PASTURING ALFALFA IN MICHIGAN

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This discussion of some phases of alfalfa pasture under Michigan conditions is based primarily on experiments conducted at the W. K. Kellogg Farm of the Michigan State College located at Augusta, in southwestern Michigan. To check on some of the general principles which these trials have indicated, questions regarding them were taken up in some detail with 35 Michigan farmers regularly using alfalfa for pasture. The idea is not advanced that the opinions of these men accurately indicate the collective judgment of all Michigan farmers who have opened their alfalfa meadows to their livestock. Rather, a few of their ideas, summarized, are presented as an interesting and significant expression by men with an average of more than 10 years' experience in the use of alfalfa for pasture under conditions demanding the economic soundness of the enterprise.

ALFALFA VS. SWEET CLOVER FOR PASTURE

By ratio of 30 to 2 these farmers expressed their preference for alfalfa over sweet clover as a pasture crop.

"It is just as easy to get a stand with alfalfa as with sweet clover," they say, "alfalfa lasts more years, provides a longer grazing season, better and more palatable forage." The fact that second-year sweet clover is through as a pasture crop by about July 15 in Michigan, although the grazing season is only half over, is an important disadvantage. Pasture returns may normally be expected from sweet clover only in its second year, for much of Michigan's soil is of the lighter types on which this crop does not make enough growth during the year it is seeded to provide any fall pasture.

Typical of many areas in southwestern Michigan is the Bellefontaine sandy loam soil at Augusta on which a comparison of alfalfa and sweet clover pasture gave results in support of the preference of these farmers for alfalfa.

The seedings of alfalfa and sweet clover were made in duplicate 1-acre paddocks in 1930, following a 1929 application of 7 yards per acre of marl and treatment with commercial fertilizer. In 1931 the alfalfa furnished 613 sheep-days pasture per acre, the sweet clover 343. Both stands were good but even during June and July the alfalfa furnished the greater amount of pasture, while in August and September the sweet clover yielded nothing at all. Two years later the same sweet clover paddocks again were ready for grazing, this time in comparison with the old alfalfa already closely cropped by sheep for two seasons.