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MAKING GOOD ON A SMALL ACREAGE

A FRUIT AND FOWL FARM AT GREENSBOROUGH

BY OUR HORTICULTURAL REPORTER

When the question is asked in regard of small holdings, "How much land is required to make a living on?" the most obvious answer is that it depends on the amount of work that is put into it. That is subject to certain qualifications as, of course, in the case of land so poor , that labor is thrown away on it, or so far from a market that the produce cannot be disposed of profitably; but, given equally good land, one man may make more from an acre than another makes from two, or even ten. The man himself is the chief factor; the land is only a means to an end.

There can be few better examples of a small but productive holding than the. six-acre garden of Mr. J. A. Bosch, of Greensborough, 15 miles from Melbourne. It. is true that the area of the entire holding is 20 acres, but 14 acres is in a state of nature, although by no means unproductive, as it serves as a run for upwards of 1000 fowls. Of the six planted acres, 4 ½ are in full bearing and 1 ½ acre 4 or 5 years old. To say that the garden is productive is putting it mildly, for in a good season the 4 ½ acres yields 2000 bushels of fruit, besides profitable crops of vegetables and a great part of the poultry feed. Is this not impoverishing the land? By no means; the soil is improving all the time. When Mr. Bosch came into possession, some fifteen years ago, there was an old orchard on the place which had never done any good, and he was advised not to attempt fruit growing but out came a lot of the old trees and in went a much larger acreage of new ones; principally apples and peaches. Intense culture was the order of the day, thorough cultivation, generous manuring, and as much watering as was necessary to get the best results. In the meantime, some returns were required while the trees were growing, so strawberries were grown, and yielded well until the trees got too strong for them, when they were replaced with tomatoes, which in turn deteriorated as the trees became more exacting. More suitable crops have now been, substituted, peas, pumpkins, silver beet and lettuce for the fowls, with all the vegetables required for household use.

IRRIGATION SCHEME

An essential part of this system of intense culture is the water supply. There are no fewer than five storage dams, formed by building embankments in suitable places; one has a capacity of 600,000 gallons, another of 500,000, two of 300,000 each, and a smaller one which has not yet been measured. These reservoirs receive the surface water from the surrounding slopes, but the chief source of supply is the Plenty River, which flows at the foot of the garden, the water being forced by means of a wind mill pump to the top reservoir, which commands the highest point of the orchard. In addition, a supply is obtained when necessary from the Watts River aqueduct, which adjoins the property, the charge for which is by meter. The method of irrigating differs from that in vogue in Doncaster, where a small, stream is carried to each row of trees; the whole body of soil is saturated, the object being to water the ground crops, the trees benefiting incidentally. In the dry weather a watering is given every three or four weeks. The amount used has been carefully computed. and is just about 3 inches (66,000 gallons) to the acre at each irrigation.

A portion of the garden is fairly level, but most of it is on the side of the hill, which in places is very steep, so that great care is necessary in applying such a large quantity of water to prevent washing away of the soil. This is done by allowing the water, to find its own way down the slope through the growing crops, which retard the flow, prevent scouring, and act as a moisture-conserving mulch. The place is not systematically drained, as it has not been found necessary, but there is a pipe drain at the foot of each dam embankment to prevent seepage, and another lower down the slope. The inside face of one of the dams which showed signs of leaking has been very effectively lined with a kind of reinforced concrete. The lining consists of about 2 inches of lime mortar spread on wire netting and afterwards well tarred. The netting is laid on a thin bed of cocky chaff (used for packing eggs), which allowed the mortar to come through the meshes of the netting and key itself at the back. It makes a thin and springy, but perfectly impervious, lining, with no possibility of erosion and no sign of cracking in any part.

LIBERAL MANURING.

The soil has every appearance of being well nourished, being full of rich dark humus and turning over like the proverbial ash bed. On one spot of about an acre and a half 200 loads of pig manure were spread last year. The fowls yield 200 loads of valuable fertiliser per annum; no particular care is taken to conserve it. There is a pit alongside each poultry yard into which the droppings are thrown when the houses are cleaned out; no soil is mixed with it and no attempt made to keep it dry. Green manuring is extensively practised, lupines, tick beans and peas being grown for this purpose, the preference being given to lupines which penetrate the soil very thoroughly and are easily ploughed under. Tick beans also are very effective, but peas in the heavy crop which Mr. Bosch likes to grow are troublesome to get into the ground afterwards. The green manure crops are sown with a good dressing of superphosphate, but besides this no artificial fertiliser is used on the place. Mr. Bosch says he is no chemist, so prefers to give his land plenty of humus, which he knows to be good, to a dose of chemicals, which may or may not be. The motto is, "take care of the land and the land will take care of the trees'."

THE GROUND CROPS.

In one-part of the orchard, where the slope is fairly steep, there are three or four rows of garden peas in each side of the rows of trees, and in the centre a strip about five feet wide is heavily manured and planted with pumpkins. These are now starting to make good growth, and, when the weather gets warmer will completely cover the ground, keeping it cool and moist, and serving to distribute and regulate the irrigation water as it flows down the hill. Underneath every tree in the orchard is a thick sowing of garden peas; these serve a threefold purpose, yielding a profitable crop of peas, acting as a mulch to protect windfalls, from braising, and making a good fertiliser when dug in. After all the peas have been picked the haulms of these between the rows are pulled out and thrown under the trees to thicken the mulch. This idea of growing the mulch on the spot instead of having to cart straw from a distance is quite a novel, and excellent one, but is only made possible by the copious irrigation. The pumpkins are a very important part of the poultry ration. In another part of the orchard rows of silver beet are grown for the same purpose, the earthing up of the plants serving to keep the water within bounds. At present the birds are getting lettuce, which grows luxuriantly without any special manuring. Potatoes, tomatoes and other vegetables are also grown amongst the trees.

THE FRUIT TREES.

The apples arc mainly Rome Beauty, Rymer and Jonathan, and the peaches Briggs, Red May, and Hales. Early. Originally there were more cherries than peaches, but trouble with the birds and the expense of picking, caused them to be cut out. The 1£ acre" recently planted consists of Gravenstein and Williams' Favourite apples. These were chosen' because the site is on the hillside, which is favourable to bright colour. Mr. Bosch is not convinced that the brightness of colour of the hillside fruit is due to the nature of the soil; it is just as likely to be the result of a more meagre growth, the sparse foliage giving the fruit more exposure to the sun. He is not dogmatic about it, however, as he has made no definite experiment. The trees are of various ages and sizes. One immense Rymer apple, about fourteen years old, has a spread of 24 feet, and last year yielded 35 cases of packed fruit; this year it bids fair to yield 40 cases. From a block of 70 apple trees 500 bushels were obtained last season; but, as Mr. Bosch says, one 'should get something above the average or it would be of no use putting so much into the ground’. Among the younger trees is an old veteran, sole survivor of the original orchard. It was a Rymer apple, but has recently been cut back and grafted to Rome Beauty. A neighbour, Mr. Whatmore, to whose father the place formerly belonged, helped to pick from it a crop of 54 bushels on the notorious Black Thursday, 7th February, 1851. Only five years ago it bore 52 cases, but some of the large limbs gave way, very much damaging the trunk, which is quite hollow. The bark is vigorous, however, and the growth of the grafted top gives promise of a new lease of life for the tree, owing doubtless to the moist conditions under which they are grown; the peach; trees are very subject to curl-leaf; in spite of two or three annual sprayings with Bordeaux. This year, however, much better results have been obtained by a single application of lime-sulphur, there being very little of the disease visible, and that on the higher shoots, which probably were not sufficiently wetted. It is not contended that a six-acre orchard is exactly a money-making proposition, but this one evidently affords a very comfortable living, and the combination of poultry and fruit, is found to be a good one. Mr. Bosch is now interested in a feeding trough for poultry, which he has, patented and is putting on the market. The device, which, is very highly spoken of, was recently described in "The Leader."

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