Sprouting Oats Seal Big Bale Silage

Dallas DeWitt, and his neighbor Ray Fausak, Wildwood, Alberta, began experimenting with big bale silage nearly 5 years ago under a Canadian government grant. After trying just about every possible storage method, they've now come up with a procedure — which including the use of sprouting oats as a sealer — they say makes silage at the lowest possible cost with the highest possible efficiency.

"Our main reason for making bale silage is our long rainy season. We don't have to wait for good weather anymore," says DeWitt. "I feel that we get about 50% more feed value, compared with ordinary hay bales. We have virtually no leaf loss, quality is nearly identical to stored silage, protein content is much higher and cows eat everything. There's nothing left in the bottom of the feeder when they get through."

The men first tried storing bales in individual plastic bags but said that more than 50% of the bags broke open. They tried storing bales in long plastic bags and found that, while the plastic held up better, the $3 to $4 per bale cost of the plastic was prohibitive. Then they tried stacking bales above ground and covering them. This worked better and the cost of plastic, at $1.50 per bale, was lower. However, they found it hard to seal off leaks to eliminate spoilage.

"Finally, after five years of experimentation, we began storing bales in a pit and found that this is by far the best method," DeWitt told FARM SHOW. "Feed quality is excellent, it's easy to seal off, and plastic costs just 70 cents per bale."

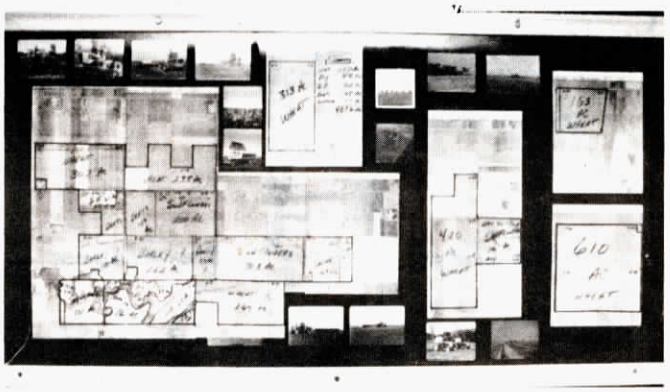
The pit used is 30-ft. wide at the bottom and 35-ft. across at the top. It's 12 ft. deep and 90 ft. long. The men placed 225 bales about 4.5-ft. dia. in the pit with each bale weighing about 2,000 lbs. They pack the stack with a 4-WD tractor and cover it with one layer of 6 mil plastic and seal the edges with sand. Chopped straw covers the plastic and then 5 gal. of oats are sprinkled over the straw. The oats sprout and form a green protective mat over the plastic.

"We've had virtually no spoilage with this method. We open it up from one end to remove bales and then reseal it," says DeWitt, noting that the sides of the pit are also lined with plastic and the bottom covered with coarse gravel for good drainage.

DeWitt and Fausak recommend baling at between 65% and 55% moisture. They say you should never bale at more than 70% or under 50%, and point out that a moisture tester is a must. They recommend staying within manufacturers recommended bale weight. DeWitt has used the same New Holland 851 baler to make more than 1,000 high-moisture bales and says it's ideal, along with Deere's 530 baler. "You have to have a dense core baler. Soft core bales will spoil in the pit," he says.

Silage bales should be covered the same day they're made so usually two men are required — one to operate the baler and another to haul them back to the pit. DeWitt and Fausak say they have been able to bale and cover as many as 200 bales per day.

For more information, and an in-depth report on making round bale silage, send $1.00 for postage to: FARM SHOW Followup, West Central Forage Association, Box 360, Evansburg, Alberta TOE OTO.



Farm Planning Board

A planning board that makes use of aerial photos helps the partners of G, E & H Farms, Ada, Minn., keep track of their farming operation.

One of the partners in the 3-man operation, Harlan Hoff, says he got the idea for the planning board during his years of military service where lots of operations were plotted and planned in a similar manner.

The planning board contains aerial photos, which Hoff got from the ASCS, of the farm's 5,000 acres. Hoff writes with a grease pencil on a plastic sheet that covers the photos. He designates each field by drawing in boundaries as well as information on what's planted where.

"Each fall we take a picture of the board when it's complete. We blow the photo up to a 9 by 10-in. size and file it for future reference. Then we wipe the board clean and start over. As we plant each field, we mark it down," says Hoff. "The photos let us check back on our rotations and varieties. We can see at a glance if we might be risking disease or insect problems due to our rotations and it gives us a running history of the farm."

Because the 33 by 63-in. board is mounted on the wall in the farm office, it makes a handy reference point for planning each day's work. Hoff and his partners can show hired men exactly where to go along with such information as where to watch out for low spots or other obstacles.

"As things get more complicated and our operation expands, it makes it easier for us to keep track of everything," says Hoff. "We even mark down how well certain varieties yield."

Hoff made the board by mounting a piece of lightweight foam on a sheet of plywood and covering it with red fabric. Then he framed it with door molding, screwing on the bottom piece so it can be removed to insert new photos. Photos of tractors and other farm equipment fill in empty spots on the board. The partners have used the planning board since 1978.

Turnip Pasture For Livestock

After Stan Simmons read about turnips as a pasture crop, he decided last year to try the crop on his Fairfield, Iowa farm. He liked the results so well he plans to expand his 3 acre patch to 10 acres this year.

Simmons explains that turnips offer a reasonably priced pasture crop that livestock really like. His input costs were $8/acre for seed and about $15/acre for fertilizer. He didn't have any weed control costs.

To prepare the seedbed, Simmons chisel plowed and disced the ground. He mixed the turnip seeds, which are the size of an alfalfa seed, with a dry fertilizer blend, applying the combination with a fertilizer spreader. He then went over the soil with a harrow and a roller to incorporate the seed.

"I applied the seed at the rate of 4 lbs. per acre, plantingthe crop in late July. This year I'll probably plant oats first, harvest them in July and then plant the turnips."

Simmons grew the edible purple top variety which grows to be about 6 in. in dia. and have greens which are about a foot high.

He pastured 60 ewes and a few hogs on the pasture land. "The sheep loved the tops. They pulled some of the turnips out of the ground and the ones they couldn't pull out they ate right down into the ground to get at so there are cup shaped holes in the pasture," reports Simmons.

Photo courtesy Fairfield Ledger