Many hundred farmers, unfamiliar with the soil and climatic conditions of our eastern plains, are this year coming to make homes on 160-acre farms in Eastern Colorado in regions where crops have not been generally grown. Many of these settlers have but a limited amount of money and can not afford a crop failure. It is to be feared that this spring crops will be only partially successful, since many of them are farming as they did “back home,” and are not using drouth-resistant crops of demonstrated value in their farming operations. This timely suggestion is sent out to prevent crop failure in fall seeding. Preparation of seed bed is the most important thing in farming the non-irrigated lands, and as soon as spring crops are in, the new settler should plow and cultivate his field he expects to seed to fall crops, or the following spring’s grain.

Summer culture is an essential of the Eastern Colorado farmer’s success. The French found some centuries ago that “manoeuvring” the land—causing the particles of earth to change place by tillage—made it more productive. Experiments now show that summer tillage in our semi-arid lands has an added value—it conserves the moisture, while it renders more plant food available. Good results have been obtained in Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, Utah, and many sections of Colorado from summer culture of the land every other season. It has been found that in this way sufficient moisture can be stored from the year’s rainfall to mature a crop in many localities.

After the snows of winter have melted in the spring, plow the ground at least seven or eight inches deep. With disc harrow, corrugated roller, imperial pulverizer, or packer, level and firm this
ground as soon after plowing as possible, at least not later than each half day, and follow up with smoothing harrow to establish the earth mulch to check evaporation. This mulch must not be too fine, as the winds of the plains will tend to rift the soil or blow the earth mulch entirely away. If possible, stir the surface soil with a good spike-tooth or acme harrow several times through the summer from two to four inches deep. Follow every summer rain with a good harrowing of this “summer cultured” ground, preventing the formation of a crust at the surface. Keep this ground clean—free from weeds.

Ground that has been well cultivated for several years will produce two crops in succession and can be given summer culture the third year. In this way it is possible to grow two crops in three years on well-tilled soil. If a farmer expects to cultivate 80 acres, he should divide it into two crop divisions—cropping 40 acres the first year and giving summer culture to the other 40 acres. This gives him a crop on one half his land each year while he is storing up moisture in the soil reservoir of the other half to make the next year’s crop. A farmer on the non-irrigated lands in Weld County last season, after seeding his spring crop, at once prepared his fall wheat seed bed—150 acres. The writer visited his field early in July and found his seed bed in a fine mellow, moist, condition for seeding. Just a few miles from this careful farmer’s ranch was a 500-acre field which had been simply plowed and left in that condition to dry out and become hard. Although an inch of rain had fallen the week previous, the writer found the soil in this field in very poor mechanical condition—dry and hard. This clearly shows how not to do. Farmer No. 1 now has a most promising field of wheat and will undoubtedly be rewarded with a satisfactory harvest.

One of the writer’s correspondents, living ten miles south of Akron, Colo., has practiced summer culture for several years. He reports that in the fall, when he seeds his summer cultured land, he often finds from three to five feet of moisture.

The writer knows that this method of summer culture has been practiced in some parts of California for upwards of forty years with satisfactory results.

Use every practical method you can to conserve the moisture. Summer culture keeps the ground in good tilth, keeps down weeds, renders the plant food easily available for the next year’s crop, while it stores up the moisture so necessary to the plant in assimilating its food.