

Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

Haymaking habits die slow

With all of the advances that have come to agriculture over the past quarter century, one job has changed very little on most farms. That's the business of haymaking.

Granted, fewer farmers make hay, preferring instead green chop or some other form of "silage". But those farmers who produce real hay still follow an age-old ritual. Tractors, pull-type hay balers and bale elevators have modernized the process quite a bit compared to the way it was 40 or 50 years ago. But the techniques followed by the typical farmer are virtually the same.

Of course, good weather is critical to good haymaking, so a farmer watches the forecast and waits for a dry spell of a few days duration. This year has been a nightmare, with showers almost every other day more than a month.

The standard routine is to cut fairly early in the day, and depending on temperature, humidity, sunshine and the type of hay, rake it into windrows late that day or after the dew dries the next day. Then, if all goes well, baling

can start the next day.

Most farmers with at least a modest amount of hay to bale, own their own balers. These marvelous machines have been around for almost a hundred years, but only in the last 40 have they become mobile. These days, a baler powered by a medium-sized tractor moves down the windrows picking up the loose hay mechanically, pressing it into a bale and tying it with wire or twine. The bale is forced out the back end of the machine, ready for the barn.

Depending on the kind of baler and how modern it is, the bales are either dropped on the ground, carried up a chute to be loaded by manpower onto a following wagon or tossed mechanically into a wagon with high sides. The latter technique is fairly new and not totally accepted by farmers as the best way to handle hay. Many still prefer to stack it by hand directly from the baler or from the ground. Both are back-breaking jobs calling for skill, strength and stamina.

It's surprising to me that as

difficult as this part of haymaking is, it's still done the way it was when I was a boy. I did get in on some loose haymaking — stacked with pitchforks on a horse-drawn wagon. And once I loaded loose hay that was piled on the wagon by an unwieldy machine pulled behind the wagon. But most of my haymaking involved bales — pulled from the back of the baler and stacked very carefully on a bumping, bouncing wagon.

Once loaded, an empty wagon was substituted and the full one was picked up by the unloading crew — usually husky teenagers willing to heft 80-pound bales off of a wagon into a barn loft without any mechanical advantages.

The first bale elevators, as crude as they were, brought joy to the hearts of many teenaged boys. After that it was only a matter of dumping the bales from the wagon onto the elevators. Of course, someone still had to stack them in the barn — a hot, dusty job — but the heavy lifting was eliminated.

That innovation came along about 30 years ago and was the last big breakthrough until fairly recently when bale throwers made their debut. More recently other machines that make huge bales that can only be handled by machines have been developed. Also, there's a machine that makes small haystacks that can be left in the field. And while these devices are being used by some farmers, common practice is about the way it was 25 or 30 years ago.

I drove by the haymaking site of a farmer friend recently — a farmer with the best in field crop planting and harvesting equipment. And although he has \$100,000 or more invested in farm machinery, he still makes hay the way I did when I was a kid. He may be riding in an air-conditioned tractor as he pulls the newest in

balers over the fields, but that's where space-age technology stops. From the back of the baler to the barn loft requires as much muscle strain and sweat as it did when that same farmer was starting his tractor with a crank and storing his milk in 10 gallon cans.

One Pennsylvania farmer handles his hay on pallets — the same way bulky items are handled in industry. Bales are stacked from the baler onto these pallets and from there it's all machine

work, with a forklift device becoming a necessary piece of farm equipment.

Maybe that's the way to go in the future, but that's a whole new concept that must be accepted by farmers. It means new equipment, new storage buildings, a big investment — something hay farmers aren't looking for these days.

So don't be surprised if the hard work stays in haymaking for many years to come. And it does provide some summer employment for a lot of otherwise idle teen-age boys.

Grange salutes elk control efforts

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania State Grange will honor officials of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Bureau of Forestry, and several state legislators involved in instituting an elk herd management program, with a tour and luncheon for invited guests in Elk County, next Wednesday.

The Game Commission recently approved an updated management plan following deliberations of an elk management committee formed last fall with appointees from the Grange, Game Commission, Bureau of Forestry, and sportsmen.

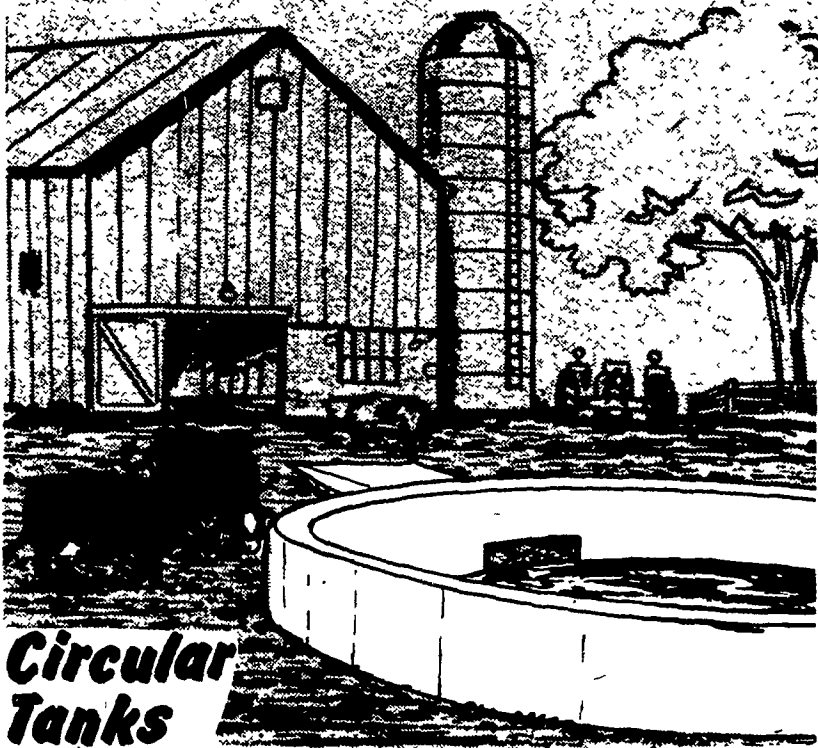
Farmers in Elk County had complained to the State Grange about considerable crop damage caused by the increasing elk herd in their county. Since the elk are unique and a local tourist attraction, farmers are reluctant to shoot the animals even though they are permitted to destroy elk if crop damage occurs. The State Grange met with the Game Commission last fall; and together an elk

management committee was formed.

The July 28 tour will include a look at management methods initiated under the newly adopted plan, such as on experimental high tensile electric fencing installed on a local farm; sites where additional wildlife openings are being developed on public lands; and an existing grazing area where the vegetation is being improved. This work is being undertaken by the Game Commission using Game Fund revenues.

At the luncheon in St. Marys, the Grange will honor the following persons for their respective roles in bringing about a solution to the elk problem: Jacob Sitlinger, chief of Division of Land Management, Game Commission; Robert Martin, district forester, Bureau of Forestry; Pa. Senator Patrick Stapleton (D-Indiana); P. Representative William Wachob (D-Elk); and Pa. Representative William Foster (R-Wayne), chairman of the House Game and Fisheries Committee.

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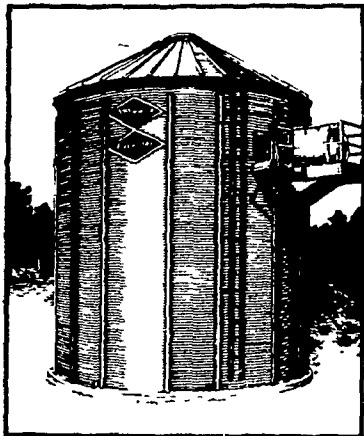


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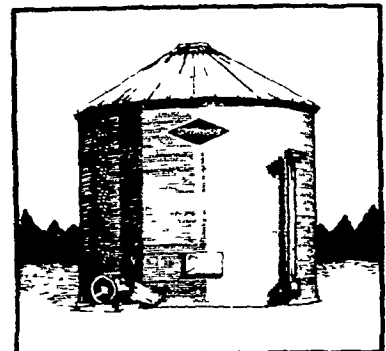
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