

**AMERICAN SEED FARMS.**

By George E. Walsh.

American seeds for garden and field culture are superior to those of any other country, partly as the result of special cultivation and selection, but more largely as the result of peculiar soil and climate adaptation. Seed growing has developed with marvelous rapidity in this country within recent years, and the industry now ranks among the leading ones of the land. We not only supply the enormous demand for seeds in the United States, but extensive exports of seeds are annually made. At the present rate of progress it is only a question of time when American-grown seeds will be the reliance of the farmers and gardeners of the whole world. Formerly farmers raised their own seeds, and it was a rare thing to purchase from professional seedsmen; but of late years the very reverse has been the case. The reason of this is plain. The professional seedsman can raise and sell the seeds cheaper because everything is done on a large scale, and he can guarantee the finest quality. So many seedsmen are in the business now that competition renders it absolutely necessary to success that superior seeds should be placed upon the market.

The most favorable locations are selected by the seedsmen to grow their seeds; and where certain plants have become famous because of the peculiarity of the soil or climate, there their farms are generally located. For instance, the valley of the Platte River, in Nebraska, is especially favorable to the growing of vine seeds, such as cucumber, melon, and similar plants. Some of the seedsmen contract annually for hundreds of acres of land in that section simply to obtain the finest cucumber, watermelon and muskmelon seeds. Excellent seed peas can be grown in Jefferson County, N. Y., and annually between three and four hundred carloads of seed peas and beans are shipped from that county. Connecticut is famous for her fine onion seeds, and hundreds of acres are devoted entirely to the raising of onion seeds for the markets. Michigan ranks next in order for fine onion

seeds, and large farms are being planted with them for the seed houses. California's climate and soil are peculiarly fitted for the growth of lettuce seed, and she stands now pre-eminent in this respect, driving all other States out of the market. Long Island has long been well known as a great cabbage center, and the cabbages grown there are the finest in the world. The seedsmen have made this place the base of their operations for growing cabbage seeds, although Puget Sound cabbage seeds are rapidly gaining on those from Long Island.

These are but a few of the many localities which are peculiarly adapted to the growth of certain garden and field seeds, and which have been largely occupied by professional seedsmen. The seed houses do not, as a rule, buy the farms, but either lease them for a term of years, or contract with farmers in the immediate neighborhood to grow so many acres of certain kinds of seeds. Many farmers living in seed-growing districts have abandoned all regular farming of crops for the market and have given up their services entirely to the professional seedsmen. There is, consequently, so much competition in this line that the former good profits have been largely reduced. In many cases the farmer does not make any more now in growing seeds than he would in growing corn or wheat, but he is surer of a market and ready money. The seedsmen contract to take the products provided they come up to the test, which is a high one. A seed-growing farmer must, therefore, be an expert, progressive and wide-awake man; for the seedsmen know what they want, and employ experts to look after the testing of seeds.

Nearly all of the large seedsmen have private test grounds where new kinds are constantly being tried, and old ones are being improved. The stocks offered by all of the rival seedsmen are also tested in these trial grounds, and if there is an improvement over their own seeds, the matter is looked into at once. If there is an improvement made in seeds by a rival house, the other seedsmen are prompt to take advantage of it, and have the seeds grown

on their farms the next season. Everything for the seedsmen depends upon the quality of the seeds, their vitality and purity being of special importance. The strong competition makes every seedsman do his utmost to raise the standard of his seeds, and, as a result, we have a great improvement in American grown seeds. European stock, if sold at all in competition with American seeds, must be sold at a considerably lower rate.

The demand for better seeds and plants makes the methods of cultivation on these seed farms a study that would be a benefit to every farmer and gardener. Formerly seed growers simply planted their seeds, and as they came up the poorer specimens were weeded out, and only the finest ones were allowed to mature. But today the pedigree of every plant on a seed farm is known way back, and the whole breeding is carried on as scientifically as the breeding of registered cattle or horses. There are famous stocks to begin with, and the dealers guarantee that all the seeds they place on the market are descendants of not more than the fifth or sixth generation from them. After that the seeds are considered run out. Excellent plants for stocks are constantly searched for. If one is discovered in the fields or trial beds it is transferred to a greenhouse, where it is treated as tenderly as a new-born baby. It is surrounded by everything that will tend to make it grow and improve. It is then increased by cuttings, which are planted another year where they will not be effected by other plants. Several pounds of seeds will be obtained from these plants, and the following year they are sown and cultivated, and a large quantity of the seeds are placed upon the market. To get the seeds from a good plant, consequently, takes several seasons, and then they run only for several years before they are replaced by others. The different strains are bred with great care, and the great number of names given to them by the seedsmen seems a little confusing to the ordinary purchasers.

—The Independent.