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Report of the executive committee of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society for the year 1858. 1858

Wisconsin State Agricultural Society

Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood and Rublee, Printers, 1858

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REPORT

OF THE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF THE

WISCONSIN STATE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

For the year 1858.

WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

MADISON

ATWOOD & RUBLEE, PRINTERS.

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REPORT.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY, ALEXANDER W. RANDALL,

Governor of the State of Wisconsin.

SIR:—In compliance with the requirements of law, and the established usages of the State Agricultural Society, the Executive Committee would respectfully report:

That during the past year, nothing extraordinary has occurred within the range of the duties of said Society; as hitherto its efforts have been mainly directed to the distribution of useful seeds and plants, together with such information as was available for their culture; to the offering of appropriate premiums for the most successful culture of the various leading crops; also premiums for the best essays and treatises on the leading subjects of Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural Architecture, &c. &c. But more particularly were the energies and resources of the Society devoted to the preparation for, and holding of the Annual Fair.

Among the seeds distributed by the Society during the past year, none other has been so prominent or important as that of the Chinese Sugar Cane (*Sorgho Saccharatum*).

The promising success of this cane, so far as tried, during the year of 1857, fully satisfied all who gave the subject attention, that its careful and intelligent culture would be found not only remunerative, but profitable, throughout most if not all of the settled portions of the State.

Therefore, for the purpose of promoting its more rapid dissemination and culture, by the agricultural masses of the State, the Society obtained a considerable quantity of the seed, from the regions south of us, where it had been more extensively cultivated and well ripened, and distributed it through the

agency of the members of the Society, the members of the Legislature, and such other opportunities as presented. Further, the Society offered liberal premiums for the best growths of the cane, as well as for the best processes of manufacture and production of molasses, syrup and sugar, therefrom.

The results of the foregoing efforts, so far as can be judged at this early day, have fully equalled the anticipations of all parties, and in fact exceeded them; and it is a well settled opinion on the part of the Committee, that the experiment of the culture and manufacture of the cane has been fairly and fully tried, by thousands of the farmers of the State, and, so far as heard from, with nearly uniform and satisfactory success. And not only has the fact of the practicability of its culture been well established, but, what is still more conclusive and encouraging, a large amount of molasses, syrup and some common sugar, has absolutely been made. In fact, good judges estimate the saving to the State the present year, on account of these productions, of over a hundred thousand dollars; no insignificant item in times like the present.

What is still further gratifying in the matter, is the fact that in all reasonably favorable cases, the seed of the cane ripened, during the past season, amply for all purposes of replanting; thus fully establishing the important fact, that it can and will usually ripen, except upon very unfavorable soil, or in unfavorable seasons.

The great and universal question first of all to be asked and answered in relation to it, "*Will it pay,*" is also pretty well settled, even by the imperfect experiments already tried. The bulk of them go to show, that an ordinarily good soil will as surely grow a good crop of it, as of Indian corn; and with but a trifle, if any more labor. And further, that a good ordinary crop will yield two hundred gallons of good syrup per acre, besides several tons of fodder and seed, from the surplus leaves and tops of the stalks.

The experience already had, also shows that, even with the imperfect machinery and information of the first experiments, the cane has been grown and the syrup manufactured, at an average expense of not over twenty-five cents per gallon; being a saving of at least one hundred per cent. of what a similar southern article would cost the merchants and the dealers of the country delivered in store; and nearly twice that saving to such consumers as produce it for their own use, and thereby save all intermediate profits.

If *Sorghum* has done this much for our people "in the green tree, what may we not expect in the dry?" Highly important results to our State, as well as to the whole North-West, are

confidently predicted for this new item of production, in the future, and that at no distant day.

In all probability there will be ten times the amount of it cultivated the present year, that was during the past. Judging from the entire success of many experiments of graining the syrup into tolerable brown sugar, no reasonable doubt seems to exist, as to its being generally done, as easily as the maple syrup, with a little more experience of cultivation, grinding and boiling, and with more suitable apparatus. That our people will soon be able to raise their entire sugar and molasses crop, and may be a surplus for exportation, seems by no means improbable. The supplying of the home demand merely, will prove a saving of some millions per annum to the State, of money kept at home and paid for home labor.

The seed of the Hungarian Grass (Millium), a forage plant that has been attracting considerable attention for the last two years, in Iowa and other prairie districts, was also extensively distributed over all parts of the State, last spring. What degree of favor or success it has met with, the Committee are not as yet very well informed; only a few reports having been received in relation to it. It is said to considerably resemble millet, except that it has more leaves, and makes much better forage. It is said to thrive exceedingly well upon the high and dry prairies, especially in dry seasons, when timothy would prove a failure. Its success is understood to be owing to its striking a deep root. The statements in relation to it, go to show that it matures in a very short period, and yields from four to five tons per acre of hay and seed,—largely of the latter; but it has to be annually sown. Another season will do much in the way of deciding its merits and adaptation to our wants.

The Committee also circulated a quantity of Sweet Potatoes (received as a present from a gentleman in Indiana) quite extensively among the careful cultivators, for experimental trial and cultivation, and had the satisfaction of seeing a fine show of well grown tubers, at the State Fair, as the result of the effort; clearly proving, (what was, to be sure, partially known before,) that they can be successfully cultivated in ample quantities, at least for the purposes of luxury and variety among our people.

The Committee have given the subject of improving the Seed Wheat of the State a good deal of attention, and have carefully investigated the often proposed plan of importing new seed from Canada. A very competent agent and practical farmer was sent by the Committee to the best wheat districts of Canada, in the autumn of 1857, (Hon. David Williams, of Walworth County,) to enquire into the matter, and report what seemed

proper to be done under the circumstances. After a careful examination of their various specimens of wheat, and a full inquiry in relation to the insect depredations, and liabilities, he came to the conclusion that importations should be made at least with great care, to avoid the introduction of new species of destructive insects, the liability of which seemed to him very great. A careful comparison of the best specimens brought from Canada, with the best from our own dry burr-oak districts, shows but little if any superiority in the imported article; pretty clearly establishing the incorrectness of the quite common notion, that our wheat degenerates from cultivation, and needs a frequent renewal from Canada or elsewhere, to sustain its quality.

The Committee are fully of the opinion, that if our farmers take more pains in sowing good clean seed upon dry and well cultivated soil, and harvest it before it shrinks and turns dark colored from over-ripeness and exposure to storms, that as handsome club wheat can be grown for an indefinite series of years as is at first sown,—that the complaint of deterioration is more from the faulty cultivation than from any lack in the soil.

The annual Cattle Show and Fair of the Society was held at Madison during the first week of October, and was, notwithstanding the rather inclement weather, largely attended by the sterling classes of the people, not only as exhibitors but as spectators. Some two thousand entries of animals, articles and products were made, embracing altogether probably a better show than was ever before made in our own, or any other State not older than ours. The show of horses, neat stock, sheep and swine, were all of a high order and good quality, and reflected much credit upon the enterprise and progressive spirit of our people.

On the other hand, the labor-saving machinery, both for agricultural and other purposes, was highly creditable to its inventors and manufacturers, and indicated a rapid progress in all the labor-saving arts of this wonderfully progressive age.

The products of the soil were in no way inferior to the other departments of the show, but proved conclusively that we had not only the climate and soil, but the cultivators, that could produce the most complete and ample results.

The fruit department particularly, notwithstanding the unfavorable season, was largely and splendidly represented, especially with the most sterling of all fruit, the apple, in great variety and profusion, and of as fair quality as any country can boast.

Several richly equipped and efficient appearing Military and Fire companies paraded upon the grounds during the

Fair, displaying superior tactics, and gaily enlivening the scene.

Altogether the occasion was one of extraordinary gratification and usefulness to all parties, and passed off with the utmost good feeling in all respects, evidencing anew to all observers, that such agricultural jubilees are a natural outgrowth of our age and people, and highly proper to be encouraged and fostered, as schools of usefulness for the great masses of the people.

The want of permanent and well fitted Fair Grounds for these occasions is sadly felt, and is a source of large expenditure and trouble annually in making the requisite provision, saying nothing of the fact, that, at best, temporary arrangements but poorly accommodate the interests and parties concerned. If some common central location could be agreed and settled upon, and fitted permanently for these purposes, it would greatly simplify, as well as diminish, the annual labors and expenditures of the society. Until such permanent fitting is had, our agricultural fairs will fall considerably short of what they ought to be.

The Executive Committee would express a wish that the law authorizing the collection of the annual statistics of the agricultural productions of the State, should be continued, and so amended, if need be, as to render its operation more certain and complete.

The collecting of such annual reliable information of the quantities of grain grown, of the various varieties; of the horses, the stock and animals; of the increase or decrease, advancing or retrograding, of the different interests, seems to them a matter of the first importance, not only to our own people, but to those looking this way from without the State for a market in which to buy or deal in our staple commercial products. When once fully understood by the officers whose duty it is to collect and embody such statistical facts, it would seem a simple duty to perform, and one that needs entail but little additional expense upon the people.

The great importance of the wool-growing interests to the State, and the commonly prevailing opinion that the business of sheep-keeping is to a considerable extent being abandoned throughout the State, on account of the ravages of dogs, seems to call for enquiry, and, if well founded, for judicious legislation, to arrest any retrograde movement of that kind.

In addition to whatever may be required upon the foregoing subjects in the way of legislation, the Executive Committee are of the opinion that few things could or would be more acceptable to the agricultural masses, than a large diminution in the amount of annual legislation and taxes. No sentiment or opinion

seems to be more indelibly engraven upon the public mind, than that there is a great opportunity for reform in these respects. May they not hope, under the general pressure of hard times, and the economy consequent thereon, to witness an improvement in this direction?

The copy for volumes eight and nine, for the years 1858 and '59, of the transactions of the Society, will be properly prepared for publication during the current year, and can be put to press if the Legislature deems it advisable to so order. The publication of these annual volumes of agricultural reports has become an established practice in most of the leading agricultural States, and, when judiciously gotten up, are undoubtedly an embodiment of much valuable information, that would, in no other way equally effective, be brought before the minds of the masses of the people.

The Executive Committee would recommend the publication of such a volume, embracing the two past years, and ask the requisite legislation therefor.

A statement of the fiscal affairs of the Society, showing its receipts and disbursements, will be found appended hereto; and full and complete vouchers will be found on file in this office for all the items of each account; all of which is respectfully submitted.

**STATEMENT of the FISCAL AFFAIRS of the WISCONSIN STATE
AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY, for the year of 1858.**

RECEIPTS.

To balance over from 1857	\$1,273 61
" State appropriation.....	3,000 00
" gross receipts from State Fair and life and annual memberships,	6,323 04
" amount from Madison subscription	1,199 25
	\$11,795 90

EXPENDITURES.

By premiums paid for 1858, out of appropriation	\$2,641 00
" diplomas all in all out of appropriation	181 50
" " Executive Committee expenses	380 75
" " office expenses	147 10
" " express charges.....	25 50
" " postage.....	55 69
" " rent.....	200 00
" " salaries.....	1,000 00
" " fitting Fair Grounds, all in all.....	1,957 00
" " arrearages of 1857.....	347 23
" " miscellaneous expenses of the Fair and during the year	2,794 56
" " bills allowed and unpaid to December 10th.....	726 13
" balance of cash on hand,	1,389 44
	\$11,795 90

In behalf of the Executive Committee,

D. J. POWERS, *Secretary.*

State Agricultural Rooms, }
Madison, January 1, 1859. }

