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ARGENTINE REPUBLIC
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Cotton Cultivation



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Cotton Cultivation.

I.

The climate and soil of the northern part (down to 32° of latitude) of the Argentine Republic is most appropriate for the production of cotton, principally in the provinces and territories situated on the banks of the rivers Paraná, Uruguay, and Paraguay, in the Provinces Santa-Fé, Entre Rios, Corrientes, and the territories of Misiones, the Chaco, and Formosa.

In the central and western provinces it also yields good crops; but in some of them, such as San Juan, La Rioja, and Catamarca, irrigation is indispensable, while in the eastern, and especially in the Chaco, the vegetation period of the plant is, as a rule, generally favoured by frequent and abundant rains, but the harvest time coincides with dry weather.

In the colonization epoch, or that of the Spanish dominion, cotton cultivation was very much diffused in all the calid parts of the ancient Vice-Royalty of Buenos Aires—that is to say, the northern part of the Argentine Republic, Paraguay, and Bolivia.

The people in that epoch knew the art of spinning cotton and weaving common stuffs for their own use and commerce, to such an extent that, due to the almost complete absence of currency, in consequence of the extreme

restrictive measures relating to commerce implanted by the Spanish Government, the use of woven cotton stuffs as a monetary medium became generalized for operations of buying and selling.

Subsequently, in several regions of the country the custom of cultivating a few cotton plants of the local subaborescent varieties, and which yield a beautiful white and smooth fiber, which is used for knitting stockings for household consumption and other uses of handiwork, has been retained.

II.

The importation first and the manufacture at home afterwards, of machine woven stuffs with foreign raw material had extinguished, almost completely, the original cotton-cultivation industry, notwithstanding the recognised advantages of this country for cotton-cultivation; but in the course of the last few years interest has revived, due to the excellent financial results obtained in the Chaco, in the neighbourhood of its capital—Resistencia—situated opposite the city of Corrientes. At present calculations show 1500 to 2000 hectares (3706 to 4942 acres) under cultivation in the Chaco and on the opposite bank in the Province of Corrientes, this cultivation extends to somewhat south of the 28° of south latitude, while last year there were only 400 hectares in the colonies near Resistencia and nothing worth mentioning in the Province of Corrientes.

Some forty years ago — about 1862 to 1864 — the cultivation of cotton in the Republics of the River Plate (Argentine, Paraguay, and Uruguay) created a great sensation, due to the repeated propaganda of an English newspaper in Buenos Aires — “The Standard” — and whose eminent editor, Mr. Michael G. Mulhall, author of the useful and well-known “Dictionary of Statistics,” ably seconded by the Cotton Supply Association of Manchester, interested in the propagation of cotton cultivation

in these countries, to supply the British factories with the textile, whose importation had diminished in consequence of the civil war in the United States.

In that epoch the Governments of the Argentine Republic, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Province of Corrientes, dictated measures tending to foment cultivation, seeds and instructions were distributed and gining machinery was imported. In Paraguay the cultivation of cotton was declared obligatory, and Mulhall proved the existence of 30,000 acres (12,140 hectares) planted with cotton. In most of the provinces of the Argentine Republic, including that of Buenos Aires, which is too far South, many cultivation experiments were made of North American and Egyptian varieties, generally with excellent results, as regards yield and quality. In reference to the first, Mr. Mulhall stated that "it must be further observed that the average yield in some of the above provinces (Corrientes, Entre Ríos, and Santa Fe) has been found more than double that of the Southern States of North America," and, as regards the second, the samples sent to England appeared so satisfactory that, while the middle class of American cotton was valued at 24 pence the pound, offers at 28 pence for that of Paraná (Entre Ríos), and 30 pence for that of Catamarca were made.

Unfortunately, "the cotton fever" that Mr. Mulhall proposed promoting by his propaganda and his work was extinguished by the bellic invasion of the Paraguayan autocrat, Francisco Solano Lopez, in the Argentine Republic and Brazil, creating a war of five years' duration, which miscarried the fine agricultural movement to which we refer.

All the details appear in the pamphlet published by Mr. Mulhall under the title of "Cotton Fields of Paraguay and Corrientes," being an account of a tour through these countries, "Preceded by Annals of Cotton Planting

in the River Plate Territories from 1862 to 1864" (Buenos Aires 1864), out of print and to-day very rare.

III.

Outside the indigenous varieties, at present a few of the herbacious kinds of North America are cultivated, and experiments are being made Egyptian kinds, particularly Janowitch and Mit Afifi.

Among the American varieties, the best known is the Lea-Island, and one of short staple ones of the Louisiana type and known in this country by that name.

The Peerless, Peterkin, and Russell big-ball have also been introduced, some "upland" and perhaps some others: but the only one planted on a large scale, and which up till now serves as a base for cotton cultivation in the Argentine Republic, is the afore mentioned Louisiana variety, rustic, highly productive, and which the Chaco agriculturists consider has improved in that region; but probably this only is an effect of acclimatization.

The enemies of cotton, if the langosta voladora of this country (*Schistocerca-paranensis* Bourm Brun) be excepted, which invades the country from time to time, are very few and up till now have done no damage worth mentioning.

The crops obtained in the neighbourhood of Resistencia reach an average of 2500 kilograms with seed per hectare (2204 pounds per acre) and in some cases up to 4000 kilograms per hectare, for instance, in the Colonia Popular.

The yield in fiber is calculated to amount to about one third of the weight, or say about 800 kilograms per hectare which is equivalent to 1750 pounds per acre.

The expenses of sowing and labour are calculated at \$70 national currency (\$30 gold) per hectare and those of collecting at \$30 to \$40 n/c. (\$13.20 to \$17.60 gold) per ton of 1000 kilograms.

In this way the planters of the Chaco have obtained

a splendid profit of \$200 national currency (\$88 gold) per hectare on land that is worth \$15 to 20 national currency per hectare.

These facts explain the great interest awakened among the proprietors and agriculturists of the Chaco and Corrientes and the quintuplication of the cotton planted area from one year to the other.

Some solid commercial and industrial firms of Buenos Aires propose entering into large transactions in cotton fiber—be it for manufacture in this country, or for export to England, all tending to show that capital employed in this industry will obtain very remunerative returns.

As regards cotton-seed, there is one oil mill in Resistencia which has commenced to utilize it, and the immediate installation of another is already announced at the same place, not counting those that already exist in Buenos Aires and other parts of the Republic—which will also surely deal with cotton-seed.

