

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION of The Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Ala.

M. J. Funchess, Director

GROWING LESPEDEZA SERICEA ON SAND MOUNTAIN¹

Lespedeza sericea is a perennial legume that has shown a great deal of promise as a hay and grazing crop on Sand Mountain. It has proved to be a very satisfactory hay for mules and milk cows. At the Sand Mountain Substation, an average yield of approximately 3 tons of hay per acre has been obtained in experiments in which the sericea has been cut twice each year.

Soil. Sericea is adapted to most soils on Sand Mountain, except badly eroded areas. Like other crops, it will make larger yields on fertile soils, but it will probably make higher yields on soils of low fertility than other forage crops grown in this section.

Fertilization and preparation. Sericea responds to both phosphate and potash. Before seeding 1 ton of basic slag or 600 pounds per acre of superphosphate plus 200 pounds of muriate in either case are broadcast on broken land. After the minerals are applied they are disked into the soil. Following this preparation, the land is harrowed as frequently as is necessary to destroy weeds and crab grass.

Annual fertilizer treatment is 300 pounds of superphosphate and 200 pounds per acre of muriate of potash.

Seeding. Scarified sericea seed are planted between May 1 and May 15 on a loose seedbed, and before rain packs the last harrowing. The seed are planted at the rate of 35 to 40 pounds per acre. Use only dodder-free, scarified seed.

To insure uniform distribution, the seed are divided into two equal parts. One half is broadcast in one direction. The other half is broadcast crosswise of the first sowing.

Do not cover the seed but allow the next rain to do the covering. Every possible

care should be taken to secure a stand from the first seeding, as it is very difficult to thicken stands in future seasons.

Management the first year. Sericea does not make much growth during the first year. Therefore, it is likely that the area will be full of weeds and grass, which are allowed to grow during the summer. In November or December, the dead weeds and grass are mowed, raked, and removed from the area.

Cutting and curing. In the spring of the second year sprouts will come from the old crowns and very few weeds will appear. Sericea should be cut for hay when it reaches a height of 12 to 14 inches. It should not be allowed to reach the large, woody stage; such hay is practically worthless. The first cutting is usually ready in late May or early June, and the second cutting in late July or early August. It is not advisable to cut sericea later than August 10, since late cutting may seriously damage the stand.

Sericea cures rapidly and must be handled carefully to prevent excessive loss of leaves. In good hay-curing weather, it should be cut about 9 o'clock in the morning, raked into windrows about an hour later, and hauled to the barn the following morning at about 10 o'clock. If it is to be baled, it should be left in the field another day. It is very important not to allow sericea to remain in the swath more than one hour.

These instructions are not iron-clad, because they are based on conditions favorable for cutting and curing hay. Under less

*Formerly Mimeograph Series.

¹The following recommendations apply to the Sand Mountain area only and should not be applied on other areas in the State. Original prepared by R. C. Christopher, formerly superintendent, Sand Mountain Substation.

favorable conditions, careful judgment must be used in deciding when hay may be hauled to the barn or baled.

Feeding. It has been found that mules eat sericea equally as well as any good hay. Cows, however, do not eat it quite as readily. It usually takes about 10 days to get them on full feed of sericea.

Grazing. Cattle seem to relish tender sericea. Grazing should start when the plants are 6 to 8 inches high. If the sericea is under-grazed, it will become coarse and stemmy. In such a case it may become necessary to mow the crop.

Sericea may be grazed from the time it reaches 6 to 8 inches until frost.