On the Importance of Hay

Haymaking in the United States today appears headed in several directions at the same time.

One trend is toward growing more and better hay crops. Farmers watched helplessly during the past year as protein feed prices climbed to well over $400 a ton. Good hay, when it could be found, was expensive.

Hay prices on the open market last winter varied from $50 to $100 per ton, delivered, depending on quality and availability. One of the highest prices reported during the year was $127.50 a ton for a load of alfalfa hay sold at public auction in New Holland.

Farmers realized they would have to grow much of the protein for their cattle on their own farms. Not only did they plant more soybeans, but many farmers also increased their acreage of hay crops and are paying closer attention to hay quality than ever before.

A second trend showing up on farms across the country is in feeding hay. After experiencing serious illness and calving problems as a direct result of no-hay diets for their cattle, dairymen especially are discovering that Bossy is made for hay and without some in her diet, she may just break down.

Dr. Sam Guss, Pennsylvania State University veterinarian notes that a cow on a no-hay, haylage, or all corn-silage ration during the critical preparation period ahead of calving can be headed for serious trouble.

Neither haylage nor corn silage provides the muscle-stimulating exercise needed by the rumen to get in condition for the coming lactation, he said. Because finely chopped forages move through the rumen quickly, it temporarily becomes smaller in size. Ketosis and displaced abomasums often follow, Dr. Guss said.

But probably the greatest change in haymaking recently has been in the mechanics of getting the crop harvested and out of the field. One-man hay systems have stormed to the front in an era when the farmer no longer permits himself the luxurious drudgery of endless summer days in the hayfield.

Equipment now available to the farmer enables him to cut, condition, windrow and stack either baled or loose hay without ever having to touch the crop with his hands. Gone are the long, hot hours most teenage farm boys remember spending in the peak of a barn, putting up 90 pound bales in 120 degree heat.

A farmer today can stack five tons of baled hay in the barn in little more time than it takes to back a New Holland automatic bale wagon into place. He can just as easily go back anytime he wants to retrieve and haul that five tons of hay to another location for either feeding or selling.

In a serch for an easier way to harvest hay, some farmers have returned to making loose hay stacks that resemble giant loaves of bread in the field. Even the old buck rakes have reemerged on a few Western ranches. Still other farmers are trying to get their haymaking done with giant half-ton bales. In some areas, facilities have been established to make pelleted and cubed alfalfa as well as an assortment of hay cakes and tiny bales.

These newer hay systems have clearly presented a challenge to time-proven baled hay methods. Loose hay systems offer the farmer a quick way to harvest his crop—if in-the-field storage and feeding suit his operation.

Numerous articles have appeared in the farm press during the past year comparing the cost of baled hay systems to loose hay methods. Where the cost of harvesting was the only consideration, the loose hay systems appeared to be less expensive—but the crop was still out in the field. Such comparisons are of little help to the farmer who wants to grow top quality, high protein hay that will enable him to save on next winter's feed bill.

Farmers who each year have their hay tested for protein, roughage and TDN (total digestible nutrients) know all hay is not the same. Baled hay, properly stored under roof is almost without exception of higher feeding quality than the best hay from a loose stack that has been subjected to wind, rain and sun.

The farmer interested in what has become known as "fancy" hay can today have his crop harvested and safely stored in the barn quicker than almost any other crop he raises and without ever having to touch the bales with his hands.

Hay is fast becoming an important cash crop on American farms and if prices last year were an indication of things to come, the future is bright. Farmers who can grow and transport it can expect to find a ready market for their hay this year, even though $100 a ton may be the exception. Western ranchers this summer have been offered $45 or more a ton for hay in the field.

Alfalfa in particular has been receiving much attention this year. U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers at Beltsville, Md., see alfalfa as an important protein source in coming years for both people and animals. Alfalfa in some form, they say, may soon be added to breakfast cereals to supply much needed nutrition.

Other research at Beltsville has resulted in anthracnose resistant varieties of alfalfa which should soon be available to farmers. Higher yielding and more nutritious varieties are also in the future.

Haymaking during the past decade has been taken out of the hand labor era and placed squarely in the space age. Men and the machines they operate have made it so.

New Cooperators

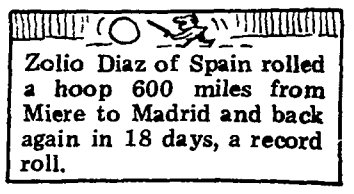
The Lancaster County Conservation District announces the following new cooperators:

Fred Appel, Sadsbury Township, 30 acres; P. Robert Wenger, E. Drumore, 420 a.; J. Earl Wenger, E. Drumore, 106 a.; Donald E. Ruhl, Rapho, 18 a.; John C. Kreider, Manheim, 111 a.; C. Roy Bixler, E. Donegal, 60 a.; John R. Zimmerman, Ephrata, 60 a.; Lloyd D. Esbenshade, Rapho, 105 a.; Wayne Stauffer, E. Donegal, 107 a.; John R. Groff, Upper Leacock, 90 a.; Roy J. Lehman, Drumore, 125 a.

E. Robert Nolt, W. Hempfield Township, 100 acres; Russell Adamire, Jr., Rapho, 136 a.; Naaman C. Yoder, Sadsbury, 92 a.; J. Harold Buckwalter, Penn, 18 a.; Daniel K. Hershey, Penn, 90 a.; J. Kenneth Miller, Pequea, 95 a.; Jacob M. Conley, W. Hempfield, 50 a.; Kenneth Meck, Strasburg, 90 a.; John H. Henkel, Strasburg, 30 a.; Willie D. Stober, E. Cocalico, 54 a.

Donald S. Eby, Leacock and Paradise Township, 120 acres; Kenneth Matz, Rapho, 63 a.; Clarence H. Eckman, Manor, 85 a.; Chester S. Stoltzfus, Paradise, 46 a.; Earl Newcomer, Manor, 82 a.; Eugene Hummer, Clay, 12 a.; John E. Kniesly, W. Hempfield, 95 a.; M. Joan Armstrong, New Providence, 57 a.; Abram K. Fisher, Manor, 26 a.; Edwin L. Keener, W. Donegal, 58 a.; L. Eugene Martin, W. Cocalico, 90 a.

David H. Cassel, Penn Township, 102 acres; Ernest Lefever, Manor, 84 a.; Grayvill Becker, Warwick, 90 a.; Philip G. Kinsey, Providence, 22 a.; Roland Sharpless, E. Drumore, 177 a.; John B. Noll, E. Hempfield, 82 a.; Wilmer Groff, Rapho, 43 a.; Allen Groff (Lehman), Rapho, 17 a.; Allen S. Groff, Rapho, 146 a.



Zolio Diaz of Spain rolled a hoop 600 miles from Miere to Madrid and back again in 18 days, a record roll.