

Wilted Hay Considered Better Than Direct-Cut Silage, Smith Says

By Max Smith
County Ag Agent

Some sad experiences with overwilted forage and too great a dependency on weather have combined to discourage some farmers from making haylage.

This situation coupled with promotional efforts by some concerns marketing silage preservatives has increased interest in a return to direct-cut silage.

A shift from one extreme to the other should be discouraged in most cases, we (in extension) continue to discourage the direct-cut method of making grass silage.

The preferred method of ensiling hay-crop forage is to wilt the material to a moisture level ranging from 60 to 65 per cent, or at most 55 to 70 per cent.

In some cases, it may be necessary to wilt as low as 40 per cent moisture to overcome unloading or freezing problems in silos with bottom unloaders.

If wilted forage is to be stored in a horizontal silo, a moisture level of 65 to 70 per cent probably should be used. No chemical preservatives or feed additives should be necessary when forage is wilted as outlined here.

See page losses can be con-

siderable, and pollution or fly problems result when forage containing over 70 per cent moisture is ensiled in upright silos. Thus, about 200 pounds of a good feed additive such as ground grain should be added per ton of direct-cut forage stored in upright silos. No chemical preservatives should be needed when a good feed additive is used at a level of 100 to 200 pounds per ton.

The use of slightly wilted or direct-cut forage is better adapted to well-made and well-located horizontal silos. If one does not use about 100 pounds of a good

feed additive per ton of forage ensiled, then a recommended chemical preservative should be used along with a weighted plastic cover.

The only chemical preservatives upon which we have adequate information to base recommendations are sodium metabisulfite and Kylage, a mixture of sodium nitrite and calcium formate. These recommended preservatives may be used at a rate of about eight pounds per ton of forage ensiled.

Formic acid has been shown to be an effective preservative especially wilted material

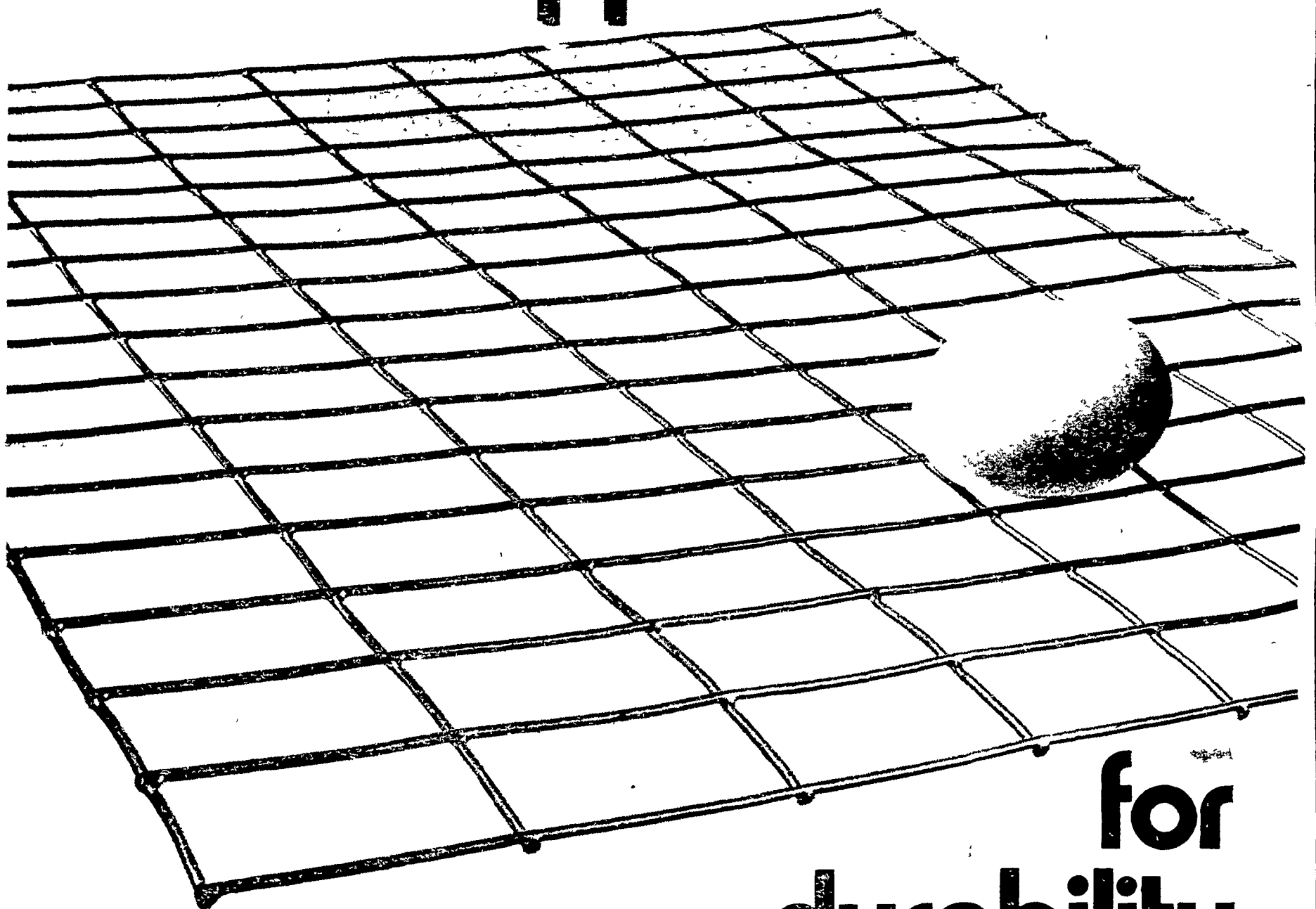
but its use has not yet been cleared by FDA.

It is important to harvest forage at the proper stage of maturity and to fill silos as rapidly as possible. Small grains such as barley, wheat, or oats should be cut soon after heading and when in the blossom stage.

All grasses are best when cut at heading time, alfalfa should be cut in the bud to early bloom stage, and red clover is at peak feeding value when in the early blossom stage.

Chop forage as close to one-quarter inch as possible, especially wilted material.

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