Seasonal reminders

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NOW that the plant is fully grown and leaves are maturing, growers should be on the way towards commencement of harvesting and curing. These operations can seriously reduce the value of a good crop if handled carelessly. If you have an even crop and are using inexperienced labour, it is possible to go around the crop the day before harvest and say how many leaves are to be picked from each plant. There may be from two to five. In an uneven crop this is impossible.

As all experienced growers are aware, there are no set rules which can be laid down for the curing of a crop. The treatment of leaf from various parts of the paddock varies, so it is wise to endeavour to fill a kiln with leaf harvested from similar soil types and from similar positions on the plant. This will also facilitate bulking and grading.

Only experience will enable a grower to determine when leaf is ready to be harvested. However, the following hints may be of value in assessing ripeness. As the plant approaches maturity, the dark green colour characteristics of normal growth changes to a yellow mottling with heavy-bodied leaf and a yellowish green in the case of light-bodied leaf. In addition, the leaf becomes more brittle, and assumes a slightly more horizontal position in relation to the main stalk. Bottom leaves are light in body, and should be harvested slightly on the green side.

It often happens during harvesting that rain will follow a period of dry weather. This causes plant food material in the soil to be rendered assimilable by the plant, thus turning leaves green again. In such cases, it is generally safe to harvest the day immediately following rain, otherwise a week should elapse before harvest.

The best results from curing are obtainable when the kiln is filled the one day with uniform leaf, harvested in the morning before the leaf begins to wilt. If, however, it is necessary to fill the kiln over two days, it is always best to place leaf picked on the first day in the bottom of the kiln. Heavy bodied leaf should be placed in the top of the kiln.

CURING

The curing of tobacco can be divided into three stages, and I will attempt to give a broad outline of the process involved in each stage. As mentioned previously, however, there are no hard and fast rules which can be laid down.

1. Yellowing and Fixing Stage.—High humidity with little or no ventilation.
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Wet bulb thermometer 4° below dry bulb. Temperatures from 85-100° F. Keep at low temperatures till two-thirds to three-quarters of leaf has turned yellow. Gradually raise temperature 1°-2° per hour) to 105° with some bottom ventilation. Top vents may be opened if there is excessive humidity in the kiln. Make sure that leaf does not dry out faster than the colour develops. By this time, the leaf should be yellow at the tips and showing a lemon colour tinged with green towards the butt. Raise temperature slowly to 110° F. and adjust ventilators to give a wet bulb reading 8-10 degrees below the dry bulb. Leaf tips should commence to dry and curl at this stage.

2. Drying the Web of the Leaf.—By the time the tip commences to curl, the majority of the green should have disappeared from the leaf. The web of the leaf is now dried out by raising the temperature slowly to 115° F., and hold there until the leaf margins commence to curl. After this, raise the temperature slowly (1-2° per hour) to 120° F. and hold until the majority of the web of the leaf on the bottom tier is dry. The difference between the wet and dry bulb should now read from 15°-20° below the dry bulb. The web of the leaf on the second tier is then dried by raising the temperature to 125° F. After the second tier leaf is dried, the temperature can be raised by 2° to 3° per hour till it reaches 140° F. The difference between wet and dry bulb thermometer should now be 20°-30°. If the difference diminishes, it means that there is too much humidity in the kiln, and more ventilation is needed. It is at this period when leaf is most likely to sponge.

3. Drying of the Midrib.—Once the leaf is dry, very little ventilation is needed for drying out of the midrib. This is done by raising the temperature by 4° to 5° an hour till it reaches 160°-170° F. The kiln is held at this temperature until all midribs, especially in cold corners, are dry. It is unwise to carry temperatures over 170°, since scorching and reddening of the leaf then takes place.

The amount of top and bottom ventilation needed throughout the curing process depends largely on the air-tightness of the kiln and condition of the leaf. The higher the moisture content of the leaf, the more ventilation needed during the various phases. The humidity decreases, and thus the difference between wet and dry bulb thermometers increases, as the temperature is raised.—T.G.H.

Wheatbelt Notes

January should see the completion of harvesting and this is the time to clean and store the harvesting machinery and check any parts required for the next season. Opportunities may present themselves to arrange for an overhaul of the tractor and other machinery.

Most of the sheep will now be moved on to the stubbles and care should be taken to reserve the best grazing for the mated ewes and weaners.

Do not overgraze the paddocks as bare paddocks provide ideal conditions for soil erosion.

Be sure that stock water supplies are plentiful and of good quality.

February Activities

February is a suitable month for the grading and pickling of next year's seed. Oats and barley should be dry
pickled with organic mercury dusts and the seed wheat treated with copper compounds for the control of ball smut.

At this stage make a careful check of the machinery for cultivation and seeding and place orders for any spare parts that are needed or are likely to be needed during the season.

Regular inspection of the sheep flocks will pay good dividends and it may be necessary to start hand feeding during this month. Where possible the ewes should have grain, while cereal or meadow hay should be made available to the dry sheep. Remove the rams at the end of this month.

Top dressing may be commenced, using $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. of super or more on the old pastures which had been previously top dressed for ten years or more and up to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. for pastures on relatively new land.

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**Horticultural Notes**

PROVIDED stone fruits have reached a suitable stage of maturity when picked they will continue to ripen satisfactorily. However, if harvested too green, the fruit will not develop a good flavour and the general quality will be inferior. The correct stage for picking is best judged by the change which occurs in the green ground colour of the fruit.

When the green begins to show a yellowish tinge, the fruit may be safely picked. In the case of coloured fruits, particularly plums, the development of colour also indicates ripening. Fruit required for export or storage purposes should be picked while still very firm, but for local market purposes much riper fruit can be forwarded provided softening has not occurred. Fruit packed in trays may be forwarded in a more advanced condition than when packed in cases.

Pre-harvest Drop of Pome Fruits

Losses through dropping of Bartlett pears, Jonathan and Delicious apples can be largely prevented by the application of a spray containing naphthalene acetic acid which is marketed under a number of trade names. The spray should be mixed according to the manufacturer's instructions and applied two to three weeks before normal harvest, making sure to thoroughly wet the trees and in particular the stems of the fruit.

Summer Pruning of Apricots

The difficulties of controlling vigorous growth in apricots which often results from winter pruning can be largely obviated by pruning in late February. Pruning at this time also enables heavily overgrown trees to be thinned out without resulting in the production of strong uncontrollable growth.

Budding of Deciduous Trees

Trees which have been prepared in the winter for reworking in the summer may be budded during late January and early February. Plump buds on well developed shoots of the desired scion variety should be chosen and inserted in the bases of selected well-placed shoots which have developed as the result of cutting back the tree during the late winter months. The buds should not shoot until the following spring but attention is necessary to see that the ties are loosened as the bud expands. Nursery stocks are also budded at this time.
PESTS

1. Scale Insects.

For the control of scale insects apply a spray of 1 gallon of white spraying oil to 40 gallons of water. Complete coverage of all parts of the tree is essential and for this purpose equipment capable of delivering a pressure in the vicinity of 300 lb. per square inch is necessary.

For white wax scale, apply the spray as soon as the young insects are well hatched and appear in numbers on the mid-rib of the leaves (usually early January) and follow with a second spray two to three weeks later.

Where spraying for red scale is necessary apply the spray during late January or February and if required follow up with a second spray a month later.

If citrus white fly is prevalent add 1½ pints of nicotine sulphate to the spray mixture.

2. Fruit Fly.

A rapid increase in fruit fly populations usually occurs during January and constant attention is necessary to keep the pest under control.

Foliage baiting should be carried out consistently using the following mixture:

- 1 oz. sodium fluosilicate.
- 2½ lb. white sugar.
- 4 gallons of water.

All stone fruit trees, either carrying fruit or recently stripped, pears, early apples and figs require attention, not forgetting citrus trees which have not been completely stripped of fruit.

Pick up all fallen fruit regularly—soft fruits preferably every day, and destroy by boiling or burning. Orchard sanitation is particularly important to prevent rapid increase of the pest and should be extended to include all odd fruits hanging on trees stripped of their commercial crop.

3. Apple Curculio Beetle.

When signs of the second brood of curculio beetle are noticed (usually in February) apply 4 per cent. B.H.C. dust in a complete ring around the base of each tree. Ensure that there are no alternate means of the beetles reaching the foliage other than by the trunk.

Alternatively, if desired the following baits may be used:—Mix 1 lb. sodium fluoride with 9 lb. minced apple and apply round the bases of the trees at the rate of approximately 15 lb. per acre.

Arsenate of lead sprays should not be used at this stage or the fruit will be contaminated.

Beekeepers' Notes

DURING the hot weather of January and February, beekeepers should ensure that their bees have adequate water supplies readily available. There is a widespread impression that bees do not require much water when they are working on an ample nectar flow, but last year's marri flow proved the fallacy of this belief as at all times the bees sought water apart from that obtained from the nectar.

Every bee that is carting water means a reduction in the nectar-collecting staff and therefore lack of an easily available supply of water is apt to be reflected in reduced yields of honey. One of the most convenient methods of providing water is to have 44-gallon drums filled with water, with some palm leaves or twigs from scrub placed in the top of the drum so that the bees can obtain water and fly away without risk of drowning.
The summer months are dangerous periods for beekeepers, as many hives have been lost through bushfires. Make sure that your apiaries are protected by fire-breaks and remember to always carry your knapsack spray on the truck, filled with water and ready for instant use. Shovels, beaters and supplies of water for refills should also be carried when travelling in the bush.

Carry your smoker in an old honey tin and empty it into another tin when finishing work in the evening, making certain that the smoker fuel does not contribute to the fire risk. Keep the ground round the hives well raked, and if possible have a cleared strip at least 20 feet wide surrounding the apiary. It is not worth taking chances on these matters as hives are too valuable to lose for a lack of a few hours of work.

The attention of all beekeepers is drawn to the fact that it is necessary for them to re-register their apiaries for 1953 not later than December 31, 1952. Application cards are available from the Government Apiiculturist, Department of Agriculture, Perth.

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Veterinary Notes

With the approach of summer, farmers in the drier districts should take the precaution of protecting their livestock against toxic paralysis by inoculation with botulinus toxoid. This disease affects both sheep and cattle, and usually results from the consumption of carrion or bones contaminated by the microbe Clostridium botulinum which, during the course of its growth, produces an extremely potent toxin or poison.

As the summer advances, the dry grazing deteriorates and becomes inadequate to satisfy nutritional requirements. Under these conditions, depraved appetite accompanied by carrion eating and bone chewing is commonly observed, and should this material be contaminated with Cl. botulinum, losses from toxic paralysis are certain to occur.

Outbreaks of the disease have been most serious in seasons when rabbits have been numerous, since these pests not only hasten the rate at which deterioration of the pastures takes place, but also provide an abundance of toxic carrion, when measures have to be adopted for their destruction.

Toxic paralysis may be prevented by inoculation with botulinus toxoid which should be given by subcutaneous (under the skin) injection in a dosage of 5 c.c. for sheep and 10 c.c. for cattle. The injection of this product results in the development of a strong and lasting immunity which becomes effective in 14 days and is sufficient to prevent losses from the disease for a period of at least a year.

Since the risk of toxic paralysis is greatest during January-April, inoculations should be completed before the end of December. Further information is contained in Leaflet No. 650 which will be supplied by the Department upon application.

BLACKLEG

During the past two years mortalities from blackleg have occurred among cattle in the South-West, despite inoculation with routine blackleg vaccine. This product has proved highly effective for the prevention of the disease for many years, but for reasons yet unexplained it appeared to suddenly lose its value as an immunising agent.

To overcome this difficulty, a special vaccine prepared from new strains of Clostridium Chauvoei—the microbe
which causes the disease—was obtained from the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories for the re-inoculation of herds on which the routine vaccine had failed.

The results were highly satisfactory since no further mortalities from blackleg occurred in any of the 29 herds in which re-inoculation with the new vaccine was carried out.

This product is now being marketed as the routine blackleg vaccine, and supplies may be obtained direct from the Commonwealth Health Department, G.P.O., Perth.

The dose for cattle is 5 c.c. given by subcutaneous injection. Calves should be inoculated at the age of three to six months.

Poultry Notes

In well-cared-for flocks, de-worming will have been carried out at 10 weeks of age and the birds should be de-wormed for the second time when they are 18 weeks old. This rids the alimentary canal of any worms that may be present and, as a result, the birds often display a marked improvement in health.

The pullets should be graded as they are transferred to the laying quarters. Backward pullets should be segregated from the main flock to give them an opportunity of faster development.

Adequate feeding receptacles should be placed in the poultry house and in shady positions of the yard. Allow approximately 24 linear feet of feeding space to 100 birds. Provide a receptacle containing insoluble blue metal chips (one-eighth screened) at all times.

Clean out the nest boxes and refill with three inches of clean, pine sawdust.

Before the pullets are transferred to their laying quarters, all woodwork in the laying sheds should be creosoted. Special attention should be given to joints and crevices in the woodwork. Broody coops should not be overlooked.

The laying houses should be left vacant for ten days following this treatment to enable the creosote to soak into the wood. In this way, burning of the birds will be obviated.

Inspect feeding and watering receptacles to see that they are in working order. Re-conditioning the deep litter in the laying houses is important. Leave enough of the old built-up litter to cover the floor to a depth of two inches. Apply hydrated lime to the surface of the litter at the approximate rate of one kerosene-tinful to a shed with floor dimensions of 32ft. x 16ft. Incorporate the lime into the litter and add a surface of two inches of clean, dry jarrah sawdust.

To prevent the surface of the litter from caking, during the winter months, approximately six applications of hydrated lime should be sprinkled over the litter and then incorporated in the litter with the assistance of a forked hoe.
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