

ALFALFA, DAIRYING AND LIVESTOCK



By MR. T. B. GIBSON, of Woodland

Mr. Gibson is a practical farmer and stock breeder and has an intimate first hand acquaintance with the subject of which he writes.

The leader among grasses is alfalfa. It leads all others both in yield and in feeding value. In the Sacramento Valley, where it grows almost continuously summer and winter, it is one of the most satisfactory crops grown, the basis of a live stock and dairy business that is growing rapidly and promises a great future. Alfalfa cutting begins here in April and continues as late as November where water is available for irrigation until late in the summer. From four to six crops are cut each season. I cut four crops and pasture the land the remainder of the year, and this is the usual practice in the Woodland district where I live. The hay yield averages from a ton and a half to two tons an acre for each cutting.

The annual return secured by alfalfa growers varies according to the prevailing prices and the use made of the crop. Alfalfa hay is worth usually about \$7 a ton in the field. It is seldom much lower, some times considerably higher. Last year alfalfa hay was sold at \$13 a ton in the stack. The gross returns from an acre of alfalfa cut for hay ranges from \$40 to \$100.

The expense of handling is about the same as for any other hay, except for the cost of irrigation, which amounts in the Woodland district to about \$2.50 an acre for the year. Alfalfa is a steady producer, where water is supplied at the proper times and in proper quantities there is no such thing as crop failure. One year with another the crops average about the same. The best returns from alfalfa are secured by feeding to live stock. It is the ideal dairy feed and it is used extensively for fattening range cattle. In this valley it is the basis of a stock-breeding business, already large and certain to grow to great proportions.

Dairying is one of the most profitable industries

depending upon the alfalfa fields. The modern creamery, introduced into this valley a few years ago, has revolutionized farming methods in many sections. The first of these creameries was built at Woodland in 1895 and has been operated regularly ever since. It is a co-operative creamery built and managed by the farmers. It was a success from the beginning. To-day it has 225 patrons and pays out to them for cream approximately \$150,000 per year. Dairying affords the best opportunities for men of limited means. It is the ideal business for the small farm. Milk and butter yield larger returns in proportion to acreage and money invested than any other farm products. A few acres of alfalfa cut and fed to dairy cows will provide a comfortable living for a family. The modern creamery makes this possible by simplifying the home work. It takes the burden from the farmer's wife, makes better butter and brings better prices. With the right kind of cows and the right kind of care the average income ranges as high as \$7 per month per cow the year round. I know farmers who get this

average from their cows and they keep from one to two cows for each acre of alfalfa. To get this kind of returns only good cows must be kept, there must be no "boarders" in the herd. The successful dairyman tests each cow and keeps only those that pay. Those who get the largest returns from alfalfa fed to cows do not pasture the land. They cut the alfalfa and feed it. The silo is a valuable part of the

dairy farm equipment, but only a few of them are in use in this valley as yet. The demand for dairy products promises to more than keep pace with the increase in the supply. Butter is shipped to Mexico, Alaska and the Orient. The average price during the last year has been 30 cents a pound. For several



years past it represents a very handsome profit to the farmers.



STOCK breeding and fattening is carried on in the Sacramento Valley on a large scale. This valley is the breeding ground for the whole West. It is a stock country first and foremost;

it was a stock country when the first white settlers came 60 years ago; the home of great herds of elk, antelope and deer. It is a stock country to-day, the home of the greatest breeding herds on the Pacific Coast and the feeding ground for range cattle from a vast territory. Cattle, sheep, horses and mules are grown extensively, all with profit.

Cattle are grown both on alfalfa alone and on mountain ranges. Alfalfa is often a finishing ration for range cattle. Sheep have been grown principally in great flocks pastured in the valley or foothills in winter and in the mountains in summer, but the sheep industry will narrow down to the small farm where a small band of sheep will always pay because they can follow other stock and keep fat. Hogs are grown under all kinds of conditions, but do best on alfalfa. Horses and mules are grown both on farms and on the range. The Sacramento Valley rivals Missouri as a producer of fine mules. Stock grazing is most profitable where high class stock is grown with alfalfa as the principal ration.

One of the greatest opportunities of the Sacramento Valley for the stockmen is in stock breeding. Throughout the West there is need of improvement in the quality of the stock kept by the majority of stockmen. Too much attention has been given in the past to numbers and too little to quality, but I am glad to be able to say that farmers are beginning to look more to quality. Men in the breeding business are shipping to all parts of the West. I am now preparing to ship bulls to Mazatlan and Esperanza, Mexico, to Fallon and Lovelock, Nevada, and I am shipping a carload of mules to British Columbia. The field for the sale of breeding stock embraces most of the Western States, British Columbia, Mexico, Hawaiian Islands and Alaska.

This valley has exceptional advantages for the growing of live stock. The mild climate is particu-

larly advantageous because less housing and less feed are required and because alfalfa grows nearly all the year. We have few stock diseases, herds being, as a rule, healthy. We have very little hog cholera. A man who desires to engage in alfalfa and stock growing in the Sacramento Valley will find abundant opportunities. Prices of irrigated land in the Woodland district, where I reside range from \$75 to \$150 per acre. These values are low compared to the productive capacity of the land.

The first step after land is purchased should be to sow at least a portion of it to alfalfa. It will be necessary to "check" the land, that is, to build a system of small levees, dividing the land into blocks for irrigation. The cost of this and of seeding ranges from \$7 to \$15 per acre, according to the lay of the land. Alfalfa is usually sown in the spring, and two crops are cut the first year. Every farmer should have

chickens, hogs and cows. All these will bring ready money. There is never a time when a fat steer, hog, sheep or fowl cannot be sold for a good price. The chickens will lay eggs that are worth from 30 to 40 cents a dozen. Good cows will bring from \$6 to \$7 per month each at the local creamery. Fat hogs have averaged 6 cents a pound live weight for two years. Farming in the Sacramento Valley is a good deal like farming in any

other locality, except that the climate affords special advantages, that add to the satisfaction and profits of the farmers life. This is a farming country—it must always be a farming country. We grow fruits to perfection in endless variety, but we cannot expect to plant all these millions of acres to fruit, even if all of us would be fruit growers.



MANY farm crops are profitably grown—the list including about all of which I have knowledge. One of the most profitable is sugar beets. My beet crop last year averaged fifteen tons to the acre, and brought \$5 a ton

on board cars at the nearest switch. The cost of growing, harvesting and delivering was \$35 an acre, leaving a net return of \$40 an acre. The present crop is estimated at twenty tons to the acre. Beets do exceptionally well in land that has been in alfalfa, running from 21 to 22 per cent sugar and 85 per cent purity. Alfalfa is a soil builder; it is the best crop grown in California, barring none.