Gathering and Preparing Show Grains and Grasses

By

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Alfalfa and Clover Exhibits

A sample of grain or hay that is entered in a county or state fair sometimes does not receive serious consideration at the judge's table simply because the grower has not cured or prepared the sample in a manner which would display its points of value to the best advantage. Unless a grower understands how to cure and exhibit his sample he is under a serious handicap when competing with men more experienced in the methods of preparing entries.

The average community or county fair is not increasing rapidly in its importance and value. This is due partly to the fact that only a few growers understand the preparation of show grains and grasses and they thus discourage the less skilled grower by their large winnings.

It would be a lengthy and difficult task to place on paper all the different methods used by skilled exhibitors in fitting their displays. In fact, many of their methods, gained from long experience and keen observation in the show ring, are considered secrets of the trade and are not often explained to the public. However, any farmer who has been given a few pointers may be able, after a little experience, to fit his grain for a successful showing. After all, it is the best grain or the best hay that counts; no person however skilled he may be in the art of fitting grain for the show, can win unless he starts with grain of show quality. On the other hand, the exhibitor seldom wins fame with a peck of wheat or sheaf of alfalfa that is not prepared so as to display to best advantage its points of value. No stockman would think of leading an overage animal of his herd into the show rings, nor would he show even his finest stock without proper fitting. So should the grain farmer consider his grain and grasses; he should select the best, and prepare it skillfully for the show table.

In this article a few easy, simple and effective methods of gathering and preparing grains and grasses for the show table are outlined. The writer acknowledges the helpful suggestions of P. V. Cardon, former agronomist at the Montana State College and the valuable work of Mr. J. B. Nelson in photographing material for use in this circular; also the courtesy of the Rheem Sheafmold Company, Helena, Mont., in furnishing the sheafmold used. The photograph of the community fair exhibit on the cover page was furnished by M. E. Stebbins, county agent in Valley county,
Grasses should be gathered when the heads are well out of the boot and at a time when the leaves are not only plentiful but of a fresh green color. A sample will be judged principally upon its showing of superior forage quality, its apparent feeding value. This fact should be kept in mind when the show sample is gathered. Considerable care should be exercised to obtain a luxuriant clump of long, fine stemmed material. A knowledge of the growing habits of the grass sought is helpful in this search. After cutting the sample close to the ground so as to obtain all of the foliage, the sample should be cured in a manner to preserve the fresh, natural green color. This may be accomplished by spreading the sample out on a clean floor or table in some out-building, taking care that no strong light strikes it. As the sample is being spread out, still green, all dried stems, weeds and foreign grasses should be removed, thus insuring a pure sample for the exhibit. After the sample has dried sufficiently so that it will not mold when gathered in bunches, it should be tied rather loosely about the butt and hung up with the

Figure 2.—Two samples of timothy and one of orchard grass ready for the show table.
Figure 1.—The sample of alfalfa on the left carries its great foliage quality nearly to the butt of the sample. The sample on the right has very coarse stems and would make poor hay.
heads down, taking care that it is allowed to swing free and not touched on any side. In cases where only a limited amount of space is available the sample may be divided into a number of small bunches, tied loosely and hung on a wire stretched for that purpose.

The cured sample must be prepared next for exhibiting. Hay fields are rarely uniform in quality, some parts of the field producing grass of very rank growth, others grass of very fine growth. It is therefore difficult to obtain a show sample that indicates both high yield and fine quality. Consequently it often happens that the finest stemmed sample of timothy or red top lacks in length of stem. In such a case many exhibitors cause a coarser and larger stemmed sample to be mixed or blended in with the finer sample to give the sheaf not only fine quality but large yield as well. The center of the bundle first should be laid and the bundle then built up on either side of the central bunch so that it will produce a finished bundle (Figure 1). After the show bundle is made up the butt should be cut off square with a pair of heavy shears. Most shows specify that a bundle must measure from three to five inches in diameter at the butt. The sheaf should be tightly tied about six inches from the butt with cloth or cord made by seven strands of binder twine. A one-inch ribbon tied over the string will improve the appearance of the sample greatly.

ALFALFA AND CLOVER EXHIBITS

A sample of alfalfa or clover is more difficult to prepare than one of timothy or blue grass. The sample should be cut when it will show fine quality and high yield of hay. Maximum yield usually must be sacrificed for highest quality. Cut the selected sample by hand, remove all impurities and discolored dead leaves and carefully spread it out on a clean floor. When laying the sample out on a floor to cure, straighten out the stems and do not allow them to dry in a tangled mass. If there is not sufficient space for spreading the sample on the floor, it is possible to cure it by tying the fresh sample in small, loose bundles and hanging them on a wire. The small bundle should be wrapped in a very loose fashion, with paper. The paper acts as an absorbent and protects the sample from any strong light which would destroy the fresh green color.

The building of a show bundle of alfalfa or clover requires no small amount of skill. To prevent the leaves from breaking off in
handling it is best to wait until a rainy or moist day when the leaves are tough. If such an opportunity is not afforded, sprinkle the sample lightly or cover it with a damp gunny sack. The show bundle is best made by adding small bunches to a large central bunch until the bundle of desired size is obtained. In building a bundle in this manner it is possible to produce a fine stemmed sample or one of a coarser nature, as the exhibitor desires. The outside of the bundle may be arranged to produce a well rounded dome of blossoms. The butt then should be squared off and the sample tied as described in the case of the grass bundles. (Figure 2.)

**SMALL GRAIN SHEAF EXHIBITS**

After the grain has been selected for showing its preparation for display is comparatively simple. When gathering the sample-
the exhibitor should bear in mind that the chief point of value in a sheaf is the quality, yield and purity of the grain. Also, it is well to remember that fields of grain of uniform quality are rare; therefore it is absolutely necessary to search over the field until the best grain is found.

The sample selected for the sheaf should not be cut until it is mature and then it is best to cut it close to the ground in order to obtain full length of straw. It is the common practice then to strip the leaves from the stems before the show sheaf is built. The leaves are removed easily by passing a handful of material over a "stripper." A "stripper" is a one-inch board studded with nails. The stems then are pulled through the protruding spikes and the leaves are stripped from the stems. The material then is built into a sheaf of uniform size and shape. A sheaf mold is desirable for such work. It also is possible for two people to build a sheaf with-

Figure 4.—Various shaped sheaves can be built according to the fancy of the exhibitor. Notice how clean the straws appear due to their freedom from leaves.
out the aid of a sheaf mold, one man holding the bundle as it is being built. A cluster of twenty or thirty heads is used as a foundation for building the sheaf. Small clusters of from five to ten heads then are carefully laid upon this foundation, the small sheaf being rotated as it increases in size in such a fashion as to produce a smooth and regular shaped head. (Figure 3.) Sheaves of various shapes can be built this way, the most common shapes being the ball, the acorn and the oval. (Figure 4.) After a little practice the exhibitor can build a sheaf quickly and skillfully. Experienced exhibitors can build from 15 to 20 sheaves an hour, provided they have one or two helpers. The exhibitor should be certain that the grain is thoroughly dry and will not mould or heat before building it into a tight bundle. This precaution is particularly necessary with oats.

The finished sheaf should be firmly tied in at least three places and cut off square at the butt. To tie the sheaf use either old rags or two to three thicknesses of cord so the straw will not be cut. A very neat appearing sheaf can be produced by tying with ribbon one inch wide.

THRESHED GRAIN EXHIBITS

Prize winning samples of threshed grains rarely can be gathered from the threshing machine. It is seldom that a field of grain is uniform enough to allow selection of the grain in this manner. It is sometimes necessary for the grower to select the grain which he intends to show and to allow it to remain standing uncut in the field until it is thoroughly matured. This is especially necessary when the main field is harvested before the grain has ripened completely. Another advantage of taking such pains in gathering the grain is that all weeds and foreign varieties may be rogued out before threshing.

The grain is threshed best by hand by placing the heads in a strong sack and vigorously pounding them until the grain is separated from the chaff. A strong wind and some coarse sieves then may be used to clean the sample. If the exhibitor feels that his sample is worthy of further work he will find that screening the grain over a medium coarse sieve will improve it greatly. A two-bushel sample of grain often is screened and rescreened until only a peck of the very largest and most plump kernels remain. Should this peck be of sufficient quality to warrant it, most exhibitors then hand-pick the sample. Hand-picking a sample is not as hard work
as it sounds. All "off color," slightly shriveled and yellow-berry kernels are removed by means of tweezers. The speed of this operation will, of course, depend largely upon the quality of the sample. Allowing the kernels to roll down an inclined board or over a revolving belt will expedite the job. Rest assured that a sample of grain that places high at the International Grain Show has received many hours of such labor.

**EAR CORN EXHIBITS**

Field selected seed corn may not be always prize winning show corn, but good show ears always must be seed corn of the highest quality. Ten ears of seed corn selected at random probably never would be placed high in a corn show, because judges pay a great amount of attention to the uniformity of a sample.

To select ten ears of corn for a corn show it therefore is best to start with the ears selected for next year's seed. From the rack or seed string pick out one hundred ears of the type desired. This "type" will vary in the different sections of the state and will vary with the variety as well. Before trying to select the corn for the show table it is absolutely necessary that there be a fixed type in mind. Lay these ears out on a long table and then discard all ears which do not measure up closely to the standard or perfect type. Fifty or more ears may be thrown out in this second selection. From the remaining ears, all of them of the characteristic type desired, select ten ears which are of uniform size, shape, length, circumference, number of rows, size of cob and, in fact, so uniform in every respect that one ear cannot be distinguished easily from another.

In the selection of show ears many fancy points which are of negligible value for good seed ears must be considered. Judges pay attention to well filled butts and tips, to the straightness of rows, the shelling per cent and other similar features.

**PACKING EXHIBITS**

Many fine samples of grain and grasses are ruined entirely by the time they are placed on the show table, because of insufficient care given in packing them for transportation. Judges must judge the entry as it is exhibited; they cannot overlook a damaged or shattered sample even though it might have been in excellent condition before shipment. It is wise practice, therefore, to wrap and
pack the exhibits so that they will not become damaged in shipment.

All threshed grain should be double-sacked and securely sewed or tied; tage should be placed inside as well as outside of each sack.

Figure 5.—A clover sample loosely wrapped in cheese cloth ready for shipment. The grain sheaf is wrapped with cheese cloth, tightly twisted at the end and a knot is then tied. This aids in giving the grain sheaves compactness and shape.
The heads of sheaf grain should be wrapped with cheese cloth or similar material and, in case they are to be shipped some distance, should be packed in a strong box in such manner as to prevent shattering.

Grass and legume bundles should be wrapped well in a soft cloth and packed tightly in a box. (Figure 5.) Too much care cannot be exercised in packing such exhibits.

Ten ears of corn never should be placed loosely in a box or sack. Each ear should be wrapped separately in paper and the ten-ear lot then firmly packed in a box.

**SHIPMENT OF EXHIBITS**

All exhibits should be shipped by prepaid express, carefully addressed to the secretary or superintendent of the fair. The exhibits should be wrapped well and packed in a strong box. Vegetable entries should be held up until the latest possible date as they lose their freshness and quality quickly. In case an entry is to be made at the Montana State Fair and the particular county from which the entry is to be made has an exhibitor in charge of the county show, then it is best to address the entry directly to the County Exhibitor, State Fair Grounds, Helena, Mont.

**ARRANGEMENT OF EXHIBITS**

Many fairs follow the policy of allowing each rancher to arrange his own entries in a small booth or section and, in many instances, to compete for prizes for the “best arrangement of farm products grow on one farm.” No matter whether such prize is offered, an exhibitor should take particular care to arrange his entries in a systematized and appealing fashion. A judge will not give serious consideration to a booth in which melons, potatoes, wheat, corn, flax and alfalfa are displayed indiscriminately, provided that there are booths in the fair that are arranged artistically.

An effort always should be made to group the various products according to their agricultural class. The space may be limited, yet it is almost always possible to place the small grains together, the forage crops in another group. Where wall space is available, directly above the table a very neat booth may be made. The grain sheaves may be arranged in some neat design upon the wall, or the grasses and legumes may be arranged in a large fan upon the wall,
while the vegetables, corn and threshed grains may be grouped on the table below.

Time spent in decorating the booth with crops not regularly entered in the show is worth while. The asparagus plant furnishes an attractive background of green and usually is easy to obtain. Oat heads stuck in chicken wire screen are easy to work with. The many colored sedges and rushes may be used effectively in adding color and tone to the display.

Threshed grains and seeds are displayed best in tin pans of a size sufficient to hold a peck sample. Often these pans are painted green or some other color in harmony with the color scheme used in the entire booth. The grain sheaves may be placed quickly in design on the wall by means of a large nail driven directly under the head of the sheaf. Samples of grasses or legumes may be fastened on the wall in a similar manner. Bunting freely used will give a certain “air” to the booth. A neatly lettered place-card, giving the name of the exhibitor or his ranch, also will aid the appearance of the exhibit.

A neat, attractive booth, filled with farm products of good quality is certain to be considered carefully by the judges. Such a booth furnishes excellent advertising for the ranch as well.