

ALFALFA ON WESTERN CATTLE RANGES.

BY DAY ALLEN WILLEY.

The prediction is made that the choicest beef and mutton served on the tables of the world will be raised within a few years on the great pastures of the West and Southwest. It is known in a general way that live stock has been considerably improved recently by the modern systems which are employed on ranches; for no longer is the flesh driven off the bones of the cattle in forcing them to go mile after mile over plain and valley in search of new feeding grounds. Many of the ranches of to-day are divided into pastures, which, though perhaps covering 50 or 60 square miles in extent, are provided with an abundance of fodder.

While the majority of the great herds and flocks of the West as yet are of medium and low grade stock, the tendency is to breed a higher grade of animals; for the ranchmen have realized that they can grow a kind of food which is especially suitable for such varieties as Herefords, Devons, Holsteins, and Durhams in cattle, as well as even Merino and Southdown sheep. This food is alfalfa, which is perhaps one of the greatest blessings which has been bestowed upon the western farmer and stock raiser. Alfalfa is another name for lucerne and in the Southwest is called Spanish clover, because its foliage resembles this clover to a certain extent. It is an attractive plant and only a few years ago was considered far more ornamental than useful. Now, however, it has been discovered that not only horses and mules but cattle and sheep thrive upon it and

many as seven crops have been gathered in Colorado and New Mexico when special attention is given it. The seed is planted in the spring of the year, about 25 pounds being enough for one acre. The ground is first prepared by plowing and after the seed is in, it is kept fairly free from weeds until the plant secures

for the average cost of the seed, cultivation, harvesting and stacking is only about \$1.50 a ton, where four crops are gathered in a season. One reason for the low cost of making the crop is that the ordinary horse cultivators and harvesters can be used, thus saving time and labor. It grows so luxuriantly that a

few weeks after the seed is sown, the plant may be knee-high, and sometimes waist-high in the field. Cattle and sheep eat it with the same relish whether standing green in the field or pulled dry from the stack. After the harvest, sometimes hogs are turned into an alfalfa pasture and they actually fatten on it. It not only makes flesh, but a fine quality of flesh. Beef and mutton fed on it have an excellent flavor, usually superior to that coming from the ordinary ranches, where various grasses are depended upon for food, and where corn is also used for fattening.

The reports made to the Department of Agriculture from the various irrigated districts in the West show a surprisingly large number of flocks and herds of high-grade animals. In fact the proportion in these sections is much larger than elsewhere in the country beyond the Mississippi River. It is due to the fact that the irrigation farms are raising so much alfalfa. In the Pecos Valley in New Mexico there are herds aggregating 500,000 head of Hereford and Durham cattle alone. Some of the single herds contain 30,000 animals, while it is estimated that fully half a million blooded sheep are contained in the flocks which graze in the same vicinity. In the valley of the South Platte, Colorado, are also immense

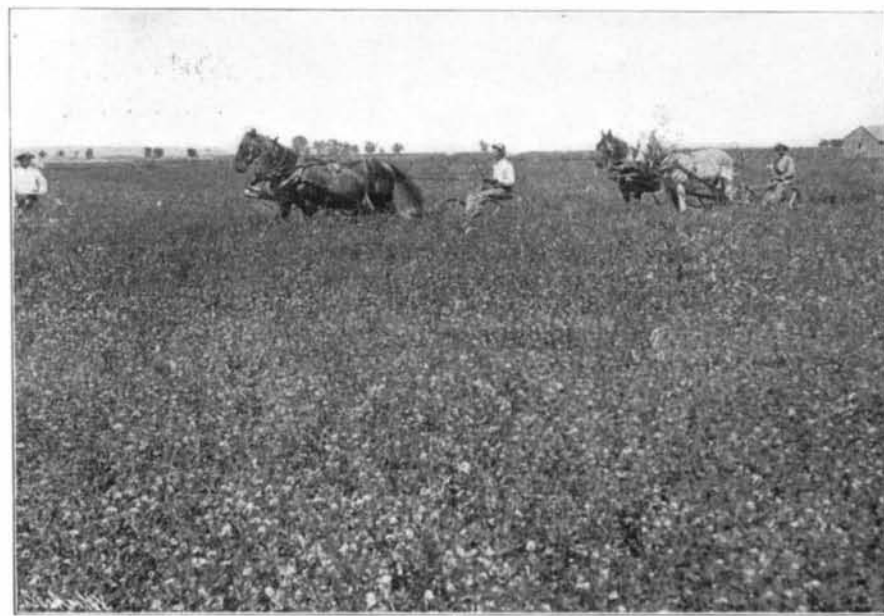


An Artesian Well for Irrigating an Alfalfa Field.

a start, when it does its own weeding. In fact it is very independent and practically takes care of itself until it is ready for the blade of the harvester. It can be piled or stacked like timothy or any other forage crop, and when properly piled in a field is proof



Western Cattle, Raised on Reclaimed Desert Land and Fattened with Alfalfa



A Field of Clover.

will eat it in preference to any other grass that grows. The farm experts say that it contains as much nourishment for live stock as corn and is as good as the best timothy or other ordinary hay.

Alfalfa is an importation, being brought to the United States first in 1842, when some seed secured from France was planted in New Mexico. The first harvest was considered of little value and for a number of years the crop was neglected, but the vegetation from the first field began spreading over that portion of the State until to-day there are many miles of territory upon which nothing else is grown. It is especially adapted to the arid lands of the West, for it grows luxuriantly with a very small amount of moisture. In the irrigated districts it has become one of the principal forage crops and is as extensively raised in Colorado as in the southern part of the country and more and more is being raised as the farmers appreciate its value.

Alfalfa grows so rapidly that in six months the mower can go over the field four or five times and cut off from 1½ to 2 tons an acre at each harvest. As

against the weather. Sometimes it is pressed into bales and stowed away; but most of the large ranch owners grow it in convenient places, stacking it up near their pens and pastures. They get a great deal out of their alfalfa fields for a small amount of money,

droves of blooded animals and fully 100,000 cattle are now being sent to Kansas City, St. Louis, and Chicago which have been raised almost entirely on alfalfa. The packers pay the highest market price for these grades. They are largely exported on the hoof and in carcasses and many an Englishman dines on roast beef "made in America," but coming from stock which originally was raised in Devonshire or perhaps Durham.

The tendency among the western cattle growers is to raise more quality and less quantity, and for this purpose a number of very valuable herds of pure-blooded stock have been imported within the last few years from Great Britain. Nearly every large ranch has at least one or two registered bulls and as fast as possible live stock growers are improving their strain. There should be no danger, however, of a meat famine on account of this revolution in cattle raising, for last year government statistics showed fully 25,000,000 beeves, nearly 50,000,000 sheep, and about 30,000,000 hogs owned by farmers and ranchmen in the United States.



Pens on a Western Sheep-Ranch, where the Animals are Fattened with Alfalfa.

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