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Dairymen

Beware!

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FRENCH WEED — PEPPER GRASS

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FRENCH WEED and PEPPER GRASS cost the Minnesota dairy industry over a million dollars in 1935. The Minnesota Dairy Industry Committee, an organization representing all branches of the dairy industry in Minnesota, announces that weedy-flavored cream will receive a much larger price discount this year than in the past, because of losses sustained from the purchase of such cream in 1935. On many shipments losses ran over 7 cents a pound. Some butter could not be sold at all for consumption.

FRENCH WEED or STINK WEED is common throughout the Red River Valley and is spreading in other parts of the state. It causes most trouble after the seeds mature. As little as five ounces of the seed consumed by the cow daily will cause an off flavor. French Weed imparts a garlic-like flavor to the butterfat that cannot be removed or covered up, and small amounts spoil a whole churning of butter. In extreme cases the butter is unsalable.

PEPPER GRASS causes trouble early in the spring, when cows eat the green plant. The area generally infested is the 50-mile strip bordering South Dakota. Pepper Grass imparts to butter a very disagreeable sweetish taste that seems to become more intense with age of cream and butter. In 1935 much of the butter made from such cream could not be sold for consumption.

Many of the off flavors in cream can be eliminated by proper handling by the creamery operator, but no

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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION DIVISION
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means have been found for removing the French Weed or Pepper Grass flavor. As little as 15 per cent of off-flavored cream will give the whole churning of butter an off flavor.

A drastic cure.—Taking cows off the infested pasture four to five hours before each milking will eliminate most of the trouble. The production of the herd may be lowered as a result of cutting the grazing time to only seven hours between milkings. It also involves taking the cows from the pasture about midnight to prepare for the morning milking, or keeping them off the pasture all night. Barn feeding will be necessary to maintain production.

Better management also a cure.—It seems that cows graze these weeds, especially French Weed, from necessity. Plenty of other feeds give the cows some choice, and they prefer good grass to weeds. When there is an abundance of pasture, less trouble may be expected. Therefore, enlarge and improve the pasture area. A thick stand of grass tends to crowd out the weeds. If the pasture is thin, drill in grain—rye or oats and sweet clover. If it is a permanent pasture, seed in alfalfa, sweet clover, timothy, and brome grass.

Alternating and clipping.—Dividing the pasture into two or more lots, grazing them alternately at 10-day intervals, will help maintain a thick stand of grass and increase the yield. The weed pests can be clipped with the mower when the blossom and seed heads shoot up.

The drouth thinned out permanent pastures in this area and increased the stands of these weeds. Prompt action is needed on the infested dairy farms if serious loss is not to result to the owners. Keeping the cows off the pasture until the grass gets a good start in the spring will help.

It is possible that with a return to more normal rainfall and better pasture less trouble will prevail, but on thin pasture areas difficulty is more or less certain. Pepper Grass and French Weed are both annuals that can be held in check by rotation of crops and proper cultivation methods. In the long run the cure lies here, not only for these two weeds but for several others that also cause off flavors in cream and butter.

See your county agent and creamery operator for more details on identification of these weeds. Action is needed if dairymen are to avoid big losses through lower prices for off-flavored cream.