

Conserving the Farm Timber Supply

Prize-winning Letters from Progressive Farmer Readers

BUILD A "FIRE LINE" TO PROTECT YOUR TIMBER

Mr. Akerman's Plan Here Described Is One Thousands of Farmers Should Adopt—Best Methods of Fighting Fire Explained—First Prize Letter

TO MY mind the most important thing to do for our timber lands is to protect them from fires. Fires injure the mature trees, they kill the seedlings, and they burn up the seeds that are lying among the leaves and litter. Aside from the injury to the larger trees it is clear that a stand cannot be maintained when the seeds and seedlings are destroyed at frequent intervals.

The injury does not stop with the trees. Fires burn the leaves and litter, and this lessens the fertility of the soil. As some one put it, "You cannot make humus out of smoke." Nature can make it out of leaves and litter; so nature should be given a chance to make humus—the thing that most of our soils are deficient in.

Fires Often Do \$4 Per Acre Damage

IT IS not easy to reckon the cost of a fire in money. I once made a careful estimate of the damage done by a woods fire here in the Piedmont region. As nearly as I could reduce the damage to dollars and cents, it amounted to \$4 an acre. This seems to be about the average for this region. It is worth while to try to prevent a loss as great as that.

My experience in fighting woods fires goes back to the old farm in Bartow County, Georgia, where I was born. Our woods were back on a mountain on the east side of the place. At that time it was a common practice to set the woods afire every winter. This practice was based on the belief that burning the woods increased the grass and so made a better range for cattle. We had no stock law, and many persons let their cattle range in the woods beyond our place. If one of them did not set the woods afire another would. These fires burned parts of our fence several times and ran over a part of our woods before we could put them out. We wanted to protect our fences and our woods, and by turning out promptly we probably had smaller losses than most farmers in the county. But there is a simple device that would have helped us immensely, had we known about it. We should have run a "fire line" along the side of our place where the greatest danger was.



A "Fire Line" and How to Make One

I AM now in charge of Shamrock Farm here in Greene County. I am glad to say that there is a much better sentiment about fires than there used to be, and yet fires often occur in our neighborhood. To lessen the risk I have run a "fire line" along a part of our boundary. The woods of others touch us along that line; and there is more danger of a fire crossing than at other points.

The fire line is about 15 feet wide. We made it by raking the leaves towards the center along each side of it, so as to make narrow paths; then we burned the space between the paths. When burning the line there was a light breeze; so we kept the fire a little ahead on the lee side of the line. This lessened the chance of the fire jumping over the path. We were also careful to go back over the line several hours after it was burned, to be sure that the fire was out.

The "fire line" is about a mile long. It cost about \$10 to make; and it costs about \$5 to burn it over each year. This is a small outlay as compared with the help it gives us in protecting several hundred acres of timber.

Fire lines are a help and only a help. The surest protection comes



A COMMON EXAMPLE OF WASTE IN CUTTING TIMBER

from a healthy sentiment among the neighbors and an understanding with the hands that they are to turn out if a fire occurs. Our hands on Shamrock know that they are to come on the run when the farm bell tolls. We have had to use the bell only once this year. In ten minutes after it tolled we had four men at the danger point a mile from headquarters.

Best Methods of Fighting Fire

AS TO tools to fight fires with, my experience is that it pays to take an ax, a hoe, and a rake when going to a fire. The main reliance is on pinetops, cut as they are needed. The rake is useful in pushing back smoldering leaves after the blaze has been knocked out with a pine top. The hoe is handy where there is a mat of grass and the fire creeps along through it; by beating the fire down with a pine top and then cutting to the sod with a hoe the fire can be stopped. It seems a simple matter to beat out a fire with a pine top. And yet I have had to show my hands that a blow should come a little slanting towards the fire. At first most of them hit straight down; and in doing so often scatter the fire instead of knocking it back.

Another thing that experience has taught me is that it pays to send a man around the edges of a burned area after the fire appears to be out. One fire broke out three times after it was beaten out; and but for the precaution of having a man there, all of our work would have been lost.

ALFRED AKERMAN.
Greensboro, Ga.

HASTENING THE CEDAR'S GROWTH

The Cedar Tree Is Fast Disappearing, Prices Are Soaring, and High Prices Are Certain—Second Prize Letter

THAT little grove of cedars in the ravine on the back side of the pasture may never be worth anything to you in your life time, but it may be worth a great deal to your children or your grandchildren, if you take care of it. It used to be the common belief that the so-called "scrub cedar" never grew into the stately cedar tree that is one of the most valuable of all timbers. But this was a mistaken idea. The "scrub cedar" does eventually make the large cedar tree, but few men ever live long enough to witness the transformation.

But the growth of the young cedar can be hastened to some extent, and the work necessary to hastening the growth of the tree also causes it to grow a smoother and straighter trunk. First the underbrush, such as briars, bushes, and other worthless material, should be cleared away, then the lower limbs of the cedar sapling should be trimmed off as far up as a man can reach with saw or ax. This work should be done with

a sharp instrument, so that the tree will not be left in a bruised or ragged condition. Of course, the larger and taller the sapling is the higher up it can be pruned with safety, but this high pruning often endangers the life of the tree.

After the pruning is done, all limbs and brush should be removed from the ground, to prevent all danger of fire. A young cedar grove, once swept by fire, never amounts to anything afterwards.

A young cedar grove should never be thinned out. The thicker the trees are, the more rapid will be the growth and the better timber they will make. Careful pruning is all that is necessary to start them off to growing. I have seen this method of hastening the cedar's growth thoroughly demonstrated during the past 20 years, and I am convinced that the cedar sapling which has been carefully pruned will grow to the size of a telephone post 10-years in advance of the unpruned tree.

People are just beginning to realize the value of cedar timber. The vast cedar brakes that once dotted our country are gone, and in most cases the owners of these brakes realized very little for their timber. Lumber companies bought them for a song, and as they cut out the larger timber they broke down and destroyed the smaller growth. I knew of one cedar brake in our community that was sold for \$500 25 years ago. If this brake were standing today it would probably be worth \$20,000.

WHITNEY MONTGOMERY.
Eureka, Texas.

KEEP ALL THE ACRES PRODUCTIVE

Mr. Moore Says That in Clearing New Land We Are Often Too Destructively Industrious—Third Prize Letter

THE Progressive Farmer has often and long been showing the folly of our trying to cultivate so many acres that we really cultivate none. However, the Southern farmers have not quit it, and until they do, it should not be a high crime to call it up again once in a while. We all know that most of us do it, but can any of us give any valid reason why we do so?

It would be bad enough if it were only a waste of labor, for that is a precious commodity. But when we add a small per cent to the acreage in any crop to what it would take to satisfy the market, we tend, by just so much, to depress or to glut the market. It adds also to the risk we run in producing and saving that crop. But if we did not cultivate that spare acre, and would let it alone, most any acre in the South would soon bring us a crop much more sure, much more profitable, and a hundred-fold more enduring. I mean the biggest crop in the world, trees. Our lands would all bear trees if simply let alone.

A stand of trees yielding an income in mast, fuel or timber, if properly dealt with, will keep it up indefinitely, and be no worse. We might call it an income in perpetuity; an endowment for your children. In order to grow a crop of forest trees at least two things are essential: the available seed, and fire kept out. When a tract is already set to timber, and you cut all, leaving no tree to produce seed of the kind you want, and then burn the very land itself, by what right do you expect another growth of the kind you had?

We are still practicing the same methods of wanton destruction today on our forest that the pioneers practiced on the buffalo and other wild animals,—wasteful, criminal destruction. The only reason we have not reached the same result, extermination, is that there were so many more trees. But unless we hold up, it is in course of time just as inevitable.

Why will we persist in clearing a piece of ground for cultivation which will sell for less, or bring less rental than if it had not been cleared? We are destructively industrious.

ZENO MOORE.
Whitakers, N. C.

