

Agriculture.

FLAX CULTURE.

Experiments in this State Prove That We Can Equal the Product of the Famous Districts of the Old World.

"I believe that the state of Washington can produce as fine a flax fibre as is grown in any part of the world." Thus spoke J. B. Powles to the editor on his recent visit to Seattle.

"I have been making a series of experiments near this city and although the methods pursued were necessarily crude, they were sufficiently successful to determine beyond a doubt that flax culture can be made one of the most profitable agricultural pursuits in Western Washington.

There has been interested with me in conducting these experiments, H. S. McGee, a native of Ireland, reared in the flax growing districts of that country. He is at present a street car conductor in this city.

"Our experiments were made on two plats of ground, one located in Seattle and the other on ex-Sheriff Cochrane's farm in the White river valley. The date the Seattle tract was sown was the 17th of May and it was pulled the 27th of July. It was laid in the field in swaths and allowed to dry for a day and then made into bundles about eight inches thick and put in the 'ditch' to go through the rotting process. This is as follows: The bundles of flax straw are laid in the ditch at an angle, with the roots down and the ditch is filled with water. The straw is covered with boards and weighted down with stones. In the course of three or four days it commences to ferment. The harder it ferments the better. The object is to rot the bone in the straw and separate it from the fibre. When the bone pulls out easily it is time to take it out, and it is spread in the field to dry. With us it remained in the ditch 18 days, but that was longer than it usually takes, because by some mistake the water in our ditch was changed and the fermentation thereby delayed. Fermentation will proceed quicker when the same water is allowed to remain stagnant in the trenches. Ten days is generally sufficient. When taken from the ditch it is spread in the open field for a day to dry, and then stored like grain until the grower wishes to prepare it further for market. There is no hurry about continuing the work of preparation as, unlike most crops, the longer it is stored the more valuable it becomes. It is generally put into the ditch again, although it is not necessary, and allowed to ferment until the bone can be easily loosened from the fibre. It is dried again in the field, and then follows the "breaking" process. This

brings into use a simple device which breaks the straw and makes it ready for the scutching process, which by systematic drubbing relieves it of all the bone and leaves only the fibrous strands. The final preparation is made with the hacking machine, which is a board about 1x6-x12 inches, through which is driven square edged 20-penny nails, about four to the square inch. The points of the nails are sharpened. The flax is drawn with a quick, sharp stroke over these nails until the strands become very fine. The finer they are made the more valuable the flax.

"Flax fibre is raised at the expense of the seed. The flax straw should be pulled as soon as the seed bowls mature, but before the seed ripens; hence the seed is not harvested. Now if a man is raising ten acres, in order to furnish a supply for the following year he must devote one fourth of an acre to seed raising. Seed should be changed every year, and in communities where flax fibre culture is general an exchange between neighbors is usually made. In growing flax for fibre it takes 2½ bushels per acre. In growing for seed it takes but 1½ bushels.

"We estimated from the little that we grew that we can produce in Western Washington 500 pounds per acre. I think a fibre can be produced that will command from 22 to 25c per pound; and the estimated cost, as near as we can tell, for getting it in the market, is from 8 to 10c per pound.

"Samples of fibre we raised last year have been passed upon by experts, and they say there is not the least doubt that the Sound country will ere long take the lead in the cultivation of superior fibre."

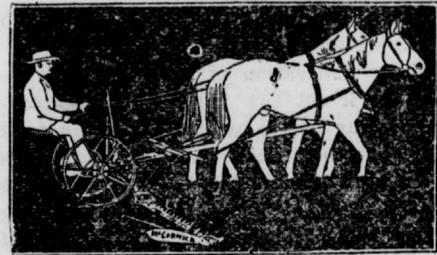
AGRICULTURAL BRIEFS.

The prospects of a good yield of grain this year in the Big Bend country, it is learned, are brighter than ever before. The squirrels, which are generally numerous there awaiting the arrival of the young wheat are very scarce.

In the Palouse county the crops look healthy, and although the spring is late the farmers of that section are confident of an abundant harvest from present indications. There has never been a much greater acreage planted this year than formerly, and squirrels for some reason are scarce.

There will be plenty of work in the Pacific Northwest this year for all who want work. No one who is physically capable and willing to work need go hungry or be in want for any of the necessities of life. Not only will there be a demand for thousands of men in the mines, but in other branches of industry as well, will there be need for many hundreds of workmen. From Helena to the Pacific coast the country will be the scene of liveliest activity, development and progress.—Spokane Chronicle.

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