

THAT PLUNGE OF livestock prices last fall and winter still is receiving attention from farm economists. One chart maker, Sam H. Thompson, professor of agricultural economics at Iowa State College, Ames, pictures one explanation (as above). There was the production of beef and veal — still pushing higher as in every year since 1951. Then hogs did a surprising turnabout from their cyclical decline and added a huge tonnage of pork for the mar-

ket to absorb. Never before had there been a high point in beef production and another one in pork simultaneously. Combined, they made a 27-billion-pound total which was absorbed satisfactorily by consumers but only at lower prices. The lower prices at retail crept back along the meat pipeline all the way to the producer on the farm. Producers tried to make certain the same thing wouldn't happen again this season.

New Plastic Films May Be Answer to Water Loss from Seepage in Ponds

WASHINGTON — (USDA) — Tests by the U. S. Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station indicate that new plastic films, used as liners, may be the answer to water losses by seepage from farm reservoirs. Such films may also provide farmers with a more economical means for seepage control in irrigation ditches.

About one-third of all water used for irrigation is lost in conveying it to the land. Most of this loss is caused by seepage, which can largely be eliminated by lining the irrigation canals. Other seepage losses occur in water storage, which also can be controlled by lining the reservoirs. Seepage control is particularly important in localities where farmers have difficulty in getting their stock ponds to hold because of coarse textured and permeable soils.

USDA's Agricultural Research Service and the Utah Station are testing specially prepared plastic films to determine their resistance to weathering and other factors which influence the durability of these films as linings for farm reservoirs and canals. Plastics used have included vinyl and polyethylene (PE). These were tested in 4 and 8 mil thicknesses (1 mil equals .001 of an inch). Seepage losses from the lined reservoirs varied slightly from period to period, but without exception losses were small. In most instances they were considerably less than evaporation.

Linings for canals and reservoirs must be relatively impermeable to water and should be reasonably durable, say the researchers. Ideally, a lining

should also be flexible over a considerable range of temperatures and at the same time highly resistant to mechanical damage, weathering, and deterioration from biological activity. The properties of plastics, and the varied forms in which they can be produced, make them well suited for use in lining reservoirs and canals.

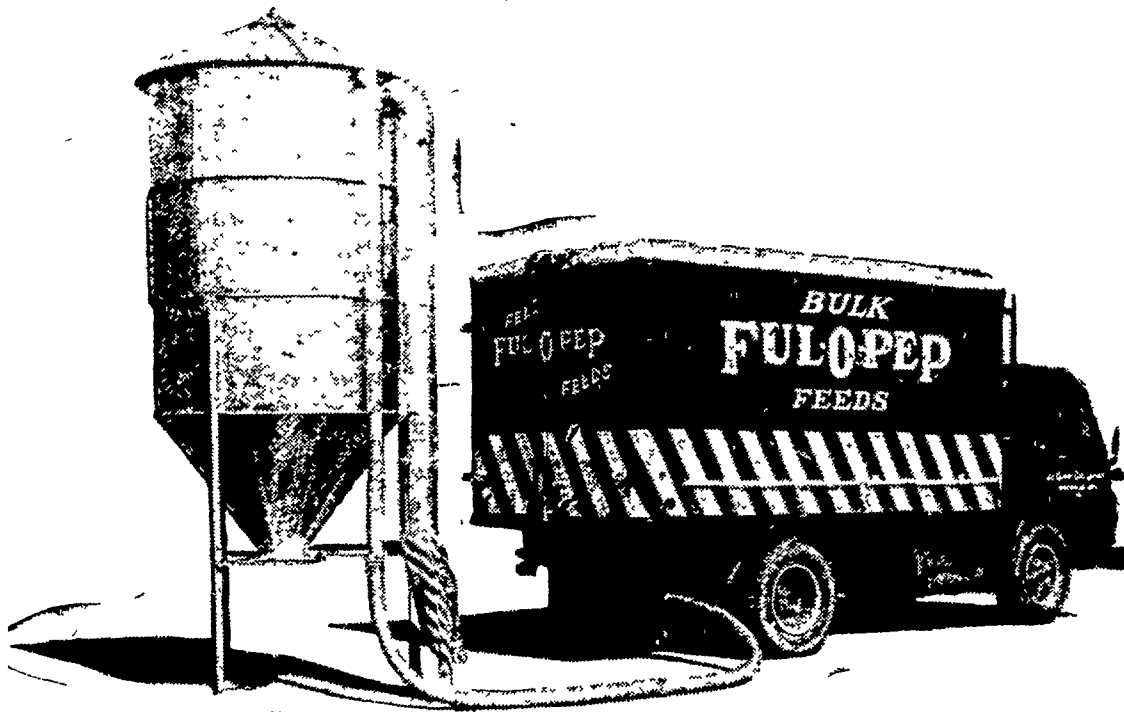
Because of their durability, PE films are well adapted for use as buried liners. However, a fine-textured material is necessary as a base for the first layer of the cover. Also the cover should be placed carefully to prevent damage to the liner.

The costs of fabricating and installing plastic linings, which depend on site conditions and job organization, as well as on the price of plastic, will vary considerably with different jobs. At present they may run as high as \$1 per square yard for 8 mil film.

Because of resistance of PE film to weathering, the investigators feel there is a possibility of using this film as an exposed lining where reservoirs can be fenced against livestock. Advantages of exposed linings — other factors being equal — are less trouble from weeds, easier repairing, and saving of cover costs. However, ravens and crows have caused extensive damage to exposed PE linings in some areas. Exposed film linings are not suitable where these birds are present. Also, if the reservoir is not kept full of water, the researchers found that air pressure will develop under the film because of differences in temperature and cause the film to billow in a wind.

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