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OATS and VETCHES

Show Their Worth at Bridgetown

By A. W. HOBBS, B.Sc. (Agric.), Agricultural Adviser

AN excellent fodder crop yielding almost 4½ tons of hay per acre was grown on a property at Bridgetown during 1956. This crop was grown for demonstrational purposes and many farmers in the Bridgetown district have been interested in it as they passed along the road. Some details concerning this crop, therefore, may be of interest to those farmers.

The demonstration was carried out on the property of Mr. L. Beard of Bridgetown and is one of a number of demonstrations which have been arranged throughout the dairying areas over the last seven years.

Oats and vetches are particularly valuable as a cleaning crop preceding the sowing down of pasture species. The combination of vetches with oats provides a hay crop which is more valuable in its protein content than a crop of oats. The seed mixture consists of 60 lb. of Algerian oats and 15 lb. of purple vetch per acre. Algerian oats are chosen because they most nearly match the vetch in the rhythm of their growth, both species growing most rapidly towards the end of the spring.

The area on which this demonstration was carried out has been cleared for a number of years. It originally carried redgum with some jarrah. The soil is a red loam which is typical of a considerable area in the Bridgetown district. Although the area had been down to subterranean clover pasture for a number of years, the pasture had commenced to run out and was somewhat low in production and the demonstration was arranged as the first stage before seeding down to pastures in 1957.

An area of two acres was scarified “in the dry” during March to loosen the surface of the soil and allow easy penetration of the early rains. This was very successful and weeds germinated quickly. They were cultivated with the tandem disc implement, and the area left in fallow for four weeks when it was again disced to kill a further germination of the weeds. A third discing took place during April and then between the end of May and June 12, the area was harrowed several times at intervals to give a good clean seed bed with a firm tilth.

Seed and fertiliser were sown broadcast on June 12, and harrowed in. Vetch seed was inoculated with culture. Both the oats and the vetches germinated rapidly and a very good germination was noted by July 1. By August, a good stand of oats and vetches had been obtained and was making vigorous growth. The area was almost free of weeds. The crop finished off well and contained a good mixture of oats and vetches. It was mown on December 12 to give a yield of 372 bales with an average weight per bale of 53 lb. each, that is almost 4½ tons per acre of hay.

During the growth of the crop, any weeds which appeared were successfully choked out and the land is in good condition for an early harrowing and seeding to pasture during the autumn of this year.

From experience on Research Stations, mixtures of oats and vetches which contain a high proportion of vetch are capable of giving high protein contents in hay and frequently protein levels at least twice that of an ordinary hay crop have been recorded.

With the excellent yield of 4½ tons per acre, Mr. Beard feels that he has been well repaid for the care and attention he put into preparing for this crop and in addition, his paddock was left in excellent condition for sowing down to pasture in 1957.
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