

FARM WORK FOR MARCH

PASTURES

Autumn-sown permanent grass.—In most districts, on both cultivated land and burns, March is considered the most suitable month for autumn sowing of pasture seeds, chiefly because the autumn rains usually begin in that month, providing a fairly uniform supply of moisture to germinate the seeds and keep the young seedlings growing. The temperature is usually fairly high too, and the young plants get a good start. Later sowings often result in poorer establishment because of cold temperatures, and if the sowing is too late, clovers may fail to establish, with the result that the grasses will not thrive and may ultimately die. In any case the resultant pasture is much poorer than it should be and production for the following two years or so is low. The seed-bed should be firm and fine; consolidation is essential for successful clover establishment.

Italian ryegrass.—Sown in March except in colder districts and on poorer and heavier soils. Italian ryegrass will provide good supplies of winter feed. It is usually sown with red clover, which provides feed when the ryegrass runs to seed in the early summer. After being grazed in winter the Italian ryegrass may be closed to stock for production of a hay crop.

Pasture management.—*Paspalum* fields should be kept well grazed. As soon as the autumn rains have moistened the ground and softened the dung voided by cattle during the autumn fields should be harrowed to scatter it and spread its beneficial effects. Cattle dung left unspread smothers pasture plants which otherwise would contribute to the early winter supply of feed.

Topdressing and liming.—Topdressing with phosphatic and potassic fertilisers where they are needed should be in full swing in March to encourage winter production of pastures. Topdress first fields which are to be closed next month to provide winter feed for the cows as they calve. Fields chosen for this purpose should be in good heart.

Lime sowings should be completed before wet weather causes transport and sowing difficulties.

Harvesting broad red clover.—Watch broad red clover crops closely for readiness for harvesting. Cut the crop when 80 to 90 per cent. of the heads are brown. The crop may be cut with a mower and the material left in the swath to dry. It may be headed directly from the windrow during the hottest 2 or 3 hours of a dry, sunny day. If the weather is unsettled or the ground moist, stack the material 10 days after cutting. It can then be threshed with a clover huller after 6 to 8 weeks in stack.

By the Fields Division

HAY AND SILAGE

Watch haystacks as they settle and adjust weights holding down covers so that they do not rest on the ground and become useless. Make final adjustments to all stacks early in March to ensure that rain does not penetrate and that fences surrounding stacks are stock proof. Metal tracks from silage pits if they are likely to become boggy in wet weather.

LUCERNE

New stands of lucerne should be in full growth by now after the first cut. Depending on the weather since then, they may produce another cut next month, but generally they are better left undisturbed till next season.

After old stands have produced the last cut of the season they may be cultivated with penetrating harrows to destroy weeds. If conditions are seasonable for doing so, bare patches may be sown with red clover to lengthen the life of the stand. Red clover may establish and grow well on such patches, but sowings of lucerne usually are not successful and are not recommended. The whole area may be sown with oats, after cultivation, for production of late winter or early spring feed and to suppress weeds which may appear in the stand in the dormant season.

CEREAL GREENFEEDS

Continue feeding green maize to dairy cows till autumn rains produce sufficient pasture growth for the herd's requirements. Areas which were in maize and millet and were ploughed and cultivated last month can be sown in March in permanent or temporary pasture or in cereals for greenfeed, or they may be left for later sowings such as oats for greenfeed, grain, or chaff in the following month.

Barley sown now will ultimately provide winter and early spring feed. Oat sowings will provide winter and early spring feed in the milder districts and late winter and early spring feed in the South Island and colder districts. The seed-bed for these crops should have been prepared last month and should be fine and firm below and somewhat rubbly on top at sowing time.

ROOT AND CRUCIFEROUS CROPS

Areas in rape intended for further cropping should be disced to cut up the stalks and make the packed surface friable and then ploughed for the next crop, which may be autumn-sown wheat.

Areas which were in soft turnips for summer feeding to stock should be ploughed ready for the next crop.

Cultivated root crops will have developed far enough by now to require no further attention. See that such crops are well fenced and wire the gates to prevent accidental invasion by stock.

POTATOES

Watch for the presence of the potato moth during digging operations in areas where infestation may occur. If the moth is present, bag the potatoes as soon as they are dug. Preparation should be made for digging the main crop in the South Island. See that sufficient bags, twine, needles, forks, and implements are on hand to deal with the crop.

CEREALS AND PEAS

Deep plough in March for autumn sowings of wheat. Harvesting of late cereal crops will still be in progress. The notes in the December "Journal" outlined stages of cutting cereal and pea crops. Stacks of cereals and peas for late threshing should be protected from damage by weather: Peas should be covered with straw and cereals by thatching, particularly if they are to stand for long in wet districts. They should be watched closely for a tendency to lean and measures should then be taken to prevent collapse.

Threshing operations should be closely watched to prevent loss and damage of grain by uneven feeding, too close setting of the drum, or excessive drum speed.

Turn sheep into maize crops grown for cobs to eat out the undergrowth. This keeps the ground clear of weeds, which aids harvesting and helps to prevent diseases assisted by damp, muggy conditions. Arrange for the building of cribs where they are not available or if sufficient space to accommodate the crop is not available in existing cribs.

GENERAL

Crossings, gateways, and stock lanes should be filled and metalled. Stacks of cereals, hay, and silage should be inspected to see they are weather and stock proof. Wage war on rats and mice in barns now before they cause damage and increase in numbers. See that implements used for harvesting are properly housed or covered and protected from rust by greasing, oiling, and painting.

LIQUID MANURE

More and more farmers are realising the value of liquid manure. Bulletin No. 256, "Liquid Manure," illustrates the most profitable ways of utilising this valuable fertiliser. Write to the nearest office of the Department of Agriculture for a copy of this free bulletin.