

Agriculture

REGENERATION OF GRASSLAND

ACHIEVEMENTS IN SOMERSET

PLOUGHING UP AND RE-SEEDING

FROM OUR AGRICULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Somerset is a grass county, and grass is the foundation of her farming economy. It is true that fat lambs, fat cattle, and milk are the products that the farmer actually sells, but grass is the crop which produces these things and which really matters to him. Not everyone looks upon grass as a crop. To some the growth of herbage is just a natural phenomenon. But the idea of grass as a crop to be studied and cultivated, like wheat, oats, and any other crop is gaining ground. A few days ago I had the opportunity of seeing what the farmers of Somerset are doing to improve the output of their grass crop.

The lead came from the Agricultural Instruction Committee of the Somerset County Council, which has allowed Mr. W. D. Hay, the county organizer, to devote his great energy and enthusiasm to the problem of regenerating the county's grassland. It is 12 years ago since experiments with grass-seed mixtures were started, and at the same time manurial trials on permanent grassland were carried out at a large number of centres all over the county. The farmer could see the results on his neighbour's farm, which is much more convincing than plots at an experimental station. Out of this work has developed the plan for ploughing up and re-seeding "dead" pastures, which is being adopted by a number of progressive farmers in the county.

The first farm visited was on the Mendips, above Cheddar. Here, about 1,000ft. above sea level, a perfect sward, mostly rye grass and wild white clover, has replaced moribund moor turf, consisting mainly of rough grass and bracken. The plan carried out here, as on other farms, was to plough out the old grass early in the winter, work it well after Christmas, plough again and work down, and then a third ploughing and final cultivations before sowing the grass seed mixture in late June or July.

STANDARD SEED MIXTURE

The standard seed mixture now used in Somerset is:—

Four lb. Italian rye grass; 12lb. perennial rye grass; 8lb.-10lb. cocksfoot; 4lb. timothy; 1lb. rough stalked meadow grass; 3lb. late flowering red clover; 2lb. broad red clover; and 1lb. genuine wild white clover.

This mixture, using strains of proved merit, generally gives good results backed by a generous dressing of basic slag. It has been established by many trials that basic