

Farmer-Stockman

Silage

It's Best Way to Preserve Most Forage Nutrients With Least Waste

SILAGE, particularly grass silage, is becoming a popular form of forage preservation in Montana. The first reason for this popularity is the fact that good silage is more nutritious than the best hay. The second reason is that good silage can be put up in weather that would be impossible for making good hay. But the chief reason is the rapid development and simplification of ensiling methods.

This development can be expressed like this:

A silo is expensive. **Don't build a silo.**

Chopping machinery is expensive. **Don't chop the silage.**

Feeding out silage is difficult. **Don't feed it out. Let stock eat it out cafeteria style.**

The principles of silage making have boiled down to this: Make your silage of any kind of forage—grass, corn, weeds, what have you. Put it into any kind of silo you wish—upright, pit, trench or don't put it in a silo at all. Just pile it on the ground. Whatever you do with it, be sure the silage is packed tight, particularly at the edges, and cover with straw, dirt, sawdust, paper, anything cheap and handy, that will enclose your silage as nearly airtight as possible.

Actually the story of the progress of silage in Montana goes way back to homestead days. Homesteaders needed some way to preserve their chief crop, Russian thistles, in the most succulent form. Ensiling was the answer. But upright silos and machinery to fill them were out of the question. Anyone could dig a hole, however. So the pit silo was created. It was easy and cheap to fill, it preserved the silage perfectly, but it was a backbreaking chore to feed out.

Then came the trench silo. It was cheap to build, easy to fill and not too difficult to feed out.

But not every farm has a site for a trench silo that will drain, so some operators began building their silos on top of the ground. They scooped out an area not more than a foot or two deep, pushed the dirt up to form dikes at the sides. Or they set posts around



Pile It or Ensile It



Make It From Any Forage

a circular area, connected the posts with hog wire and lined the wire with sisal paper. This last method makes a cheap silo but, of course, a blower or elevator is necessary to fill it.

But, understandably many operators hesitated to add to the haying equipment they already had—stackers, balers, etc.—the extra expense of a forage chopper. The natural solution to that problem was long grass silage. Why not? It's been used for years in European countries. Some even baled their long grass silage. It worked, and the bales were a cinch to feed out in the winter.

A variety of methods have been used to take the silage out of the silo or pit. A scoop on a power loader is a natural, of course, but lately some operators have made

feeding silage even easier than that. They simply build a movable rack or stanchions across one end of the silage and let the stock run right to it. The rack is moved up as the silage is eaten.

Here's a quick review of the advantages and disadvantages of various types of silos and methods of ensiling:

Upright Silo

The upright silo is still perhaps the most effective type in point of preservation with minimum waste and spoilage of silage. It provides a minimum top surface area for exposure to air and it assures tight packing as the silage settles of its own weight.

Chief disadvantages are the comparatively high cost of construction and the need for blower (Please turn to page 16)