

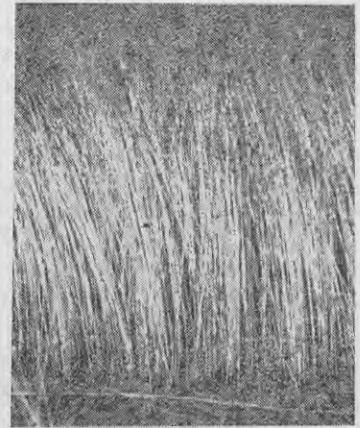
Quality in the Linen Flax Crop

— By —

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The writer of this article, who has had experience in the valuation of standing crops of linen flax, discusses those factors which, from a processing aspect, make or mar the linen flax crop.



LINEN FLAX as a cultivated crop has a very long history. The accumulated knowledge of generations concerning the growing, processing and manufacture is woven into the finished article. In New Zealand it is the latest of the crops in the farmer's rotation and the extraction of fibre one of the youngest of our industries, but every endeavour should be made to ensure that the article exported from this country measures up to the exacting standards of an old-established trade.

Since quality in their raw material is the first demand of the overseas manufacturers this must be the constant aim of the linen flax factories in New Zealand, and to assist in achieving this aim the farmer growing the flax must have some idea of the various factors which in any crop of flax influence the quality of the fibre produced from it.

In the first year or two of the establishment of the industry in this country an incomplete understanding of the factory requirements by the growers led many of them to place undue emphasis upon length of straw, with an almost total disregard of the other factors influencing fibre quality. As a consequence they were somewhat disappointed when their crop was not as highly esteemed by the factory as the foot rule had led them to expect and some appreciation by growers of the various points by which the quality of the fibre may be judged from the standing crop would be to their advantage.

The value of the ripening crop may be judged to some extent almost at the first glance. A promising crop is of good height, golden in colour and level as a table. Further detailed examination of all parts of the area and consideration of the factors enumerated in this article provide a basis upon which some judgment may be

made of the quality of the fibre to be produced from the straw. Excellence in some respects only is not sufficient; first-class fibre can be extracted only from the crop possessing all the desirable characteristics.

Length of Straw

Since length of fibre is one of the most important factors in determining the grade, the straw must be of good length, and a minimum of 18 ins. of fibre is essential. That portion of the stem between ground level and where branching starts is the only part containing fibre, so that straw of 20 ins. in length to the seed boll may fail to produce the requisite minimum of 18 ins. of fibre. Below this length the product is classed as reiss or tow, the value of both these being only a fraction of that of linen fibre. General experience over the past few seasons

indicates that crops from 25 ins. to 30 ins. fibre length produce the best quality, those over 30 ins. being as a rule inclined to coarseness of straw.

Appearance of the root ends has some bearing on quality and length of fibre, in that fine, long and straight roots usually indicate extension of the fibre well down the stem below ground level, while short, thick, twisted roots usually indicate a shortening and coarsening in the fibre.

An absence of branching until the upper extremity of the stem is a necessary feature, as low branching reduces the length of processable straw.

Evenness in length over the whole crop is essential, any great variation involving difficulty in the scutching process and an increase in the proportion of tow. Variation in length between individual straws over the whole crop is a more serious matter

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