

Hay and Seed Harvest

SEASONAL NOTES Contributed

by the EXTENSION DIVISION

HAY is the main supplementary fodder provided on dairy farms and the aim should be to save hay of good feeding value. Fields should be cut as close as possible to the flowering stage of the chief grasses present, and the cut material should be turned frequently to dry it rapidly and protect it from over-bleaching by the sun. The pick-up baler has enabled the farmer to make the best use of short periods of favourable weather for haymaking and has reduced the risks attendant on early harvesting.

IRRIGATION OF LUCERNE Lucerne for hay should be grown on all irrigation areas and irrigation should be carried out throughout the growing season. The usual practice is to irrigate

twice before the first cut, again after each cut is cleared, and to give a further application of water during the growth period of each crop. Under these conditions four cuts in the season can be obtained from a good stand. The number of irrigations necessary depends on the rainfall during the growing season, but on well-bordered areas there is little danger of over-irrigation and the tendency is for irrigators to give insufficient water rather than too much.

IRRIGATION OF FODDER CROPS Irrigators and research workers have not yet worked out completely reliable methods for applying water to root and green forage

crops, but experience to date suggests that irrigation of the land before sowing gives considerable benefit and should be carried out at least a week before the crop is sown. Sometimes two applications of water are made before sowing; the first early in the season when the land is still in the furrow. The second application should be followed by cultivation at a depth of 3 or 4 in. with the grubber before the land is finally worked down to sowing tilth. Irrigation of growing crops should be carried out while the crop is growing well; irrigation of wilted and moisture-starved crops often is not successful.

RYEGRASS HARVEST Areas of perennial, Italian, and short-rotation ryegrass are usually closed in October; early in the month on light land or in dry seasons or toward the end of

the month on medium to heavy land. Farmers should take full advantage of the pre-harvest seed-testing service made available by the Department of Agriculture; full particulars of the service are widely advertised in December each year. Samples for testing for blind seed infection should be taken within a week before cutting and while the seed heads are dry. The sample should be about as thick as one's wrist and made representative of the whole field by picking odd straws at random until the required sample is obtained. The sample should be labelled and rolled tightly in several layers of paper and forwarded by the first mail to ensure its arrival in fresh condition at the Seed-testing Station, Palmerston North or a blind seed testing sub-station. The report on the sample will indicate the amount of infection, for example, one-tenth, etc., and the stage of development, for example, flowering, very immature, middle stage, or mature or ripe.



Every irrigation farm should have an area of lucerne to provide hay for winter supplementary feeding.

WHITE CLOVER The time of closing a pasture for a white clover seed crop depends on soil and rainfall. Generally, grazing can be continued during spring until the first flowers appear toward the end of October, but a field may have to be closed earlier if the season is dry or the land is light. However, on heavy land or in wet seasons closing in early December may not be too late to ensure a good crop. If it is not possible to even up the field by grazing, the growth should be topped with the mower.

MONTGOMERY RED CLOVER The yield and quality of Montgomery red clover seed depends to a very large extent on weather conditions during the period from closing to harvest. In seasons when growth is prolific and flowering uneven and prolonged, seed does not set freely and much is lost if harvesting is delayed. The grazing of Montgomery red clover areas in the first year allows the plants to become well established and produce high yields of seed in the following years. Stock should be removed from fields on light land as early as mid-October; fields on downlands are usually grazed until about the end of November and then topped. On heavy land the crop should be treated similarly to cowgrass, from which a hay crop should be taken early in December and the field then closed for seed.

FARM STORAGE OF FERTILISERS During recent years peak fertiliser demands in autumn have led to transport difficulties and delays in delivery. Farmers should order fertiliser early and store at least part of their annual requirements on the farm. The problem of farm storage is essentially one of keeping the materials dry, and the bags of fertiliser should be stored in such a way as to get the maximum of ventilation and the minimum of condensation. The bags should be stored on a wooden platform of crossed planks with as much space between the bags as possible. If bags are stacked in tiers, the tiers should be not more than eight bags high and a space of about 2ft. should be left between each tier. Serpentine superphosphate is ideal for farm storage, as it retains good physical condition under storage, being much superior to straight superphosphate in this respect.