COMMUNITY COTTON IMPROVEMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA.1

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Rural communities that boast of good roads or good schools are not uncommon; but one rarely finds a community that takes pride in the quality of seed it produces. On the contrary, it is the custom of most communities to secure a large proportion of their seed from other localities. This is particularly true of the small cotton growers. Very few growers realize the value of home-bred and home-grown seed. Some even believe that crops deteriorate when grown in the same locality for several years. This delusion and misleading advertisements are partly responsible for the lack of uniformity in cotton varieties. With each grower of a community changing cotton seed every few years one can very well imagine the effect upon uniformity and quality of staple.

A survey of cotton varieties in a North Carolina community would read somewhat as follows: Two growers planting Half-and-half; four, Cook; ten, King or a variety of similar origin; and three growing Cleveland Big Boll or some other large-bolled variety. Each grower swears by his particular variety but is usually not sufficiently interested to prevent its mixing with other varieties at the public gin. Assuming that these varieties are fairly pure, the community would be producing a little 5/8- to 3/4-inch cotton, quite a bit of 3/4- to 7/8-inch, a small amount of 15/16- to 1-inch, and in some communities a little long-staple cotton. Such a group of cottons is sometimes found on a single farm. This condition and the mixing of seed at the public and private gins render the production of uniform strains of cotton almost hopeless.

Considering our market conditions, the responsibility for lack of uniformity cannot be placed entirely on the producer. To the average buyer cotton is cotton, to be bought as cheaply as possible. Until improved quality and uniformity mean increased price to the grower, we cannot expect a general production of better cotton. The work of cotton improvement, therefore, requires the attention of the market expert as well as that of the breeder.

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