

THE PROMISING REWARDS OF MUSK OX PROJECT

One of the most interesting experiments was witnessed by this editor recently when he saw the work going on at the University of Alaska Musk Ox Project on the Yankovich Road three miles from the university. There, research is being conducted that may prove to be rewarding agriculturally for the Native people of Northern Alaska. The forward-looking project is being directed by Professor John J. Teal, Jr., professor of animal husbandry and human ecology.

Prof. Teal and his helpers are proving that the "Oomingmaks," as they are called by the Eskimos, are easily handled as domesticated animals. They require little care as they are able to fend for themselves in the cold Arctic climate. The animal requires very little food as nature has built it to conserve what he eats.

The oomingmak is a fine meat animal and it also has fine underwool that is considered finer than cashmere. This wool is shed each spring at about six pounds per animal and this is valued at about 200 dollars. When this wool is spun into yarn, four ounces of it is said to be enough to make a sweater and the garment would be worth around 200 dollars. Under this estimation, 20 or more sweaters can be made from one animal. Projections from this in terms of a score or more animals a village might be able to take care of, a considerable cash income could be realized by the village communities if they pursue the project seriously.

Prof. Teal said there are plans to teach Native women how to spin the oomingmak wool with a view of creating an agricultural base for economic life in the Far North.

The idea of creating an industry utilizing oomingmak products is a subject worth thinking about. If it is taken seriously, it could prove rewarding to our people in a way of improving economy in villages. It is a subject village councils and their people should discuss to see whether they could come up with ideas that would help Dr. Teal and his associates to establish oomingmak industries that could well mean considerable cash income to those Native communities who have never had any kind of industry in the past.