
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO

*Report of the Minister of Agriculture for the Dominion of Canada
for the year ended March 1933.**

THE Canadian Ministry of Agriculture deals with a wide variety of agricultural activities covering every kind of agricultural interest which for comprehensiveness is not equalled by any other country. The record relates to the work of the Central Farm with its fourteen divisions, the work on the thirty Branch Farms and Stations and the departments of Dairy and Cold Storage, Health of Animals, Livestock, Seeds, Entomology, Fruits, Agricultural Economics and Publications. What a wide field is covered will perhaps be appreciated best when we point out that the Ministry controls even betting on race courses, a subject which one would hardly think of bringing within the ambit of agriculture. Details about the subject such as number of race meetings and racing days, amounts of money wagered, prize money, etc., are given with the same care and thoroughness as those relating, for instance, to manurial experiments, nutrition studies, releases of parasitic insects and the hundred other matters which one usually associates with a department of agriculture. This only shows in what an intimate manner the State concerns itself with the welfare of its foremost industry, investigating, directing, controlling and advising at almost every point. We may draw attention to another aspect of its work which marks it out as conspicuously different from what obtains in India, *viz.*, the extent of agricultural legislation and the administration of the numerous Acts passed thereunder. These deal with a variety of matters such as pest and weed control, guarantees of purity in seeds, fertilisers and feeds, disease control of livestock including bees, export and import control in respect of grades and standards of quality, packing, warehouse equipment, creamery, canning-house and elevator requirements and so on, a wide range of legislative control all calculated to advance the permanent interests of agriculture and the community though perhaps irksome and harassing to the individual. The Indian farmer is in the enjoyment of a blissful freedom in this respect—a freedom as blissful as that which permits smoking near a haystack. When one thinks of the prevalence of crop pests, contagious

diseases of cattle and the confusion in the marketing methods in this country, one would welcome a powerful and liberal measure of reining in of this unholy freedom. The strict control methods have enabled the Dominion to benefit substantially by arrangements like the Ottawa Pact which, we are told, has materially increased the export trade in the United Kingdom.

We may now refer to some of the important items among the strictly agricultural activities of the department. One which is of timely interest in Mysore is the success which has attended what is called the biological method of insect control. The *Lecanium* scale is said to have been practically exterminated by this method; while against other important pests like the Oriental fruit moth, the satin moth, the green house white fly, the wheat stem saw fly and the corn borer, suitable parasites have been liberated with satisfactory results. We hope similar success will attend our own attempts in Mysore against the sugarcane borers. The increasingly large distribution of bacterial cultures of legumes is noteworthy in as much as it indicates that the true place of this method has at last been recognised, after the boom it once enjoyed and the disappointment it caused when the unduly high expectations were not realised. In the Division of Chemistry, experiments on pasture manuring and management confirm the now accepted conclusion that the stock carrying capacity is increased if the herbage is grazed quite young. The work relating to "quality" in produce such as protein and oil content in soyabeans, nicotine content of tobacco as related to "harshness" in smoking, is interesting and is worth being copied in India in regard to the chief products here. Manurial experiments bulk largely as usual in this Division; the results indicate the need for complete fertilisers including a suitable proportion of potash, an ingredient to which Indian soils have not always responded, at least as regards the *quantity* of produce. The Publicity and Extension Division maintains its high level as a model for propaganda methods. One of the happy features of this work is the intelligent response of the farmers themselves as evidenced by the co-operative experiments and the readiness with which questionnaires are answered. The various marketing and other surveys and studies of the results of work are rendered easy

* Published in *Curr. Sci.*, Vol. III, April 1935, p. 499.

and efficient by this attitude of the farming community and the report bears ample evidence of the advantages that have accrued thereby. The record of the year's work justifies the high reputation which the Canadian

Department of Agriculture enjoys for the efficiency and diversity of its services.

A. K. Y.

NEWS

LIVING INSECTICIDES

... "Although many people, especially in the West, feel a high degree of revulsion towards spiders and may in fact be frightened of them. In some areas of the world they may actively encourage spiders to enter their homes or may even take them in themselves. The houses in villages in certain areas of the Sierras in the state of Michoacán, in Mexico, suffer invasions by huge swarms of flies which congregate in them during the rainy season. To rid themselves of this nuisance, the villagers employ a novel form of biological control. In the mountains near the villages, many of the trees are covered with the massed webs of the communal cribellate spider, *Mallos gregalis*, whose local name is the mosquero. The webs of these spiders may clothe a

whole tree, so the locals just cut off a handy-sized branch, which is taken home and hung from the ceiling. The swarming flies land on the sticky threads and become ensnared, whereupon they are removed and eaten by the web's occupants. Such a practical use of spiders to control an insect pest, which in addition to being a nuisance, may also spread disease, is admirable but alas rather rare."

[Rod Preston-Mafham & Ken Preston-Mafham in *Spiders of the World*. New York: Facts on File, 1984. 191 p. Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, *Current Contents*®, No. 6, February 11, 1985, p. 14. (Published by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, USA.)]

FATTER MAY BE BETTER

... "A new study . . . maintains that it is all right for you to get fatter as you grow older. In fact, it says, you will live longer if you do. . . . If one looks at *age* as well as height and weight when computing the best weight for lowest mortality, [reports Reubin Andres, Natl. Inst. on Aging], then it is clear that the logical course is to start on the thin side in youth and get fatter with increasing years (which is the path most Americans follow, with guilt). Based on Andres' computations, the longest-lived person would generally be the one who gains about 10 pounds per decade from his or her late 20s on. . . . 'He's crazy,' said

William Castelli, director of the long-running Framingham (Mass.) Heart Study and a past critic of Andres' fatter-is-better ideas. 'Our data [from the Framingham study] says that if you gain weight it's one of the worst risk factors. . . . What you find is when people gain weight their cardiovascular [disease] and death rates jump up.'"

[Fawn Vrazo in *Philadelphia Inquirer* 26 Oct. 84, p. 1-C, 7-C Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, *Current Contents*®, No. 2 January 14, 1985, p. 13. (Published by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, USA.)]