

[Preparing Seed Wheat, to Prevent the Crop from being Smutty] James Clarke

Date: 1790/05/02

Other

James Clarke
A farmer

Publication Format

Print

Type

Agriculture

Ingredients

water
lime
salt
wheat
pickle
ashes

Places

Nova Scotia
Halifax
England
Quebec

Source: Nova Scotia Magazine

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Description

Instructions on how to prevent smut in wheat by treating the seed with a pickling solution and lime or ash published by the Secretary of the Agriculture Society in Halifax. nn.372_73. Microfilm Reel 8062.

Transcription

TO THE SECRETARY OF THE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY, AT HALIFAX
SIR,

I OBSERVED in the Halifax Journal, of the 11th February, taken from the Quebec Gazette, observations on that most dangerous disease in wheat, called the **smut**; and as I cannot agree with the author of that piece respecting the cause of that disease, I have taken the liberty, not so much to ascertain the cause, as to point out the remedy for that pernicious

malady.

The author justly observes, that there are two sorts of **smut**; one he calls rusty **smut**, which is the worst; the other dusty **smut**; the last is common amongst barley, oats and rye, as well as wheat; but it does no material injury to the crop: I suppose it proceeds from some defect in the seed. As to the rusty **smut**, it is a very pernicious disease and very prevalent in Nova-Scotia: the grains that remain whole after threshing, a very few, will cast, a deep shade on a considerable quantity of good flour, and render it disagreeable in smell and taste. The only way to prevent their bad effect is, to wash the wheat in clean water, skim of all the **smut** and other foulness, and then dry it in the sun or on a kiln; after which it will make as good flour as any clean wheat. I cannot pretend to investigate the cause of the rusty **smut**, but believe it proceeds from a defect in some of the light underlain seed corn, and not from mists, or the various intemperatures of the air or kinds of land it is sown on, or contagion from the dirt of **smut** adhering to the seed or manures, as the aforementioned author observes. I have constantly followed the business of farming in Nova-Scotia twenty-eight years, and generally sowed from 20 to 30 bushels of wheat annually, and have experienced on all sorts of land in the part of the province where I reside, and never observed one smutty grain of wheat in my fields: but my neighbours are seldom free from it, more or less. I have endeavoured to inculcate the means to prevent the **smut** amongst them; some few have adopted the means with good effect; others, the greatest number, partially or not at all; so that very little wheat is to be had but what is more or less smutty. I agree with that author, that the farmer ought to be very careful to procure good seed: a bright heavy full grain, free from all sorts of mixture, and to change his seed often, (it would be best to do it every year); this change of seed should be procured from a considerable distance, and from a different soil. I have often had

pease, barley, oats, and other spring grain from England, and always found a rapid growth and great increase, the first year

especially. I have been obliged to sow wheat that was smutty (not of my own raising) when no other could be had, and the seed I had reserved would not hold out for the land I had prepared, and have had good crops without **smut**. I have often supplied my neighbours with seed wheat, from the same heap I took my own from --theirs have been smutty, and mine not. One instance in particular I will mention: Some years past, a tenant of mine came in the spring and desired me to let him have some seed wheat, the wheat he had, being foul and smutty. I let him have what he wanted, and advised him in what manner to prepare it before he sowed it: he was an elderly man, and answered, he knew very well how to raise wheat before he came to this province. I told him, notwithstanding all his knowledge, if he did not prepare his seed as I advised him, his wheat would most probably be smutty. He took his wheat from the same heap that I sowed mine from; and in the fall, as he did not return the seed, I called on him for it; when he said, he was ashamed to bring it, for his wheat was nearly one half **smut**, and that he was convinced some preparation was necessary to prevent it; and he was more convinced of this when he saw my wheat entirely free from **smut**. These instances prove to me that the cause of the **smut** in the seed may be destroyed.

The following method I practice of preparing seed wheat, to prevent the crop from being smutty:--Take a tub that will hold as much as you intend to steep at once, put in a tap wisp of straw in the same manner you do a leech tub; set it up where you can conveniently draw off the liquor you intend to put into it; fill the leech-tub about half full, with a good pickle: I generally use the pickle my beef, pork, or fish has been cured in: If it is foul or not strong enough, boil it and skim it clean, and add more salt to it; there is no danger of making it too strong. When the pickle is prepared, put in the wheat very slowly out of a half bushel or pail, in the same manner at when it is winnowed, to prevent any quantity of the heavy grain falling in together that might carry down oats, or any light stuff with it, all which I skim off; when the tub is so full that the pickle stands about two inches above the

wheat, stir it well about with a stick, and skim off every thing that swims; let it

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stand twenty-four hours at least; but as the weather is generally cold at feed time; thirty-six or forty eight hours is better, then draw off the pickle and reserve it for another steeping, let it drain a little, then throw out the wheat on a floor, a smooth earth floor is to be preferred; but as you throw it out a little and little, sift slacked lime on it; about half a bushel will serve for four bushels of wheat; after the wheat is all out and limed, turn it and mix it well, so that some lime may adhere to every grain if possible. If the ground is ready, you may sow it the same day; or,

if the weather or other accident prevents,

it will take no damage if it lies on the floor a fortnight or more, only it must be turned and not lie too thick, to prevent its heating, which, however, it is not so apt to do on an earth floor; --this is the whole process--and whoever will faithfully put it in practice will find the good effects of it. It sometimes happens the farmer cannot procure lime, which has occasionally been my own case, though seldom; in such cases, good wood ashes will serve as a substitute, but, I think, not so efficacious. I am as careful to procure lime for my wheat as salt for my provisions. The farmer says, this process is troublesome, besides the expence of time; such language as this I have often heard: But there are many necessary things to be done in farming, as well as other employments, that are unavoidably troublesome and expen-

sive, which, nevertheless, must be done; besides in this case, the trouble and expence will be amply repaid in the crop.-- I am fully persuaded this preparation not only cures or prevents the **smut**, but gives a strong vegetation to the first sprout of the grain, which serves as the manure and betters the crop. The lime made use of should be slacked by the wind by long standing in an open cask in an airy place; but if stone lime is used, it should be slack-ed leisurely by sprinkling hot water on it a little at a time, so that it may be a dry

powder before it is sifted on the wheat. Many farmers in England dissolve a pound of green copperas in the pickle before they put in the wheat, and others dissolve stone lime in it, to make it more powerful; but this I never experienced. The **smut** in wheat used formerly to be as prevalent in England, as elsewhere, if used without preparation, though very few omit it now.

My present purpose being only to correct the error respecting the cause and cure of the **smut** in the wheat, I shall not at present say any thing on other grain or the cultivation of land, &c. which may be a future consideration.

If the society for promoting agriculture, think these remarks worth notice, they will make the proper use of them.

I am, Sir, your Humble Servant,
A FARMER.

Published by Order of the Society,
JAMES CLARKE, Sec'ry

Annotations

smut:

Defined by the OED as "A fungous disease affecting various plants, esp. cereals, which are spoiled by the grain being wholly or partly converted into a blackish powder."

Preparing Seed Wheat, to Prevent the Crop from being Smutty recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:
<https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/51>