

weeds. The lucerne plants on the left are becoming choked by grasses and weeds, and are producing only a small percentage of the bulk produced by the plants on the clean stand.

Lucerne as a Winter Feed

Many farmers now realise that lucerne can be successfully grazed and is providing an essential link in the food supply of ewes and lambs. The number of early lambs obtained from ewes running on lucerne is increasing each year, with the result that more and more stands are being used for this purpose. Lucerne is also coming into its own for fattening store lambs and old ewes, although later in the season lambs do not flourish as well or put on weight as quickly as they do on rape. The uncertainty of the rape crop in many districts, however, mitigates against its use, and it is well that lucerne can be relied upon to take its place.

It should not be taken for granted, however, that lucerne can be haphazardly grazed—indeed, there are many questions involved, not only on the animal side, but also from the

point of view of the plant. For instance, lucerne on heavy, rich soils will not stand as hard grazing as will that on light soils. Grasses, clovers, and weeds will encroach on good soils, and will compete to the disadvantage of lucerne under hard grazing conditions.

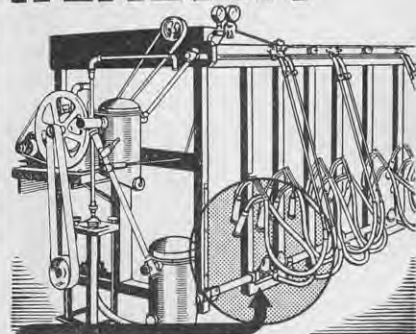
There are many light soils in Central Otago which will grow very little else but lucerne. In such cases lucerne has been grazed "as bare as the road" and made great recoveries. Such stands will maintain themselves for years because there is little competition from other species. Under competition, lucerne is not generally killed out through the grazing animal, but more often because it is placed at a disadvantage with other plants, either because they are not palatable and are therefore not grazed, are quicker recovering after grazing, will stand more tramping, or will stand closer grazing.

Rates of Seeding

The rates of seeding have an important bearing on the results. Although excellent stands of lucerne have resulted from the drilling of less than 5lb. of seed to the acre, there is no doubt that the lack of competition factor has played a significant part. A low seeding will give results if conditions are right and if the competition from other plants is negligible, but there are very few conditions which would warrant the risk of sowing as little as 5lb. to the acre. In some cases where the soil is heavy and the weed invasion (both of annuals and perennials) is likely to be severe, 18lb. to the acre may not be considered too much. Here, again, the farmer who studies his soil conditions, his cultivation, and his previous results can form a sound opinion on what is likely to be the result of sowing too small a quantity of seed, and can guard against doing so.

The value of lucerne as a hay crop has been proved, and it is well utilised today. Under good conditions, lucerne will give four and sometimes five cuts in the season, and has yielded nearly ten tons of hay to the acre in Central Otago. In dry conditions, if a stand of lucerne had a life of only five years under grazing, it would still be ahead of anything yet known in giving results on much of Central Otago's grazing lands.

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