

DROUGHT WATCH

What farmers can do during drought conditions

STORING UP ADDITIONAL CORN SILAGE IS GOOD BUSINESS IN A DROUGHT YEAR

There are three good reasons for dairy producers and livestock farmers to store up more corn silage than normal in a drought year like this one, and only one pitfall.

So says Richard A. Erdman, professor of animal sciences at the University of Maryland College Park. Erdman is nationally known for his research work in dairy nutrition and feeding.

Contrary to popular belief, Erdman said, silage made from drought-stressed corn has feed value that is at least equivalent to the feed value of corn produced during a normal growing season.

And, with good-quality alfalfa hay now selling at more than \$160 per ton, corn silage is much cheaper than hay. Erdman urges livestock farmers to buy standing drought-damaged corn from their neighbors as soon as possible, if they don't think they'll have enough feed to last through next spring.

Standing corn in the field prob-

ably can be purchased for \$20 per ton. This would be the equivalent of paying only \$60 to \$80 per ton for alfalfa hay, Erdman said.

A third reason for storing up extra corn silage now comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Stabilization and Conservation Service. James C. Richardson, state ASCS director in Maryland, reports that federal regulations have been changed regarding farmer eligibility for possible drought disaster payments.

In the past, farmers who stored up extra feed in early fall were penalized by not receiving as much drought disaster financial assistance as farmers who had not stored up extra feed. This is no longer true, according to a memo sent recently to county ASCS offices.

Richardson now says that farmers who store up extra feed will not be penalized, as long as they can show a verifiable receipt proving that they purchased the extra feed from another farmer.

Nitrate poisoning is the one pitfall to feeding drought-damaged corn, Erdman said. But this hazard can be overcome by careful management.

Three to four weeks after ensiling, the fermentation process should have reduced nitrate levels

by nearly one-half. But proper moisture levels are necessary to make sure that adequate fermentation occurs. The optimum moisture level is 65 percent. Oxygen-limiting silos, however, work best at 60 percent; bunkers at 68 to 70 percent.

At the proper moisture level for silage, corn ears should have the milk line (dark area) about halfway down each kernel. In severely drought-stricken fields where no kernels have formed on the ears, dried leaves may not be an accurate indicator of moisture in the

stalks. Instead, try one of these methods:

- For precise measurements, use a silage moisture tester. You probably can order one through a local farm supply store in a range of \$200 to \$300. Those at the high end of the price range provide digital readouts. Grain moisture testers are not adequate for the job.

- For an estimate of silage moisture, try drying out a silage sample

in your family's microwave oven. This method requires an accurate scale for weighing the sample before and after microwaving.

For more information on ensiling drought-stressed corn, check with your county office of the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland System. Ask for Fact Sheets 433 and 483. Single copies are free to Maryland residents.



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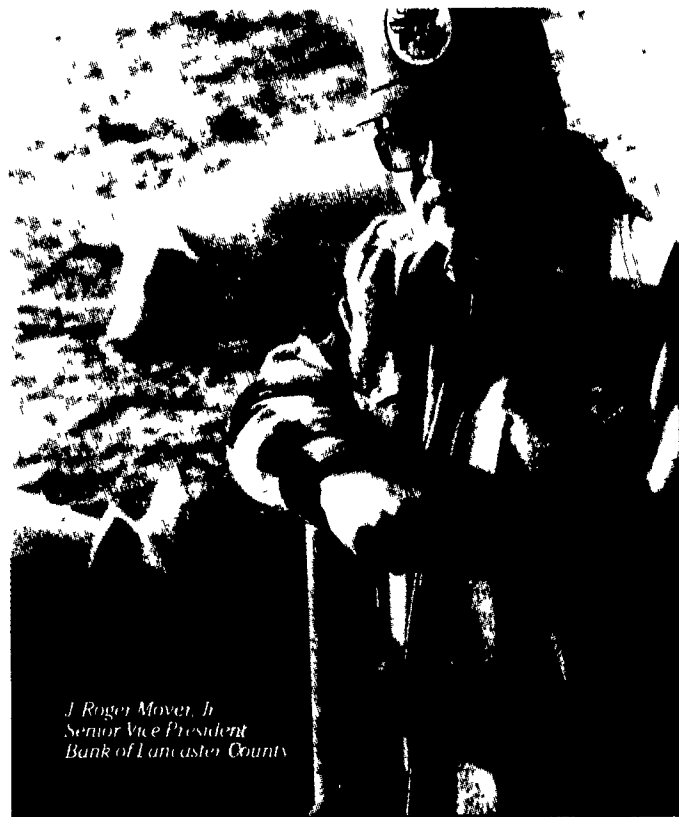
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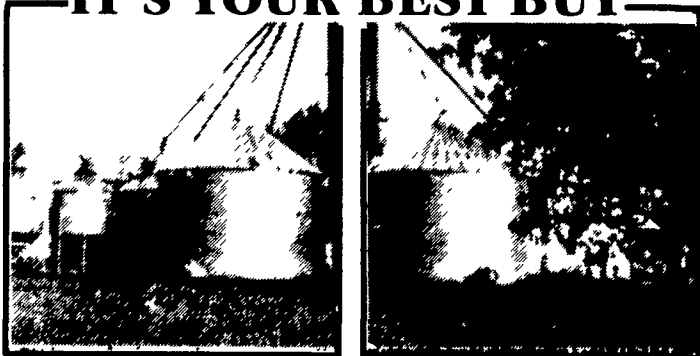
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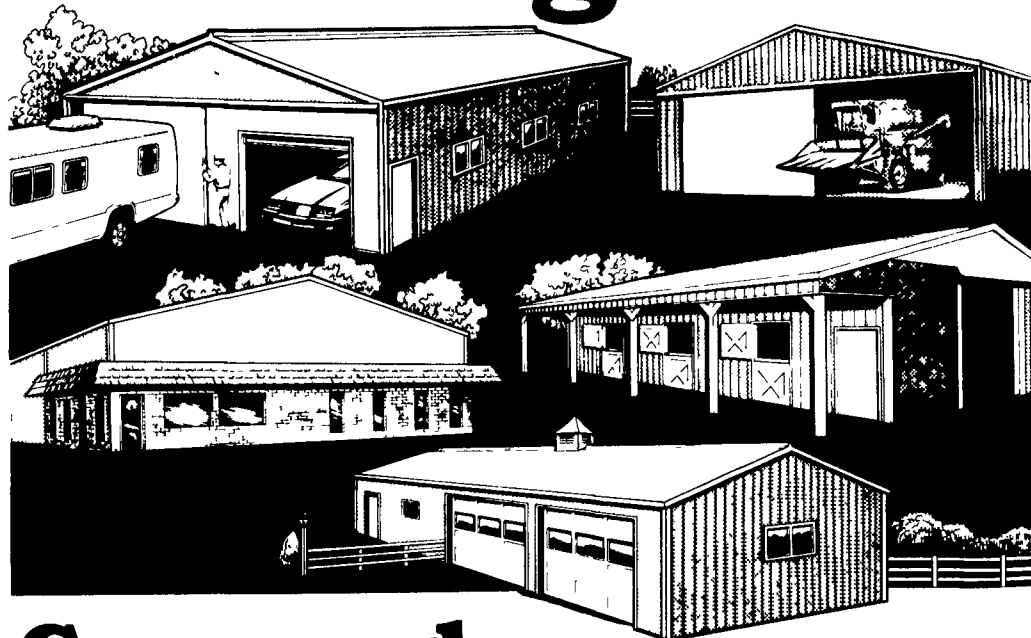
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