Pasture Improvement—Methods of Getting the Job Done

F. V. Burcalow

PASTURE improvement is of utmost importance in Wisconsin because over 12 million acres of the 22 million acres of land in farms in Wisconsin is classified as pasture. Less than 3 million acres of this total of 12 million acres are classified as plowable pasture, the balance being so-called open permanent pastures or woodland pasture. Much of the open pasture land is on steep or rolling side hills very subject to erosion if cultivated. Improved pasture production is also of utmost importance because 88% of the total farm income in Wisconsin is derived from the sale of livestock and livestock products.

Extension work on the improvement of so-called permanent pastures in Wisconsin was started as a major project in 1935. Interest in this improvement resulted from severe damage to millions of acres of bluegrass by white grubs. They did such a complete job of eliminating the bluegrass that livestock production was greatly reduced and the pastures became badly infested with weeds. As a result of some preliminary work started in 1923 by Professor L. F. Graber, the program now known as renovation was ready for extensive use by 1935. This program is based on the establishment of drought-tolerant legumes in old bluegrass pastures without plowing. Briefly stated, the steps in this renovation program consist in testing the soil, applying the necessary lime and fertilizer, preparing a seedbed by use of a disk, spring tooth, field cultivator, or a combination of these implements, and reseeding these pastures to a mixture of sweetclover, red clover, and timothy. This was the basis of the extension program started in 1935 and 1936 on individual farms scattered throughout the grassland areas throughout Wisconsin. Considerable supplies of TVA phosphate and potash from the American Potash Institute were made available to local cooperators who agreed to do the necessary work and provide the lime and seed for the job. These demonstrations were carried on under the direction of extension specialists in cooperation with the county agents and Soil Conservation Service personnel where they were available. Method demonstrations were held at the time the work was done and the result demonstrations held in subsequent years at these sites.

A total of some 500 demonstrations were established in the years 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938. These demonstrations were used as stopping places on county extension tours as well as for individual meetings. This field work was supplemented by discussions on pasture improvement at winter meetings as well as preparation of circulars, news stories, and radio broadcasts on this subject. By 1938

1Contribution from the Extension Department, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis. Presented as part of the Extension Program at the annual meeting of the Society held in Omaha, Neb., November 21, 1946. Received for publication December 26, 1946.

2Extension Agronomist.