A LONG VERSUS A SHORT ROTATION FOR THE NEW ENGLAND DAIRY

(Abstract)

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The present system of land management on New England dairy farms was developed in response to specific conditions of climate, soil type, labor supply, and competitive factors which are probably less evident today than the practices they established. In any attempt at readjustment so that greater net income may be realized, the question arises as to changes in the rotation system and the relative values of the long and short rotation in effecting the improvement of soil fertility which is fundamentally important to the more efficient production of forage crops.

If there be at present a typical rotation on such farms, it is the so-called long rotation which, generally speaking, is well suited to the soil type, topography, and labor supply of many of these farms. It has failed, not because of its length, but because regular additions of plant food to maintain production have not been included in the scheme. It would seem from experience and experiments that the long rotation with necessary adjustments as to plant food supply, including lime, will best meet the needs of many of these farms.

The New England dairy farm differs from the short rotation farm of the middle western states in that the acreage in hay is so much greater than the total of other crops in the rotation. To shorten the rotation and to include the entire present acreage of crops on the farm in such a system would involve a labor need that makes the attempt prohibitive. For some farms a combination of the two systems may be the most desirable. The production on areas which are costly as to tillage can be maintained with soil amendments. That portion of the acreage which permits of easy tillage may be carried in short rotations. With lime and mineral fertilizers and more frequent crops of clover it would seem that distinct gains could be made relative to the proportion of legume hay available.

DISCUSSION

B. C. HELMICK, in discussing this paper, remarked that in deciding upon a change we should consider whether the economic situation has changed and stated that this depended largely upon whether we can grow grain as cheaply as we can buy it.

"Is forage the only thing to be considered?" he asked.

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