

Dairy Pipeline

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least I'd have the satisfaction of knowing I did a pretty good job feeding the herd over the winter and putting up good quality forage last year.

If production did drop when cows went out to pasture, I would also want to restrict pasture consumption in order to increase dry matter intake by feeding more hay, low-moisture silage, or hay.

So, now is a good time to be analyzing what went wrong and what went right.

Did you have the quality and quantity of forages you needed for good production, plus the quantity and uniformity necessary for developing a balanced ration and a good, economical feeding program?

Could you have benefited from feeding more forages, or from having more hay crop forages in the dairy ration?

Having answered these questions and determined your forage needs, your next challenge is to grow, harvest, purchase, store and feed out your forages in accordance with these needs. Easier

said than done—but, here are a few possibilities for consideration.

Concentrate on planting those forage crops which you need the most, the ones which are most expensive to buy or will save you the most in purchased feed costs, and the ones for which quality is most difficult to control.

Perhaps it is alfalfa. If you grow your own, you are in a good position to control and anticipate its quality, whether it be good or bad.

However, you may not have the time nor the equipment necessary to plant and harvest crops in a manner conducive to top quality, or you may have insufficient acreage.

In this case, there are several other options: hire someone to grow and harvest forages for you, or make purchase arrangements for forages well in advance of need—and before prices skyrocket.

In other words, attempt to control the quality and quantity of your forage, and the market, to your advantage.

Stage of maturity and moisture

at time of harvesting are two factors which greatly affect quality. Come harvest time, it seems like the weather never cooperates and there is always more work to be done than time permits.

Here are a few suggestions for relieving the strain, reducing the risks and improving forage quality.

Select alfalfa varieties and hay crops of different maturities. If mixed stands are planted, make sure the species have compatible maturities. The use of hay preservatives or ensiling a crop as haylage lets you harvest at optimum maturities for top quality and gives you a jump on the weather.

To keep all the corn from becoming "ready" on the same day, stagger the planting dates, or plant hybrids of different maturities. This will also stagger pollination times, thus reducing the risk of reduced yields due to poor pollination.

Variety - Not the Spice of Life

For dairy cows, variety may not always be the spice of life. It is difficult for cows to sustain production when they have to adjust to frequent changes in the ration,

production and herd health can suffer.

This can occur when cows are fed timothy hay this week, switched to clover or a different batch of timothy next week, then to haylage the following week. The quality and consistency of these forages can vary considerably, and it becomes almost impossible to keep the ration balanced.

Thus, there are advantages to growing fewer different crops and growing more acres of them, while also concentrating on top quality and high yields.

For example, maybe alfalfa and corn, plus a few acres of grass, ought to be your only crops. They complement each other well in the feeding program. They are high quality, nutritious production and milk yield per acre.

However, every farm situation is different. You may need some small grains to provide you with straw, or some sudex to stretch your pastures out through the summer, etc.

If you're short on hay, you may be forced to take a cutting off of an old sod field before planting it to a late crop of corn. Generally, these practices and crops are not as productive as a corn-alfalfa rotation. They may bail you out of an immediate emergency only to leave you in a similar predicament a year from now because you are not as productive. However, before making any changes, consider all costs and analyze your situation very carefully, every farm has its own unique situations.

Prepare for droughts

Summer droughts can alter the best of plans. Droughts are hard to predict, but in our area, we are already entering Spring with low levels of soil moisture.

To help combat the stunning effects of a dry summer, you can encourage crops to develop deep, extensive root systems, and preserve soil moisture.

Deep rooting is fostered by good fertility, good drainage, good soil tilth, and by early planting. The incorporation of lime, fertilizer and manure at recommended rates will help.

Plant crops as early as practical to give them maximum opportunity to become well established and deep rooted before summer droughts set in.

Here is where double cropping can work against you, the first crop consumes scarce moisture and the second crop may never get established nor do well, you may do better planting a full season crop early.

Plant deep rooted crops such as alfalfa, they'll survive dry spells better than shallow rooted crops such as grasses. The proper use of starter fertilizers encourages rapid root development, and the use of soil insecticides can help prevent roots from insect injury.

Few better water absorption and for less runoff, avoid soil compaction, and practice strip cropping and contour farming whenever possible. Perform the minimum amount of tillage. One of the best conservation practices is no-till seeding into a mulch cover.

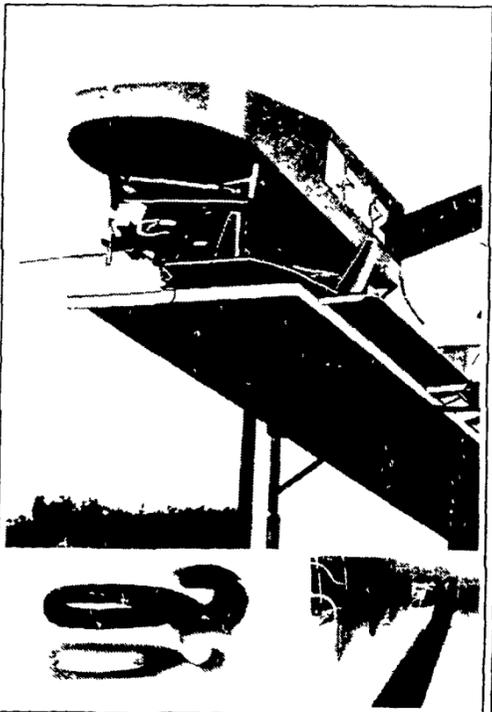
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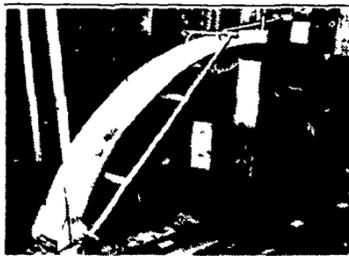
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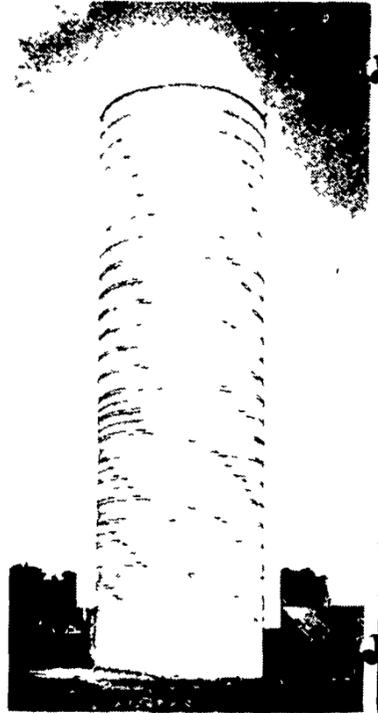
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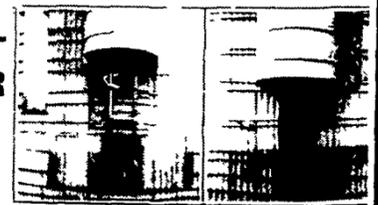
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