

ON THE LAND

ONION GROWING.

For the highest results in onion growing autumn preparation of the soil is desirable, ground got into shape at once will yield splendid crops (says the *N.Z. Farmer*). Bastard trenching is the best method, plenty of good farmyard manure being worked between the first and second spits. Basic slag (2oz to the square yard) should be sprinkled over the bed and the soil left rough if it is heavy. On sandy soil add manure or moisture-holding and stiffening matter if you have it; at any rate, give 2oz of kainit to the yard at once and a third of that amount of super-phosphate of lime at the end of May or early in June.

On all soils (medium soil is most suitable) a dressing of soot and salt—2oz of soot and ½oz of salt to the square yard—must be given for first-class onions in August. On a dry day afterwards the soil should be neatly raked level, rolled firm—the lighter the soil the heavier the rolling should be—and the onions planted.

August planting is the best, generally speaking; and rows 15 inches apart, with nine inches between the bulbs, are usual. Opinions differ as to the wisdom of shortening onion roots when planting out; shortening the leafage undoubtedly does good. Sow seed by covering half an inch deep out of doors; plant as shallow as possible. Hoe often, but do not draw soil to the bulbs; only their roots should be below ground.

INTELLIGENT USE OF FERTILISERS.

A better understanding of the chemistry and use of commercial fertilisers on the part of a great number of our settlers would be a highly important factor in promoting an increased agricultural output (says Mr. A. McTaggart in the *Journal of Agriculture*). These valuable crop-stimulants are not as well understood by farmers generally as they might be. An understanding by the farming community of their use from the standpoints of soil, crop, climate, and economics is of first importance. A good deal has been accomplished in this educational matter, but much remains to be done. Official experts are at the service of producers, and it behoves any settler who is in doubt as to the manures to use for his particular soil, crop, and climate to obtain advice on the subject from a scientific source.

THOROUGH CULTIVATION TO INCREASE PRODUCTION.

Wherever cultivation is carried out it is essential to increased production that it be as thorough as the season, labor, and facilities available permit (says Mr. A. McTaggart in the course of an article in the *Journal of Agriculture*). Thorough and timely cultivation makes available plant-food and conserves soil-moisture, the two most important factors in promoting abundant crop-growth. In adverse seasons attention to thoroughness and timeliness as regards cultivation frequently means the difference between success and failure in crop production. A fine firm seed-bed is important in giving a crop a good start—a highly important factor; and the rule to follow in the seeding of crops is, the finer the seed the finer the seed-bed. Elimination, as far as possible, of rough-and-ready cultivation will go a long way toward materially increasing production from our soils.

The adoption of methods of cultivation and the use of implements suited to varying conditions of soil, climate, and labor supply will, where possible, contribute a great deal towards increased output. Labor-saving machinery can materially assist in this direction. The farm tractor, on land suitable for its use, can play an important part.

In parts of the country where the rainfall is prevailingly somewhat limited, or where in seasons the weather conditions are dry during the growing period, implements designed for "dry-land" farming could be used to advantage. In preparing a seed-bed under such conditions use could be made of the subsurface and surface packers, as used in the Western States and provinces of North America. These implements pack the soil, both lower and upper portions, and thereby encourage moisture to travel upwards by capillarity. The thin dust mulch that, in addition to packing, is produced by the subsurface packer tends to check evaporation from the soil. Thus moisture is both conveniently concentrated and conserved, and so made the most of by the crop subsequently sown. Disc drills, especially the double disc, also pack the soil around the grain as it is sown, thereby causing the young plant to have the benefit of a maximum of the moisture available in this comparatively dry soil.

Failing the use of these special-purpose implements, the roller, of as heavy a type as made, should be made plenteous use of in preparing "dry-land" seed-beds, and their use should always be followed by a final stroke of a chain or brush harrow to promote a dust mulch, and so prevent evaporation. After every shower of rain in such climates or seasons a stroke of the harrows (light time), where possible, will conserve this extra moisture to a marked extent. Indeed, during a dry spell when a cereal or turnip crop seems to "stand still" a stroke of the harrows (crosswise) often works like magic in promoting growth. This, again, is due to evaporation of moisture being checked and concentrated at the roots of the crop.

In like manner the intercultivation of drilled crops during a dry season often means the difference between success and failure with respect to such crops. This being so, the expenditure on labor for such purpose where at all available or procurable is thoroughly justifiable. In other words, it pays.

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