

Alfalfa, the Crop Profitable



Wherever alfalfa can be grown successfully and economically, it produces more valuable crops of hay, both in quantity and in quality, than any other plant available. In addition, it puts the land in better condition for such crops as may follow.

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"Alfalfa uses all the season and it uses all the soil. . . . Because of its immense root growth, it withstands drought better than any other crop. Not only does it give the largest yield, but it is exceedingly rich in that most important and expensive food element, protein. A ton of alfalfa hay contains as much protein as a ton of bran. . . . Alfalfa is also valuable as a soil builder. . . . It adds to the soil more nitrogen and more humus than any other leguminous crop."

That is the testimony of J. F. Connor, a farmer of Redwood Falls.

Alfalfa growing on a majority of the farms in Minnesota is not difficult, says A. C. Arny, University Farm, St. Paul. Where the soil is acid, it is necessary to apply lime or marl, as in southeastern Minnesota or in the sandy lands between the twin cities and Bemidji, but with lime treatment the crop may be grown profitably. Well drained lands are also necessary. Alfalfa is the salvation of sandy land farms.

Grimm alfalfa recommended

Minnesota grown Grimm alfalfa is the safest variety to plant in Minnesota.

When conditions are at all favorable, from 12 to 14 pounds of seed to the acre

is enough. On light sand it is sometimes necessary to reseed once or even twice in the same season, owing to the killing of young plants by blowing sand.

Inoculation increases both root and top growth. Inoculation is accomplished by mixing soil taken from the top three or four inches of a vigorous sweet clover patch with the alfalfa seed, pound for pound. The soil is taken under cover, sifted, and then dried gradually. When seeding time arrives, the seed is moistened and then mixed with the dried inoculated soil.

Preparation of the seedbed

On the heavy, moisture-retaining soils of Minnesota, alfalfa may be sown early in the spring with grain, in the same manner as clover. A firm, well prepared seedbed gives best results. Fall plowed, well harrowed fields provide these conditions. From one-half to three-quarters of a bushel of barley, early oats, or wheat to the acre is enough. Careful regulation of the drill is necessary.

On sandy land particularly, careful preparation of the seedbed and seeding without a nurse crop is the best practice. With the field limed and compact, and free from weeds, the seeding may be done whenever there is enough moisture in the soil to let the plants establish themselves. As such a condition is likely

to come early in the spring, it is well to have the seedbed in readiness. This may be done by keeping all weeds out of early potato or corn fields the previous season, and cultivating them well throughout the fall. Early in the spring, the land should be harrowed and rolled thoroly with a corrugated roller.

Seeding is at a depth of from 1 to 1½ inches.

Alfalfa should not be pastured the first season.

Time to cut for hay

For all classes of animals except horses, alfalfa should be cut for hay when the new shoots or stems at the crown are from one to two inches long, or from then on till the alfalfa is in full bloom.

It is a good plan to cut alfalfa in the evening before the dew has fallen, or in the morning after the dew is off. If the crop is very heavy, a tedder can be used to advantage in the late forenoon or early afternoon after cutting. With good dry weather the hay can sometimes be raked and cocked the day it is cut, even if it appears somewhat green.

For further information, consult your county agent or write to the Extension Division, University Farm, St. Paul.

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