

The Akaroa Cocksfoot Crop

Principal Source of Income To Settlers For Over 60 Years

— By —

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Bringing in cocksfoot for threshing.

BANKS Peninsula and cocksfoot can almost be said to be synonymous terms to many people, and especially to those of the older generation who have grown up with the development of cocksfoot in the Akaroa district. With the clearing of the forest, cocksfoot was sown sometimes pure but more often as a constituent of a pasture mixture, but in almost all cases cocksfoot soon showed dominance, and the other plants rapidly disappeared from the pasture.

Cocksfoot can be said to have been a more or less chance introduction to the district, as its value was not realised at the time of its introduction some 87 years ago. It was in 1852 that the first sowing was made at Pigeon Bay. Further sowings were made as the land was cleared of bush, and by 1865 there was quite a brisk demand for seed both for local sowing and from other parts of New Zealand. It can also be stated that Akaroa cocksfoot was one of the first farm seeds exported from the Dominion, and as time passed the name became widely known throughout this country and also overseas.

Value to Settlers

The introduction of this grass has meant much to Banks Peninsula settlers, as in the heyday of production more than 120,000 sacks of seed were consigned from the district, and for a long period from 70,000 to 80,000 sacks was looked upon as an ordinary

For more than 60 years the cocksfoot seed industry has been of great importance to the settlers in Banks Peninsula, and at one time was their principal source of income. Although a further decline in the amount of seed produced is likely because of the increased cost of harvesting and the introduction of dairying and sheep, it is considered that the anticipated decline may not eventuate for many years.

crop. For many years all the seed except that from Little River was conveyed to Lyttelton by sea, but with the development of roading the sea-borne traffic in seed has almost disappeared.

Of more recent times dairying and sheep have become important phases of farming in the district, and this has resulted in seed production taking a much less important place. Moreover, with the increased cost of harvesting on country of this nature, there is likely to be a still further decline in the amount of seed produced.

It is interesting to note that in the early handling of the seed crop serious difficulty arose, as those at that time interested treated it in a similar

manner to the wheat crop, but in threshing it was found that much of the seed would not leave the heads, and thus growers came to the conclusion that to cut the crop and tie it in sheaves and stack was a mistake.

Method of Handling

Experience showed that under Peninsula conditions the crop should be cut and left in bundles on the stubble, and as soon as sufficiently dry should be conveyed to the threshing floor. Under this method, especially in bright, sunny weather, the seed leaves the heads readily. This then became the recognised method for handling the cocksfoot crop of the Peninsula.

It should be pointed out that because of the hilly nature of the district the crop is cut with the sickle and threshed either with a small mill or with the flail. The seed is winnowed before bagging, and in many cases an excellent sample is made in this way. It can be understood that under this harvesting method costs are relatively high, but many farmers express the opinion that even with high costs the seed crop, plus winter grazing, is still an attractive proposition in seasons of average yield. This being so, it is held in some districts that the anticipated further decline of the industry may not eventuate for many years to come.

Until comparatively recent times seed from the district was sold at its face value, and with a name like "Akaroa,"