

# Freetown spud grower urges later plowing

By EDWIN LEWIS

(This unusually good commentary on the attentively produced a good crop of potatoes, was given by Edwin Lewis, Freetown, at a province-wide meeting of Island agriculturists at St. John's, Nov. 10.)

Potato management and the potato business in general have become so competitive during the last few years that possibly it is not always wise to divulge all of one's secrets, however over the past number of years my father (Colby Lewis) and I have made a number of changes in the management of our potato operation which we feel have been improvements, and these I would pass on to you.

As we all know the first step in managing a potato crop begins with ploughing. During the last number of years we have changed from the customary September ploughing to an October to early November ploughing. This has proved to be much more desirable. The soil is much better, and is contributing to too great a loss in soil fibres, due to the soil being exposed to too long periods of sunlight.

### CLOG MACHINERY

Along with the later ploughing we have been experimenting a bit with trying to rid our operation of clogs, which have a tendency, especially when the weather is wet, to clog the machinery.

We started at the source of the trouble—the soil itself. For about two years and older we started using a five-year rotation. This consisted of one year grain, one year of some times two of potatoes, one year of grain and finally two of hay. This has given us a good, clean, productive soil which is easy to prepare for potato planting, easy to cultivate during the growing season, and gives soil of good quality and quantity for our best of all makes our digging operation cleaner, easier and much more economical.

Careful management in the selection of equipment is as important today as it was when hand cutting was carried on. The selector, a most valuable piece of equipment to speed up the once endless job of hand-cutting also produces a larger set. This has proven to be a distinct advantage. The larger set provides the plant with an excellent start from the budding to the rooting stage. Good Foundation seed is of course necessary as it is profitable.

Over the past number of years we have been planting the set very close to the ground level, with as small amount to cover as is possible. A week to 10 days later, when we are scuffling for the first time, we are using a motorized fencing post behind the tractor to level down the rows. These two simple procedures, we have found, have resulted in a quick plant growth and this is especially important in the black-leg control program of Sebagoes.

### FINAL IMPORTANT

A potato, whether it be a Sebago or Kennebec, has some similarity to a prize-winning animal in the show ring. The more you work pampering each, the better it thrives. So it is with the scuffling and billing potato program. It is in the final billing that it is most important

to get a large hill up. This gives protection from blight, subburn and especially it gives protection against fall frost.

The farmer in managing his potatoes has got to watch weather conditions much more carefully than on days between his sprays. In former years the established pattern was to spray every seven to 10 days. We have found this method not always to be satisfactory. In the last number of years we have sprayed immediately following a rain, even if we had sprayed the day before. This, along with a regular spraying program, guarantees almost foolproof protection.

### SETTLES DOWN

Also we have found that late-evening spraying, especially if it is calm, is one of the best times of the day to spray as the spray settles down over the field rather than drift away into the atmosphere.

To date we are sticking with a high-pressure, low volume of water spraying procedure. We are yet to be convinced that the now talked of "low pressure, low volume of water" method is as effective. We are using 10 to 15 pounds depending on growth, of Dithane M-11 to 400 pounds of water, covering 10 to 20 acres at 600 pounds pressure.

Possibly potato harvesting is the operation which taxes the man in management more than any other thing. The farm manager at this point has numerous decisions to make.

1. Are my storage facilities adequate?
2. Am I prepared to meet a bumper crop?
3. Should I buy a one-row or two-row combine — this machine or that one?
4. Can I afford to invest in new machines?
5. Can I afford not to invest in newer equipment?
6. Am I prepared to cope with frost?
7. Can I depend on my farm machine centre for all parts?

How long will it take to have them brought in?

8. And finally, and possibly most important of all can I depend on my wife and family to be sympathetic when I come home discouraged, disgruntled and dismayed?

### THE FULL RUN

It has been the experience of our farm to have had acquaintance with the full run of potato harvesting equipment, from hand picking to today's three potato combines. My father and I would both have to agree to the fact there is nothing superior to hand picking to escape today's No. 1 problem which is bruises. However, with the high cost of labor and its scarcity, this of course is a thing of the past and gives way to today's highly mechanized combines and bulk loaders.

Even this equipment is not an answer to all prayers — it has too many bugs still to be ironed out — and we, being in the position of being closely associated with the Linkletter men of Linkletter Road, who are known for their pioneering in the potato machinery field, and we have also been had to experiment in machinery improvement.

### ROLLER BAR

For instance two years ago on our potato combine we replaced the split shear with a roller bar type shear. This completely

eliminated all front-end plugging, plus all shear-cut potatoes. Also, with no front-end plugging, it makes it possible to carry sufficient clay throughout in all major drops to cushion "potato fall" from one chain to another. This one change in our equipment resulted in fewer stops which in the field means time gained, which in turn means money saved.

Also this improvement resulted in fewer bruises. Bruises can also be caused by another bothersome agent in digging-stones. We stress to our men on the combine that we would rather have dirt than any stones get by.

With the potato producer management does not stop when the last potato has been dug. Efficient management must cover the proper housing of his crop. This means proper storage in recent years due to the improved methods of harvesting, storage has had to change with the times. No longer is the hole-in-the-ground method considered most efficient and economical. I believe cellar-type warehouse facilities will soon all be giving way to "above-ground storage."

I say this probably because last year we built our first aboveground potato house and found it to have so many convenient, practical and economical features that we can say we are really sold on this type of storage.

We have found it to be:

1. Ideal for unloading bulk loads.
2. Excellent in eliminating complex excavating systems, in favor of a bin piler.
3. Incomparable in lessening potato handling.
4. Unequaled (when properly insulated) in maintaining a near uniform temperature, even throughout severe weather conditions, contrary to all previous beliefs about above-ground storage.
5. And, finally, this type of storage is comfortable, convenient and roomy for grading operations.

To sum up briefly my experiences in potato management I would say that:

1. It is necessary to have planters operating within 95 per cent efficiency.
2. It is essential to have scufflers set accurately so as not to interfere with the plant's root system.
3. It is of the utmost importance to have a spraying system that is almost 100 per cent efficient.
4. It is vital to have a digging operation that is meticulous, yet fast-moving.
5. It is fundamental to have storage facilities that are cool, yet comparatively moisture-free.



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