

[Whether to Plant Large or Small Potato Cuttings]

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Experiment to determine whether it is best to plant large or small cuttings of potatoes; in a Letter from the Rev. Mr. Cochran to the Secretary of the Agricultural Society for the County of Hants, dated Windsor, February 12th, 1791.

SIR,

IN the Nova-Scotia Magazine, I for December 1789, there appeared some extracts from an Essay on Potatoes, published among the papers of the Bath Agricultural Society, for 1788. In these a prodigious difference is noticed, between the produce from large cuttings and that from small, in favour of large ones, as nine to one.

That a considerable difference of produce might escape the observation of mere practical farmers, who

seldom make comparative experiments, is readily to be supposed, and that, therefore, it might still be a disputed point amongst them, whether large or small cuttings are most profitable, as the author who relates those experiments asserts it is, and as we know it to be here. But we can hardly suppose that any farmer, who should see one acre in his neighbour's field produce as much as nine in his own, would continue inattentive to the advantage of using larger seed.

* The Society are of opinion, that it would be an improvement upon Mr. Shaw's method, to let the first washing of the seed be with brine, or a strong pickle, instead of water, in order the better to float the light grains and seeds of weeds.

† The Society observe, that salt and brine remaining in port, Beef, or fish barrels, will answer the purpose of brining wheat, As well as other [salt].

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In the extracts, where this amazing disproportion of produce is mentioned, it is not stated what proportion the cuttings, used in the one and in the other case, bore to each other. Probably there was a greater difference than between those which are commonly used here. However if the loss by planting small cuttings should only be one half, or even one fourth part of that mentioned above, still it would be an object highly deserving the attention of farmers. I thought, therefore, it might not be a useless experiment, to try two or three different sizes of cuttings, near to those usually planted in this neighbourhood, and to mark the difference of produce, if any.

For this purpose, in the second week of June last, I took an equal number of cuttings, of three different sizes; the largest (No. 1.) were somewhat larger than those usually planted here. The second size, which I shall call No. 2. was less than one half of No. 1. The third size (No. 3.) was about one third of No. 2.*

I planted 100 hills with each size, four cuttings in each hill. The land, manure, and cultivation as nearly alike as I could make them.

From the first appearance of the plants a striking different, in favour of the largest size, was observable. Many of the hills from No. 1. had ten, twelve, or fourteen stalks, strong and healthy. Those from No. 2. much fewer and weaker. Those from No. 3. in many instances had not more than four

stalks, and those small and feeble. The difference, though still very perceptible, was not so great towards the end of the summer, as at the beginning.

In the beginning of November they were all taken up and the produce weighed

No. 1.	Produced 280lbs.
No. 2.	2491/2
No. 3.	168

The medium weight of a bushel, upon several trials, was found to be 61lb. Therefore the produce of No. 1 was something above four bushels and a half; and the difference between No. 1. and No. 3. nearly two bushels. This is very considerable. If an acre, planted with cuttings such as No. 1. would produce 200 bushels by planting such as No. 3. the farmer will lose 80 bushels. In four acres the loss will be 320 bushels; in eight acres, which many farmers plant in a season, it will be 640 bushels!

I am informed, that some farmers in the province plant only the eyes of their potatoes, and give the rest to their cattle or hogs. With these the loss must be still greater.

I design to pursue the subject farther, and may hereafter communicate the result to the Society. Meanwhile, with the greatest respect for you and them

I remain, Sir,

Your most obedient,

And most humble servant.

WILLIAM COCHRAN

(To be continued.)

* The cuttings of each size were weighed, and the weight noted at the time of planting, but the memorandum has been mislaid. However, although I cannot recollect the absolute weight, I am certain the proportion to each other was, very nearly, as above.

Whether to Plant Large or Small Potato Cuttings recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:

<https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/233>