Crop and Pasture Management

Seasonal Notes by the Extension Division

THOUGH spring is usually a period of abundance, it is during this time that planning for summer and autumn shortages in crop and pasture production is necessary, and the following notes deal with some aspects of preparing for summer and autumn production.

SUMMER CROPS FOR THE ECZEMA SEASON

MOST people in the North Island are now convinced of the need for a summer crop to feed off during the period of facial eczema warnings in February, March, and April. To be suitable for this period the crop must provide a large bulk of high-quality feed which will keep well, remaining in first-class condition for at least 3 months. Chou moellier, either Medium-stemmed or Giant, is one of the most reliable for this purpose. It is sown in September or October at 2lb. to 4lb. per acre, the higher rates resulting in thinner-stemmed crops, which are more suitable for sheep. In years when eczema is prevalent it can be fed off at any time during summer and autumn and will still make some recovery growth. If no eczema occurs and the crop is not required in autumn, it will keep on growing and can be used for winter feed.

SUMMER CROPS FOR DAIRY COWS

The three common varieties of soft turnips are N.Z. Green Globe, N.Z. Purple Globe, and N.Z. Red Globe, which mature about 12 weeks after sowing. These are sown in October at 1lb. of seed per acre. Because soft turnips do not keep well, it is well worth while to sow any large areas in two or three breaks if only one variety is sown. A new variety, N.Z. York Globe, matures rather earlier, about 10 weeks after sowing, and this is recommended for its better keeping quality. Because of the difference in time of maturity, it is advantageous to sow half the paddock with, say, Green Globe and the other half with York Globe.

Maize is another excellent summer crop for dairy cows in frost-free areas, particularly on swamp soils. It is sown in November in two breaks at 100lb. of seed per acre and fed off just as the cobs are forming.

—M. G. BOYER

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SHEEP FARM PASTURE MANAGEMENT

VERY satisfactory progress is being made in many sheep farming districts, especially on hill country, in the better management and utilisation of pasture growth during the peak period from October to December. The improved management is based on the quite simple idea that it is far better to have the surplus growth in a few paddocks than scattered all over the farm, and the only way to do this is to concentrate stock to give control of peak growth while a portion of the farm is left ungrazed or lightly grazed to accumulate surplus feed for later use. It is a mistake, however, to try to hold this surplus growth until winter or even for autumn, as it will dry out in summer and become practically useless. This surplus growth should be cleaned up in December and January.

Paddocks with plenty of clover growth provide ideal feed for weaned lambs, and the more grassy ones are excellent for holding the breeding cows and bulls and the surplus sheep intended for sale later. Concentrating a good portion of the stock on this surplus grass in December and January reduces the pressure on that portion of the farm that has been kept well grazed during the peak of growth and this allows the area to recover and make some top growth before dry weather sets in. The whole farm will then be in much better condition for the trying summer and early autumn conditions than if the stock have the use of all the paddocks, and the surplus growth, mainly unpalatable species, is scattered all over the place while portions of the paddocks are badly overgrazed.

—C. J. HAMBLYN

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EARLY IRRIGATION

WHEN soil dries out early in the season plant and animal production is likely to suffer. Early irrigation in October will often ensure greater production in November. Autumn-sown wheat crops and lucerne before the first cut usually respond to early irrigation.

—A. D. HALL

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SPRING SOWING OF PASTURES

IN many South Island districts spring sowing of pastures provides the best opportunity for meeting all the requirements of successful establishment. Advantage can be taken of adequate soil moisture and quick-growing conditions to obtain rapid establishment of the sown grasses and clovers.

Broadcasting of pasture seed mixtures at high seeding rates, from 30lb. to 45lb. per acre, and drilling in 7in. rows, are steadily being replaced by more precise methods which ensure quicker and more uniform establishment from greatly reduced rates of seeding. Grain drills with special coulters have made possible the sowing of seed with fertiliser in 3½in. rows. More recently roller drills have been developed with special vee-section rings and with fertiliser and seed boxes mounted behind. These machines attain the ideal of placing fertiliser with the seed in well-consolidated, moist grooves at close row spacings. Seeding rates of 20lb. to 25lb. per acre sown in this way have produced excellent pastures under even adverse conditions and lighter rates may yet prove satisfactory. Rolling after sowing is usually necessary on light soils, but on heavy soils may be omitted; a mat of light plough chains attached behind the roller drill reduces the sowing and covering of seed and fertiliser to a single operation.

Such spring sowings normally result in rapid growth, and grazing within 6 to 8 weeks is often essential to control the quicker-growing ryegrasses and to ensure firm establishment of the slower-growing grasses and clovers. This early grazing, preferably for short periods at heavy stocking rates, also helps to control those weeds which have germinated in spite of adequate cultivation. However, MCPB or 2,4-DB weedkillers will control most seedling weeds without harming pasture species, and where weeds are likely to be troublesome spraying should be done as soon as the clovers reach the three-true-leaf stage. Any patches of Californian thistles in young pastures have normally been weakened by cultivation and may be controlled by spraying with MCPB or 2,4-DB before flowering.

—S. M. J. STOCKDILL