asks whether it will pay to keep these pigs and buy feed, or sell them.

Of course, we cannot answer this question in a way that will be of any definite value, for the two most important factors in determining results are unknown to us. These two are the man and the pigs. At the present price of corn and tankage as compared with hogs, we believe that having four barrels of slops a week it is possible to make the feeding of these pigs profitable and buy all the feed required over and above the four barrels of slops. If the man is a good feeder, that is, if the pigs are properly fed and cared for and are of fairly good quality, a bushel of corn ought to yield at least 10 pounds of gain. It will do this if about 1 part of tankage by weight is mixed with 8 parts of corn. If the pigs will pay for the slops and tankage and in addition give 10 pounds of gain, live weight, for every bushel of corn consumed, and they should do better than that, there will be some profit in feeding the pigs at present prices.

Cheapest Source of Nitrogen

A READER wishes to know whether he should "use cottonseed meal, nitrate of soda, or sulphate of ammonia to supply nitrogen for cotton."

There is not much difference in the value of a pound of nitrogen from any of these sources. It is, therefore, largely a question of the guaranteed content of nitrogen in each and the prices at which they can be bought. As this necessary information has not been furnished and the prices will vary in different sections, we cannot give a definite answer. When nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia, or a combination of the two, is used for supplying nitrogen to cotton, possibly a small amount should be put in at planting and the balance used as a side-dressing, after the cotton has been chopped out and begun to make some growth. This is possibly not necessary except on sandy soils, but if the season is wet there is danger of greater loss from leaching if all is put out at planting time. When cottonseed meal is used it may be put out at or before planting. In addition to the nitrogen, cottonseed meal contains 2.8 per cent of phosphoric acid and 1.8 per cent of potash, the value of which should be deducted in calculating the cost of the nitrogen.

Sulphate of ammonia has, on some markets, furnished nitrogen cheapest this year. Cottonseed meal is cheaper in some markets than two months ago, but either nitrate of soda or sulphate of ammonia will probably supply a pound of nitrogen at less cost.

HOW BIG A FARM?

The Size of the Man and the Kind of Farming Are Important Factors to Consider

"WHAT size should the farm be to produce the best returns?"

This question is often asked, but one might about as well ask the size of an ear of corn or an Irish potato. The kind of farming, the capital available and especially the "size" of the man who manages it are all important factors which influence the answer to this question.

The first point to be clearly set forth is just what is meant by the "farm." In some cases 1,000 acres is regarded as a "farm", when as a matter of fact there are 20 to 40 distinct units, or in reality 20 to 40 small farms, which are generally accepted as making up one large farm.

If the question refers to the farm unit and not to the number of these that may be grouped under one management, then the answer depends on the kind of farming, the available capital for financing the farming operations and the ability of the farmer; but if it refers to the number of farm units, or the number of Negro families which can be looked after by one man, then the size is only limited by the activities and ability of the manager.

If the acreage or the farm unit be too small, the expense per acre for the implements and machinery necessary to do economical and efficient work will be too great, and yet without this equipment the operator of the farm cannot obtain the best financial results. For instance a man with 40 acres, on which only 5 to 10 acres of small grains are grown, cannot afford to own a binder, and yet there is no question but the binder is necessary to the most economical harvesting of these crops. This same principle applies as to all equipment of large cost and limited use. For a small acreage one cannot afford high-priced implements that can only be used for a few days out of each year, no matter how efficient these implements may be in accomplishing work. On the other hand, a farm of more than 300 acres, or possibly of more than 500 acres at the most, is generally too large for the best results. The reasons are that there is too much for one manager to look after well, if a good type of farming is done, and the distances from the central point or from the farm buildings, or from the most distant parts of the farm, are so great that much time is lost in going to and from work and in hauling crops or products.

It is only by carefully studying the earnings of a large number of farms in relation to the cost and to the incomes of the farm workers, that such a question can be answered in a way to fit the average farm and farmer. In so far as I know, there are no data gathered from or based on Southern conditions which will enable anyone to say what is the best size of farm for Southern crops and conditions. But basing an opinion on data relating to other conditions and sections, it is perhaps safe to state that for mixed or general farming of the safest and best type the farm should not be smaller than 150 to 200 acres of improved land, and probably not larger than 400 or 500 acres.

The American farmer, while only producing about one-half as much per acre, has by larger farms and the greater use of labor-saving machinery earned much more per man than the European farmer. If the farm is large enough to use three or more work animals and to afford labor for too, three or more men, and the acreage in crops is large enough to justify the purchase of the best or most efficient machinery, the earnings will be larger. In general farming it requires at least 200 to 300 acres to supply those conditions. Intensive farming may and generally does produce more per acre; but extensive farming, up to a certain limit at least, brings larger returns per man.

THIS YEAR'S COTTON ACREAGE

The Present Outlook Is for an Increase, Though It Is Practically Certain That Any Considerable Increase Will Mean Low Prices and Financial Disaster

A READER asks my opinion as to the "acreage that will be planted to cotton in 1916."

I have no means of knowing what the acreage will be, nor has anyone else, for that matter, at this time; but from a study of what has been done in past years, in increasing or decreasing the acreage in accord with the price of cotton, I make the guess that we will in 1916 plant about as many acres as in 1914, which was less than the acreage of 1913. This does not mean that the cotton crop of 1916 will equal that of 1914; but it does mean that such is quite possible. We made a large reduction in 1915, but not much, if any, larger than was made once before as a result of five-cent cotton.

The records of production and prices show that, as the price of cotton so the acreage. I see no good or sufficient reason why it should not also be true this year. In the past, when a low price for cotton has reduced the acreage the price has gone up, and when this increase in acreage has continued from one to three years the price has invariably gone down. We decreased the acreage last year, and the smaller crop, together with the demand occasioned by the war, put up the price. When we have received a good price for one crop we have nearly always increased the acreage the next year.

It is doubtful if we shall entirely forget the lessons of 1914-1915, but there is a regular or usual increase in the acreage averaging between 3 and 5 per cent. From 1905 to 1913 the increase was nearly 27 per cent. If we plant no more in 1916 than we planted in 1914, we have at least avoided any increase since 1913, which under normal conditions would probably have been around 4 per cent a year, or between 10 and 12 per cent for the three years, which will mean a considerably larger acreage in feed or other crops than we had in 1914.

But if we go back to the acreage of 1913 and 1914, it will probably mean disaster from low-priced cotton. The prices of feedstuffs are certain to be high, and there is positively no such evidence to justify us in believing that the price of cotton will not be much lower if we grow above 15,000,000 bales, or if we even grow as much as 14,000,000 bales.

The fight against a large acreage in cotton has always been made on a wrong basis. It was not so much the fight against cotton in 1915 that reduced the acreage as the very low price received for the 1914 crop. When we make the fight against too large an acreage in cotton on an intelligent grasp and understanding of soil fertility it will be much more effective. Cotton on more than one-third of the cultivated lands of the Cotton Belt means poor soils, and poor soils mean poor people and a poor country as a whole, regardless of the fluctuations in the price of any farm product.

We cannot build up and maintain soil fertility without an intelligent cropping system, planned with a full knowledge and understanding of soil fertility and its requirements.

The farmer has just as good right and about the same inclination to gamble on cotton as has the business man or the cotton buyer; but if once made to see that there is no "gamble" in it, but a downright certainty that his soils will remain poor so long as he plants more than one-third the land in any one crop, then he will be inclined to plant those crops which will enable him to improve his yields, and that may incidentally be used to supply the food and feed needs of the farm.

The trouble with the basis on which the fight on cotton has been made is that any man can take a pencil and piece of paper and show that with cotton at a good price he can make more money than in growing other crops, and he is willing to gamble on the price. But there is no gamble on the question of soil fertility. It is as certain as night follows day that poor soils follow any one crop system, and our 185 pounds of lint cotton and 18 bushels of corn per acre are the proofs in our particular case.

Cut the Cost of Production by Better Farm Management

THE business of farming, especially in the South, has not been conducted on the same basis on which other business enterprises are conducted. In fact, only recently has a careful study been made of farm management, and even yet we are lacking the facts regarding Southern farming which would enable one to lay down rules by which the management of any particular farm might be directed. But certain facts are reasonably well established and should receive more serious attention.

For instance, not less than three horses or mules can do some kinds of farm work efficiently and economically. This is well understood and pretty generally accepted, and yet most farm units in the South consist of one horse or mule, or, at most, of two small horses or mules. Even our large farms, many of them at least, are to all intents and purposes 20 to 40-acre farms with one or at most two inefficient horses or mules.

The same sort of a fact has been pretty well established that not less than two men can do efficient, economical work on a farm, because some kinds of work cannot be done to the best advantage by one man.

We have given almost no attention to the most economical use of man and horse labor on our farms, and yet these constitute the two greatest items of expense in the production of crops. Until we give more attention to reducing the cost of production, by a study of farm management, profits will be small, no matter what the market and marketing conditions may become.