If You Plan to Grow Flax

Chas S. Reddy
Iowa State College

L. C. Burnett
Iowa State College

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farmsciencereporter
Part of the Agriculture Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/farmsciencereporter/vol1/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa Agricultural and Home Economics Experiment Station Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Farm Science Reporter by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
If You Plan to Grow Flax

LAST YEAR IOWA farmers grew 40,000 acres of flax, the most in many years. They will probably grow a still larger acreage in 1940 because of the yield and price of the 1939 crop, and as in 1939, they may grow and harvest flax under the 1940 AAA program without having it count as a soil-depleting crop providing it is used as a nurse crop for clover, alfalfa or grass seeding.

The average yield of flax last year in Iowa is estimated to have been 10½ bushels per acre. With the price around $2 a bushel, the returns were good from many acres that under the AAA program could not have been used for corn, oats, soybeans or any other grain crop. That's why so many Iowa farmers who have never had any experience with flax are becoming interested.

In the main, flax can be sown and handled throughout growing and harvesting with the same machinery as any other small grain crop. It can either be sown with a drill or broadcast with a seeder. About 3 to 4 pecks of seed per acre are required for the best yields. A firm to hard seedbed is desirable. If the seed is drilled, it should be covered not over an inch deep. If it is broadcast, it is best covered with a harrow and should then be rolled afterward. It is almost impossible to get a seedbed too firm for flax.

Sow Early

In the past 10 years of experiments at the North Iowa Experimental Farm at Kanawha and at the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station at Ames, we have found that the one thing most important to a successful flax crop is to sow the seed early.

In the 10 years at Kanawha and Ames we have seldom obtained or observed a satisfactory flax yield when the seed was sown as late as May 1, and we have seen many failures from seedings in the last week of April. We believe that the number of failures increases rapidly with each day in delay of sowing after the middle of April.

Early seeding is essential for several reasons. First of all, it permits the flax seed to germinate ahead of the weed seeds. Flax is a poor weed "fighter." A good stand of sturdy flax plants with an early start can compete with the foxtails which germinate late, but it cannot compete with the large weeds such as pigweed, giant ragweed, lambsquarters and others found around the barnyard. Thus the best place for flax is usually following a well-cultivated, clean corn crop.

Early sowing also aids in getting a stand because when the seed is treated with New Improved Ceresan dust it prevents the seed-rotting fungi from ruining the stand. Later in the season, seed treatment may do little good. The treatment advised is ½ ounce of New Improved Ceresan for each bushel of seed. The dust at this rate costs only about 1½ cents per acre.

Dusting Helps

We obtained satisfactory yields and increases of about 1 to nearly 4 bushels an acre from seed treatment in our experiments in the earliest sown flax in each of 3 years. Later sown flax seldom yielded well and was not benefited by seed treatment.

In 1935 treated seed of six out of nine flax varieties, including Bison and Red Wing, in the test produced nearly satisfactory stands following corn on sweet soil. In a similar experiment on acid soil only treated seed of Red Wing produced a satisfactory stand. We also found that a fallowed soil encourages the seed-rotting fungi. It seems advisable to stir the soil, usually by diskimg, just before sowing flax.

Red Wing Best

The two best flax varieties for Iowa are Red Wing and Bison. Red Wing usually can be sown a week later than Bison and still produce a satisfactory yield. This means that when sowing is unavoidably delayed, Red Wing is a safer variety to use than Bison.

Red Wing has these other advantages: It is more resistant to damping-off fungi in the soil, and if it has been sown early it will mature just following small grain harvest. In Iowa this is usually a safer time than later when rains are more prevalent. Flax is difficult to harvest in rainy weather because it stays green and starts to grow and blossom again.

If all conditions are favorable, Bison outyields Red Wing, but this means that planting must be very early, harvest somewhat late, and that high temperatures do not occur at blossoming time to cause too many empty bolls. On the whole, we consider Red Wing the better adapted variety for Iowa.

WANT MORE ABOUT FLAX?

If you'd like more information about flax growing, ask your county agent for Bulletin 344 "Flax as an Iowa Crop," or you may obtain a copy from the Bulletin Office, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa.

Early sowing of flax gives a wider choice of soils. If conditions are most favorable for the development of the seed-rotting soil pathogens, stands are often ruined in spite of seed treatment. Flax cannot be sown successfully as late on acid soils as on sweet soils, and seed treatment is of value only on the very early plantings. It is easier to get good stands of flax on sweet soils, and seed treatment on sweet soils is often beneficial as late as May 1.