MARYLAND'S PASTURE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

F. W. Oldenburg

Aside from the fundamental problem of soil fertility, Maryland farmers have few questions of greater importance than that of pasture improvement. More and more are they looking to dairying as their chief source of income, but it is evident that any further increase will have to be brought about by cheaper production. One of the chief means of reducing costs of production, is improving pastures and managing them better. Some dairymen have learned that pastures suitable for dairy cows, due to their nearness to the barn, will give profitable returns on a considerable amount of time and money spent on their improvement, especially if the extra pasturage makes less barn feeding necessary. The improvement of more distant pastures better suited to beef and other farm animals presents a different problem.

Data on pastures are hard to obtain. In 1918 there was a total of 860,000 acres in pasture in Maryland. This had increased to 898,000 acres by 1925 and is probably greater now. They are divided as follows: Plowable, 529,000 acres; wooded, 189,000 acres; other, 180,000 acres. The carrying capacity is given as 1 cow to 2 acres on the plowable land, 1 cow to about 3 acres on the wooded pastures, and 1 cow to 4 acres on the other land. On this basis the total is equivalent to 745,000 acres of plowable land in carrying capacity.

The number of farm animals in Maryland as given by the 1925 census is as follows: Dairy cattle, 187,000; other cattle, 98,000; horses and mules, 125,000; sheep, 108,000; and hogs, 198,000.

Allowing 2 acres for each head of cattle; 1 acre for each horse, mule, and sheep; and ¼ acre for each hog, a total of 851,000 acres of pasture is needed. With an equivalent of 745,000 acres there is an apparent shortage of 106,000 acres. These figures give little information as to what part of the pastures are permanent and suitable for dairy cows and what part rotational, or where the shortage is. However, from observation we know that this shortage is principally in the new dairy regions and largely on the Eastern Shore.

Corn and wheat are the principal farm crops on the majority of Maryland farms. More than 500,000 acres of each are grown. The

1Contribution from the Extension Service, University of Maryland, College Park, Md. Presented as part of a symposium on "An Extension Program for Pasture Improvement" at the annual meeting of the Society held in Washington, D. C., November 21, 1930. Received for publication November 21, 1930.

2Extension Agronomist.