

Our Farm Department

Devoted to the Interest of Those Who Till the Soil

CONDUCTED BY J. M. BEATY

Preparation of the Soil for Cotton.

It is at this period in the year that many of our soils are injured by mismanagement. The plow is put to work before the soil has dried sufficiently to insure crumbling into a good friable seed bed. Clods are formed that cannot be pulverized by any ordinary method of cultivation during the entire summer, and perhaps not until several years have elapsed. The plant food in a clod is sealed up as effectively as though in a dry heap under roof. The greater the proportion of the soil that is made into clods the less is that left to hold moisture and nourish plants. Before starting the plow take up a handful of the soil from near where the bottom of the furrow is to be, grip it firmly in the hand for a second then give it a whirling toss so it will strike the ground some eight or ten feet away. If it breaks up and falls apart the plows may safely be started; if the mass clings together, better wait a bit before starting the plow.

If you would do a very good job, let the harrow follow close after the plow, especially if your soil is of sticky, stiff or clayey nature. By following such course it may not be possible to get quite as many acres planted to cotton, but the extra yield per acre on account of the better preparation will more than offset the acre shortage.

When there is considerable land yet to be plowed and a hard rain has fallen, it may be wise to put a team to the harrow before the ground is dry enough to plow, thus going over as much of that yet to be plowed as possible. The harrow, by breaking up the surface, prevents evaporation and thus prolongs the period before the soil may become too dry and hard to break well. Thus much time may be saved and much more land may be prepared for crops than by other methods.

Even when the ground is plowed it is not the part of wisdom to rush the planting at the expense of thoroughness in pulverizing and smoothing the soil. Work done with a good harrow before the rows are laid off is the best and cheapest cultivation the crop on average soil can possibly receive. The harrow, when judiciously used, aids in warming and finding the soil and consequently hastens the growth of the crop to be planted a little later. The soil must be warm and fine in order that plant growth may progress rapidly.

On well drained, properly prepared land high beds upon which to plant are not needed. The planting should be nearly on a level; quicker germination of the seed and a better stand may be counted on by such planting. Improved implements and better methods of tilling can be employed, the work may be done at a lower cost and better crops will be secured.

The first cultivation should be given shortly after the seed go into the ground. The ordinary smoothing harrow or a weeder run parallel with the rows or even crossing them at a slight angle may be used at that time, and again when the plants are two or three inches high, thereby reducing the hand and hoe work throughout the season.—The Cotton Journal.

We Should Make Crops Cheap.

It is not merely the big crop of cotton that causes the misery in the South, but the big crop grown at an enormous cost on twice as many acres as would be needed to make the same crop by good farming with smaller area in cotton, and more in grain and forage crops. We need not worry about the big crop if we averaged a bale per acre over the Cotton Belt, for there would be more profit in a lower price than now in a comparatively high one. It is the enormous cost of making the crop which causes the misery. Reducing the acreage will not amount to much unless the remaining acres are well employed in promoting the productiveness of the soil, and getting not only "supplies" for the grower, but for sale, too.

Then, after the crop is baled, what an enormous loss is sustained from letting it lie outdoors and get damaged, and a big discount made on it.—W. F. Massey.

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At Planting Time.

We are all now getting ready to put seed into the ground. After any crop is planted the first great step in crop making is passed. Before that step is taken let us consider a few facts having great bearing on the returns from our crops.

The number of acres planted is the greatest factor in influencing the total of any crop. The total crop produced is the chief factor in determining the profit of every man who has any part in producing that crop.

The yield—supply—is the basis of value. It determines the price. These facts apply with special force to cotton.

For several years we have counted cotton which is distinctly a mark on a great falling off in total crop of cotton because of boll weevil damage. Before the weevil came we figured on other dispensations of Providence to shorten the crop and increase prices.

There has rarely been a year when we have not argued short crop during the growing season and harvested a full crop in the fall. Last year we talked twelve million bales and now find that we produced nearly thirteen and a half million bales.

The incontestable facts of a generation's experience seem to prove that a really short crop of cotton is almost impossible. We are bound to make plenty of cotton—all the world can use at profitable prices—in spite of drought, flood, blight, black-root, boll weevil, bad farming, and the devil.

We all know this; we all admit it when we are honest. Most of us are honest at least in streaks and at times.

At planting time is a good time to practice the honesty claimed. Let's admit that a big cotton crop will be planted, and that in all human probability a full crop will be harvested. Let's give up rainbow chasing, quit counting on dire calamity to some other cotton planter to help keep prices up on our own little infinitesimal part of the crop.

If we urge reduction in acreage let's not depend on our neighbor to do the reducing and hurry up to get in as many more acres as possible ourselves.

Now, at planting time let's plan and plant on the basis of a boom crop. If it comes, we will be ready. If it does not come we can thank Heaven that the signs failed.—Southern Ruralist.

Soil.

(Paper presented to the Johnston County Teachers Association on March 13, 1909, by Mr. J. H. Burke, teacher at Fellowship in Pleasant Grove township.)

The layer of surface earth that covers the globe on which we live is called soil. The harder layer of surface earth is called sub soil. All things get their sustenance from this thin layer of soil. If it were washed away by the powerful currents of water, scarcity of food would be the inevitable result. This soil is covered with many plant growing crops. It will be interesting to know how this soil was originated.

It is conceded that surface of the earth was once solid rock and that this rock was changed into soil by the agencies of nature—namely heat and cold, water and frost. Heat and cold are co-workers. This mass of rock, in early times, was hot and on contracting broke into many pieces. Cracks or fissures were left and water ran in these cracks and froze. These rocks again expanded and broke into finer pieces. This process went on for years, until the soil was fit to grow large vegetable plants.

Running waters again acted on these small rocks and deposited them in low lands. Masses of ice were formed in the northern part of North America by the long period of winter. The climate changed and these masses of ice began to move, carrying with them rocks and earth. The rocks were pulverized and deposited in deltas, and low lands.

Air and moisture affect rock. When rocks are exposed to air they crumble. In this way much of the soil was formed. On this mass of rock year after year were deposited in small plant-like mosses grew, and year after year were deposited in this forming soil, until larger plants could flourish.

The soil should be thoroughly and well tilled in order that the air may freely circulate through it. Air that passes through soil crumbles it. The carbonic acid in the air is the principal agent that softens or crumbles the soil.

An intelligent and successful farmer will gradually deepen this soil so that the plants can have a larger territory from which to get food. Plants, like men, cannot live without a sufficient supply of water. They drink their water through their roots and it is very necessary that the soil be in a fit condition to hold water for the plants.

Drainage is also essential to soil. A surplus amount of water will not admit enough air to circulate through the soil. The soil should be manured, because each year some of the plant food is used. A very profitable way to manure, is to raise hay; feed it to cattle; then the manure can be returned to the soil. By this process a reasonable profit is gained, and the land is not being robbed of its fertility.

Raise More Meat.

Of the pork consumed in the South only a small per cent is home grown. The States to the North and West produce feeds on high-priced land and feed it to hogs in high-priced barns and pens, ship them over high-priced railroads to a high-priced city where they are unloaded by high-priced men, yarded in high-priced yards, sold at high-priced slaughtering establishments. The product comes out as high-priced meat on which high freight rates are to be paid in order that it may be put into Southern markets, where the great bulk of it will be furnished farmers' families and laborers, that they may concentrate time and strength in making cheap cotton. Cotton seems to be the only cheap thing in the whole line. Grains, meats and everything that comes between them and the cotton crop is high in price. It seems that the part of wisdom requires that the Southern farmer grow some of the high-priced products.—The Cotton Journal.

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