

IS PASPALUM A WEED ?

Paspalum Dilatum has now been established in the North Auckland Peninsula long enough to have proved its usefulness as the best grass ever introduced. It has still a few enemies, who condemn it because it grows too well; for one has only to investigate a little to find in practically every instance that these objectors have planted it in their orchards or gardens, which have in consequence been turned into paddocks capable of supporting a beast to the acre—a blessing turned into a curse because it was planted in the wrong place.

"A few years ago at a show I heard a farmer shouting at the man next him: 'Paspalum, don't talk to me about the unaged weed!' He then described in vivid terms, and I gathered that it was of a rich crimson colour, and that if he could send it to the place where there is a constant high temperature and gnashing teeth he would promptly do so. I guessed that it was the usual trouble and asked: 'Did you put it in your orchard?' He glanced at me suspiciously for a moment, then replied: 'well, yes I did, worse luck. Did it grow?' It was like a red rag to a bull. He naturally had a loud voice, and he fairly squeaked: 'Grew grow? Why, I left the one in a corner of the ploughing, and before I could say 'Jack Robinson' it had covered it over; then over the seat; right out of sight; up the trees and smothered the fence. Oh, yes it grew. Did it hold?' was my next question. 'We have been trying for years to get a grass which will hold. Yes, sir, he answered, 'it will hold, hold till the Day of Judgment; for I ploughed it and disced it and mowed it, and ploughed it again, and the more I tried to get it out the better it grew. I suggested that if he really wanted to get rid of it he might try pigs in the wet weather when the exposed tree roots would not be injured, or in a large ploughable area, to plough it in frosty weather so that the roots are exposed to the cold.

Now, as some object that it grows too well, others say that it does not grow enough, or even at all in the winter. To put it another way they are not satisfied with a grass which gives, under favourable conditions, a return of 50 tons of green feed per acre during the season, or if utilised in another form, over six tons of chaff per acre; but, like the worker, the capitalist, and Oliver Twist, they ask for more. If they would shut up a paddock, top dress it and cut it for hay, or make ensilage, they would find that it is not necessary for paspalum to grow in the winter. In any case, they are scarcely correct, for I have measured as much as six inches of entire paspalum in the middle of June, and others have noticed a persistent growth all the winter, except on frosty days, when most grasses are dormant.

I find that it makes a very nutritious hay of a dark green colour, rather coarse and long in the grain, but to quote the seedmen's catalogues, 'readily eaten by all kinds of stock, especially dairy cows.' In its green state all kinds of stock thrive on it, horses like it, put on condition and can do a considerable amount of work if fed on paspalum alone, and a little hard feed in conjunction goes a very long way. Calves do well on it, and I have watched them select tufts of it from among other grasses. When not hungry they stroll along nipping seed heads, which they eventually look on as tickles. Pigs get fat on it, and as a dairy grass only lucerne is ahead of it. As a part test of its feeding value my neighbour tells me that he could wish for nothing better for his lambs.

Now, a large area of the virgin country north of Auckland is covered with tea-tree and fern which is difficult to eradicate. This kind of scrub generally grows on poor land, and on this class of country paspalum always forms a mat, impenetrable mat, rather than shooting straight up, thus checking the young growth of fern, etc. from the very beginning, and eventually killing it right out, more particularly if the fern and the tea-tree are cut occasionally and the paspalum assisted in its good work. With the same kind of help the grass will eventually wipe out blackberries and briar; so apart from its other good traits it is of especial value in eradicating noxious weeds.

It will grow on all kinds of soil; even on pipe clay which has been ploughed it has been known to grow in places. On rich flats it gives an

enormous yield and will grow on swampy land lightly covered with water without apparent injury. At the time of writing (November 20th) I have clumps of it averaging three feet six inches in height growing in a swampy creek, its roots being in water. For several years it has done well in this condition, and in the hot weather when the creek is dry it attains a height approximating to five feet six inches, whilst the seed heads are higher. Here again paspalum is superior to other grasses, for once ryegrass, cocksfoot, etc. goes to seed they produce little growth and the tendency is for them to dry up in hot weather, and as a consequence the cream cheeses show a marked falling off, which can only be checked by a liberal supply of green feed, such as maize, etc. On the other hand the paspalum flourishes greatly, seeds luxuriantly, but keeps its bright luscious green and the hotter it is the more it grows, provided its roots, which are deep seated, can get a little moisture. With two or three paddocks of paspalum in reserve there is no necessity to grow green feed, and unlike most of the specially-grown feed it can be repeatedly eaten off during the whole summer.

"The season of 1912-13 was the driest known for the past fifty years, and feed was so scarce that most dairy farmers had to dry off their cows to save them; even then many head were lost. In hundreds of instances it was the paspalum which kept stock alive all through the drought and for hundreds of square miles that was the only green thing to be seen except the bush, and even portions of that perished from thirst. This was the test, and those with paspalum in large areas did well in spite of the season, and, in fact, were the only dairy farmers that held out at all. During the height of the drought I measured some paspalum growing under the most favourable conditions—rich soil, moisture and heat—and found that it grew two feet six inches in thirty days. A gentleman representing one of the oldest land agencies in the province stated that the same phenomenal growth of the grass had come under his notice in another district.

"By experiment I find that if the growth of the grass and seed of surface-sown paspalum be represented by the figure 4, then on good ploughed land the growth would be represented by 5. Again by actually testing and counting I find that only about 20 per cent. of New Zealand-grown seed germinates; there is a large proportion that has no kernel. On the other hand Seccombe's seed is highly satisfactory, one has only to take a handful and compare its weight with a handful of any other grass, the weight is there and so are the kernels. Pinch them between your thumb and finger nails, bite them. Seed after seed stands the test, hard and firm, for the germ is there. I am of opinion that New Zealand-grown seed will never equal Seccombe's, because Seccombe's is properly harvested and grown and developed under ideal climatic conditions such as we only get here in a life-time.

"Seed does best when sown in the spring, and a friend writes that he has got a perfect sward by the following method:—He sowed Lotus angustissimus, five pounds to the acre, mixed with Italian ryegrass, in the autumn, then in October, in suitable weather, he sowed ten pounds of Seccombe's. This sank down amongst the angustissimus and rye, thus finding the perfect seed bed, shade, moisture, and heat. As a dairy grass it is first class. We find that there is a tendency for the milk to diminish, even to the extent of six gallons at the end of a week when the cows were put into another paddock of a larger area and equal bulk of grass. There is a constant unvarying persistent return, wet or fine, year in year out. Paspalum tells, and so does good seed; therefore, get Seccombe's. Finally a grass which gives so much nourishing feed must in time require manure or it will probably die out eventually. Therefore top dress."

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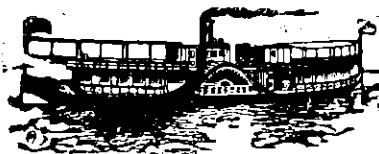
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