

Spring 4-5-1863

## [08] James Harlan, letter, agriculture, and war

James Harlan

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James Haulan Secy of the Interior

Recd  
Apr

M. Pleasant, Iowa.

April 5th. 1863

Hon. Charles Sumner,

Dear Sir: Can you give me any information on the subject referred to in the within letter?

Some years since some gentlemen from Boston established the machinery referred to, in this place, and encouraged the farmers to raise flax - offering them four or five dollars per ton for the straw. This price for the straw, in connection with the value of the flax seed made it a very profitable crop on our new and fertile prairie soil. The land is plowed but once, and harrowed and raked, when the seed is sown - it then springs up and matures without further attention. When ripe it may be cut with a grass mowing machine, and threshed with an ordinary small grain thresher - and the straw as it leaves the thresher is delivered to the flax breaker and draper who without rotting and with but little bundling converts it into the flax cotton now being substituted to some extent for the cotton

of the Southern plantation. It is said that the whole cost of producing the flax-cotton, including the price of the straw does not exceed nine cents per pound.

But the owners of this machinery have failed and the question arises where shall our farmers find a market for the flax cotton should they proceed to cultivate and manufacture it. If it could be sold at any thing near the price named in Mr. Johnsons letter, it would soon become a very flourishing business. We could I think, here in Iowa, supply enough flax to clothe the people of all the loyal States, and enough flax-seed to occupy all the oil mills of New-England.

If it would be troublesome to you to make inquiry on this subject, please hand Mr. Johnsons letter to some one whose investigations take the direction of his inquiries.

With the highest respect and regards

I am yours truly

James Harlan