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Yields of the Field Experiments 1876

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Experiments on Turnips; Barn Field

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portions which had also been sown in 1868 and 1869 the plant again died off during the winter and early spring; whilst from those which had not been sown in 1868 and 1869 two small cuttings were taken in 1871. In the spring of 1872, the plant being then almost entirely gone, the land was ploughed up. It was again ploughed in July 1872, and in March 1873; the intention being to sow some other Leguminous crop; but owing to the wetness and lateness of the season this was not done; the land was again left fallow, and re-ploughed in the beginning of June and the end of July (1873). On May 4, 1874, the land was again ploughed, and sown with Red Clover seed, May 5, without manure. The plant came up well, and was very forward in September, when the flowering stems were cut down, but left on the land. During the winter and early spring the plant on those portions from which cuttings had been taken in 1871 almost entirely failed, and the land was ploughed up in May, and again in August (1873); whilst on those from which none had been taken since 1869 a fair plant remained, and two small cuttings were obtained, namely on June 23, and on August 9 and 12 (1875). On September 22, this portion of the land was ploughed up. In May (1876) the whole was re-ploughed, and at present remains fallow.

In the spring of 1871 the *small* plots in the field were again re-sown, and those of the garden-soil were entirely enclosed, both around and above, by galvanised wire netting. Small cuttings were taken from these small beds in July 1872, and (excepting from the garden-soil plots, which had yielded considerably more than the others in 1872) larger cuttings were taken in July 1873. The produce was the largest where potass and nitrate of soda were employed, and where they were applied in the largest quantity, and at the greatest depths. In April 1874 there was still some healthy plant on all the plots, but it was considered to be too irregular to preserve. It was, therefore, dug in. The artificially-manured plots were remanured as before, but only to the depth of 9 inches, and seed was sown on May 4th, July 6th, and October 22nd; each time the plant coming up well, but subsequently dying off. On the Garden soil plots, the plant from the first sowing (May 4), for the most part stood; requiring only to be made good here and there on July 6; and in September small cuttings were taken. In May, 1875, the plant was entirely gone on the artificially-manured plots, which were then dug up, and prepared for resowing. On the garden soil plots, though the rows were imperfect, some healthy plants still remained, and gave a small cutting on June 22. On July 24 these plots were dug up; and they, as well as the artificially manured ones just referred to, were re-sown with seed. All came up well, but at this time (May 1876), the plants on the garden soil plots are entirely gone, and those on the artificially manured ones nearly so, and all will shortly be dug up. More small plots were arranged in the spring of 1874; on which the manures were dug in, at the various depths, on May 11th to 14th, and the seed sown on May 16th. One series received sulphate of potass only, another nitrate of soda only, and a third the two together. The plants came up fairly well, but there were some blanks in the rows, which were re-sown on October 22 (1874). A cutting was taken on June 22 and 23 (1875); the blanks in the rows were re-sown on July 24; a second cutting taken on August 17; and

the blanks again re-sown on September 22 (1875). The plant was the most even on the plots with sulphate of potass, less so on those with nitrate of soda, and less still on those with both together. The amount of produce was also greater with each of the manures used separately, than with the mixture of the two. The plants on these new artificially manured plots, like those on the older ones, are at the present date (May 1876), nearly gone, and these plots also will shortly be dug up, and re-sown.

The general result of the experiments in the field has been—that neither organic matter rich in carbon as well as other constituents, nor ammonia-salts, nor nitrate of soda, nor mineral constituents, nor a complex mixture, supplied as manure, availed to restore the clover-yielding capabilities of the land; though, where some of these were applied in large quantity, and at considerable depths, the result was better than when they were used in only moderate quantities and applied only on the surface.

On the other hand, it is clear that the garden-soil has supplied the conditions under which clover can be grown year after year on the same land for many years in succession.

The results obtained on the garden-soil seem to show that what is called “clover-sickness,” cannot be due to the injurious influence of excreted matters upon the immediately succeeding crop.

That Clover frequently fails coincidently with injury from parasitic plants, or insects, cannot be disputed; but it may be doubted whether such injury should be reckoned as the cause, or merely the concomitant and an aggravation, of the failing condition.

The results of the experiments seem, therefore, to exclude the supposition that the primary cause of failure is either destruction by parasitic plants or insects, injury from excreted matters, or the shade of a corn-crop, and to indicate that it must be looked for in exhaustion of the soil. Still there remain several open questions. Is it exhaustion of certain organic matters rich in carbon, of nitrogenous food, or of mineral constituents? Again: is there an absolute deficiency in the soil of some of the substances in question, or only an unfavourable condition of combination, or, so to speak, of *soil-digestion* of them, for the requirements of Leguminous plants? Or, is there only an unfavourable distribution of them within the soil, considered in relation to the extent and character of the root-range of the crop?

These various suggestions cannot be further considered within the limits of this brief notice, which may be concluded by the following quotation from Rothamsted papers on the subject (‘Journal Royal Agricultural Society of England,’ vol. xxi. Part I. p. 178; and ‘Journal Royal Horticultural Society of London,’ vol. iii. p. 86, 1872).

“When land is not what is called ‘clover-sick,’ the crop of clover may frequently be increased by top-dressings of manure containing potass and superphosphate of lime; but the high price of salts of potass, and the uncertainty of the action of manures upon the crop, render the application of artificial manures for clover a practice of doubtful economy.

“When the land is what is called ‘clover-sick,’ none of the ordinary manures, whether ‘artificial’ or natural, can be relied upon to secure a crop.

“So far as our present knowledge goes, the only means of insuring a good crop of Red Clover is to allow some years to elapse before repeating the crop upon the same land.”

BARN FIELD.

EXPERIMENTS ON THE GROWTH OF ROOT-CROPS.

EXPERIMENTS with TURNIPS were commenced in 1843. Eight acres, divided into numerous plots, were set apart for the purpose; and the crop was grown for ten consecutive years on the same land (“Norfolk Whites” 1843-1848, and “Swedes” 1849-1852); on some plots without manure, and on others with different descriptions of manure. Barley was then grown for three consecutive seasons (1853-1855) without manure, in order to test the comparative corn-growing condition of the different plots, and also to equalize their condition, as far as possible, by the exhaustion of some of the most active and immediately available constituents supplied by the previous manuring. A new series of experiments with Swedes was then arranged, having regard to the character of the manures previously applied on the different plots, and to the results previously obtained. This second series was commenced in 1856, and continued for 15 years—namely, to 1870 inclusive.

It is impossible adequately to state the bearing of the results in a few words, but the following are some of the most characteristic indications:—

1. Without manure of any kind, the produce of roots was

reduced in a few years to a few cwt. per acre; but the diminutive plants (both root and leaf) contained a very unusually high percentage of nitrogen.

2. Of “mineral” constituents, phosphoric acid (in the form of superphosphate of lime) was by far the most effective manure; but, when this manure is used alone, the immediately available nitrogen of the soil is rapidly exhausted.

3. Really large crops of turnips can only be obtained when the soil supplies a liberal amount of nitrogenous (and carbonaceous?) matter, as well as mineral constituents; and when they are already available within the soil, or are supplied in the form of farmyard manure, rape-cake, Peruvian guano, ammonia-salts, &c., the rapidity of growth, and the amount of the crop, are greatly increased by the use of superphosphate of lime applied near to the seed.

During the last 5 years, 1871-75, the land has been devoted to experiments with sugar-beet; for particulars of which see pp. 8 and 9: and this year, 1876, experiments with mangold-wurzel are substituted.