Hints to Plains Settlers

SOD CROPS

BY J. E. PAYNE

All settlers want to plant crops which will give some returns the first season, so they want to know what crops are likely to grow well on sod, newly-broken.

The first efforts should be directed to producing food for the family and for the horses, cattle and poultry which are necessary to the maintenance of a farm home. The garden will help in this, but it must be supplemented by field crops grown upon a larger scale.

The surest fodder crop for stock is sorghum. It grows fully as well upon sod as upon old ground. It is not necessary to disc the sod before planting sorghum, but it can be planted in rows three feet apart with either grain drill, corn planter, hand planter, or it may be planted in every third furrow while breaking the prairie.

Kafir corn and Milo maize may be planted the same way as sorghum, and in the southern part of eastern Colorado, these may prove fully as valuable as sorghum. The Milo will give some grain which is valuable as feed for stock, and especially for chickens.

CORN.—White Australian flint corn has proved valuable as a sod crop. It yields a large amount of fodder, and is the surest to make grain of any variety tried in Eastern Colorado. Swadley is one of the surest dent corns, but it does not make so much fodder as White Australian corn. Besides these there are a number of local varieties which have been developed by selection. These should be used when they are available.
Large-eared varieties of sweet corn such as Mammoth and Egyptian should be planted liberally, as they make a good yield of fodder of good quality, and will give considerable corn if we have enough rain in August. Queen's Golden pop-corn often does well, and it is a welcome addition to the winter bill of fare.

Mexican beans usually make a good crop if given a chance. They are one of the most drought-resistant crops with which we have had experience. Each settler should plant about one acre of Mexican beans.

Water melons, musk melons, squashes and pumpkins can often be depended upon to furnish good yields. Winter water melons and winter musk melons should be planted, as they can be kept in straw stacks above ground until after Christmas. Only the earliest varieties of melons can be depended upon. The cows will pay well for all surplus melons, squashes and pumpkins grown. Stock melons which are water melons with centers permanently firm, can be depended upon to give from five to twenty tons of melons per acre. These can be kept in good condition by storing above ground in straw so as to prevent freezing. They are valuable for use as succulent food for cattle during winter.

Potatoes can be grown on new land if the sod can be cut up and the ground be replowed.

Millet can be grown upon sod by harrowing the sod so as not to turn the sods over.

Flax has often proved to be an excellent sod crop, and has given good yields on new land.

Broom corn is practically as sure to give a fodder crop as is sorghum and Milo. And, if the season is favorable, it will produce from 100 to 400 of brush per acre, besides ten bushels or more of seed. The seed is good feed for chickens and also for horses and cattle. But, it should be ground for horses.

Sod broken in May and June and allowed to lie undisturbed will absorb practically all the rain which falls on it, and it will hold most of it from evaporation. So, if heavy rains come after the sod is plowed, it will be in fine condition for winter wheat. Any one having such land would do well to plant Turkey wheat. Plant August 15th in northern Colorado. But it should be sown a little later farther south. If the rains do not come after the land is plowed, it will not usually pay to plant the wheat. But, I have known good crops of winter wheat to be grown when sown in dry sod late in the fall. If sown in dry sod, I would prefer having the wheat sown late in the fall. Some have succeeded with wheat sown as late as December. The early seeding is advocated only for ground which contains an abundance of moisture at seeding time.