CLOVER LAND

Marquette County's Success With Green Mountain Potatoes

By L. R. WALKER of Marquette

MARQUETTE county, Michigan, lies on the south shore of Lake Superior between the 86 degree and 87 degree parallels of longitude and between the 46 degree and 47 degree of north latitude. The 1910 census gives the county a population of 46,739 with a land area of 1,196,800 acres with only 67,806 acres in farms owned by 661 farmers, with an average of 102.6 acres per farm. The total valuation of all farm property in the county was placed at $1,867,952. These 661 farmers grew 1,415 acres of potatoes in 1910 or on an average of over 2 acres per farm.

Today there are 900 farmers on the Farm Bureau mailing list owning approximately 100,000 acres of land. These farmers are all growing potatoes for a cash crop as it is the only cultivated crop that can be grown successfully that can be marketed at a profit. Sugar beets can be grown but too far to a market at present time. The weather bureau as Marquette shows that the average season from frost to frost is 145 days. This is not true of the whole country however, but even at Marquette it is impossible to mature corn or beans because of the cool nights. The soil and climatic conditions are just right though for potatoes and it is wonderful the quantity and quality that can and are being produced.

Marquette county is now known quite extensively as a producer of Green Mountain potatoes. This has came about because of a strenuous campaign made through the efforts of the Farm Bureau. Three years ago last July, or July 1915, the County Farm Bureau started the work through the county agent. The county agent made a potato survey of the county. He visited one hundred fields and looked the fields over for disease and varieties. He found every man growing several varieties and usually the variety names were unknown. The varieties were quite badly mixed. Many farmers were interviewed who had paid as high as a dollar and a half a peck for fancy seed sold by some agent or seed house. Most of this so-called fancy seed proved to be a new name for an old variety, usually a Green Mountain or a Rural and most of the farmers were growing one or the other variety or both.

A County Potato association was organized in August, 1915, with 22 members. Sixteen of these members had ¼ acre plots staked and inspected for disease and variety mixtures. The diseased hills and hills not true to type were either dug when inspected or staked and then dug before digging the whole plot. This plot served as a seed plot.

While the specialist from Michigan Agricultural college and the county agent were making these inspections, it was learned the Green Mountain potato was in favor with the farmers and also that it was proving to be the best grower. Later it was found to be the best producer.

A meeting of the association was called and the members unanimously adopted the Green Mountain as the potato to specialize on in the county. During the spring of 1916, six boys' potato clubs were organized and these boys were persuaded to buy and grow Green Mountains. These boys were very successful. Their plots were all well taken care of and inspected several times during the year.

Most of the tubers produced by the boys were sold to neighbors and friends for seed. Many more farmers grew Green Mountains in 1916 and fewer varieties were grown on a farm. Twenty-five seed plots were inspected. Diseased hills and those not true to type were treated as the previous year. In the spring of 1917, there was a great demand for seed potatoes. The Green Mountains were recommended by the Potato association. A number of farmers had No. 1 seed for sale and the Green Mountains spread from one side of the county to the other. Another method of dissemination was through the fourteen potato clubs organized.

Bert Barton's potato field at Republic, Marquette County, Michigan

From a comparatively few people growing the Green Mountain variety of potatoes in 1915, it has increased until at least 75 per cent of the potatoes grown in the county are of this variety, even the city gardeners are growing Green Mountains and pronouncing them O. K.

Last spring members of the association sold potatoes into seven counties of the upper peninsula and into several counties below the Straits besides two carloads into New York state.

The association has grown into thirty-seven members. Twenty-three members had their fields inspected this last season. Ten carloads of pure clean No. 1 seed potatoes have been shipped into New York state and not a word of complaint has been received from the buyers. The producer has received 25 per cent more than the market price. Several carloads are still retained by the growers to be sold in the spring. More men are becoming interested in the Potato association. More fields will be inspected next year and it is expected that we will have at least 25 carloads of pure, clean, Green Mountain seed potatoes for sale.

Rasmus Olsen in his Marquette county potato field, where 1.37 acres yielded 520 bu.; five hills in basket weighed 30 pounds and one hill weighed 7.1 pounds.

The soil and climate conditions seem to be just right to produce excellent crops of Green Mountain potatoes. It is believed by the writer that the average yield for members of the association where they have had fields inspected and planted selected seed has been over 250 bushels to the acre.

One member, Rasmus Olsen of Sands township, produced 520 bushels from 1,37 acres. In order to show how interested Mr. Olsen has become and how he can produce such a crop, it will be necessary to give a little history.

In the spring of 1917 Mr. Olsen picked out a fairly good sized potato, true to type and free from disease. He planted this as an experiment on his own initiative. He cut the tuber into eleven pieces and planted them into eleven hills. He dug a peck from the eleven hills and exhibited them at the Marquette county fair. He had keen opposition but received first prize. He gave this peck away. He later dug two pecks more from the eleven hills. He planted the two pecks the last of May this year. They were frozen to the ground on the 22nd of June but again came up. He dug enough in September to select a peck for the fair. He again received first prize and later dug 16 bushels. He now has 16 bushels of choice seed from the one tuber of last year. He has won two first prizes, had the potatoes frozen to the ground and given away two pecks, or the prize tubers, and still has 16 bushels.

Mr. Olsen also tried another experiment on his own account. He saved several hills from his crop of 1917 and planted them by themselves in the middle of his field. The following results were obtained:

Hill Unit Work, 1918.

Planted consecutively the tubers produced from one hill saved last year from good producing hills of type potatoes

1. Unit (50 hills) proved to be all Mosaic and yielded 107 pounds or a yield of 2.14 pounds per hill.

2. Unit (69 hills) continuation of row 1 yielded 237 pounds of 3.43 pounds per hill.

3. Unit (34 hills) alongside row 1 yielded 98.5 pounds or 2.9 pounds per hill.

4. Unit (49 hills) continuation of row 2 yielded 156.5 pounds or 3.2 pounds per hill.

5. Unit (39 hills) row 3, proved to be all Mosaic yielded 90.5 pounds or 2.32 pounds per hill.

Comparisons.

Field planted 3 in. by 1½ in. gives 7112 hills per acre.

Best yield 3.43 pounds per hill gives 406.5 bushels per acre.

Poorest yield 2.15 pounds per hill, 253.5 bushels per acre.

Difference, 153.0 bushels per acre.

Average of three not diseased 3.18 pounds per hill.

Average of two diseased, 2.225 pounds per hill.

Difference, .955 pounds per hill.

Nine hundred fifty-five thousandth pound per hill give a difference of 153 bushels per acre. The best hill produced the largest total yield as as well as the largest average hill yield. The Mosaic seed produced Mosaic potatoes and cut the yield. The five hill unit results are placed in separate bags and will be further developed next year.

The writer assisted in getting the results from this field and being curious to know the weight of some of the hills, picked up five hills from out of 50 dug and put them in a basket and weighed them and the five hills tipped the scales at 30 lbs. One hill weighed 7 pounds.

Mr. Olsen believes in seed selection. Another man, John Kreiger of Skandia, increased his crop the first year by seed plot selection just 25 per cent. His son produced the largest yield known in Michigan from his club plot in 1917, getting 142 bushels or at the rate of 568 bushels per acre. This was from select seed.

Many others have received similar results and the neighbors have noticed it and are going into the same busines of seed selection. Members of the Marquette County Potato Growers' association have learned the value of seed selection and are now starting out in the seed potato business which we hope will mean a prosperous future for them.

The county has a population of 46,000. Besides supplying these 46,000 people with potatoes there is usually a surplus of at least 100,000 bushels and there is no reason why this surplus cannot be No. 1 Green Mountain seed and neither is there any reason why this 100,000 bushels cannot be 200,000 bushels or more. What we need now is a demand for our seed. We have the quality.

This county is especially adapted to the growing of clover and grains of all kinds as well as potatoes. There are thousands of acres of land ready for the settler. Potatoes can be grown for a cash crop while he is clearing his land and at the same time he can pasture his live stock, either cattle or sheep, on the virgin soil and make a comfortable living while clearing and paying for his farm.

Lieut. Koupal, personnel officer of the M. C. M. camp at Houghton, is expecting daily the discharge papers necessary to the final release of the men from the service.

Men discharged from the service at Camp Custer are furnished funds for the purchase of their tickets home.