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SILAGE AND SOILING CROPS FOR DAIRY CATTLE

By Tait Butler

[This is No. 25 of a series of 52 articles on "How to Succeed With Hogs and Cattle." The twenty-sixth, "Dry Roughage for Dairy Cattle," will appear next week.]

THE value of succulent feed to the dairy cow is the basic fact upon which silage and soiling crops are to be considered. All recognize the superiority of green pasturage for the dairy cow, and when good, green pastures are available little other feed is necessary, or at least such pastures furnish the greater part of the feed required by the average cow and furnish it in the best form.

Soiling and silage crops are, therefore, grown to take the place of green pasturage or grazing crops. They are needed most in winter, as a general rule, because at this time pasturage is not generally available; but they are also necessary in the summer or at any other time when sufficient pasturage is not available, due either to lack of pasture acreage or to dry weather or other causes.

In Europe, root crops are used extensively for furnishing succulent feed or to serve largely the purposes for which silage is used in America. Of course, root crops like mangels, beets, turnips, etc., are used to some extent, especially in the Northern states, but in the South especially, and generally throughout America as a whole, silage and green pastures are the means used to supply succulent feed for cattle.

Corn Best Silage Crop on Rich Moist Soils

MANY crops have been put in the silo, but perhaps only two may be said to give very general satisfaction. These are corn and sorghum, but, of these two, corn is much more generally used in those sections having an abundant rainfall, and it may probably be stated without qualification that as a whole corn is the silage crop which gives the most general satisfaction as well as being the most largely used.

Owing to the high quality of silage which it makes, as well as to the large tonnage produced, corn has very generally proved the most satisfactory silage crop on rich lands in those sections where the rainfall is abundant. On land which will produce 40 bushels and upwards of corn grain per acre and in those sections which have an annual rainfall of 35 to 40 inches and more, corn should unquestionably be given first place among silage crops. For lands producing less than 40 bushels of corn per acre, especially in the middle and eastern Southern states, where the rainfall is generally large and the growing season ample, we think the larger growing sweet sorghums superior to corn for silage-making. In those sections of the Southwest, where the rainfall is less than necessary to make corn a reasonably certain crop, the sorghums are probably best for silage, because of their greater drouth-resistance, as well as because of their heavier tonnage yields.

Varieties of Corn for Silage

THERE have been much discussion and difference of opinion relative to the best type of corn for silage. Some have thought that those varieties making a large growth of stalk, which in the South are usually our one-ear-to-the-stalk varieties, make the most feed. Others, recognizing the facts that the prolific varieties usually make a larger yield of grain and that this grain is of higher feeding value than the stalks and that the prolific varieties can be planted thicker without reducing the yield of grain, have contended that the smaller growing prolific varieties produce a larger feed value than the larger growing one-eared varieties.

The data available seem to point to different conclusions at different experiment stations. For instance, in

North Carolina it was found that four prolific varieties gave an average of 865 pounds per acre more cured plants—stover and ears—than the average for the four one-eared varieties; but one large growing, one-eared variety gave 268 pounds more stover and ears than the heaviest yielding prolific variety, which was Batt's Four-Ear. But notwithstanding this, the yield of ears in proportion to stover was so much greater in the prolific varieties that the average of these produced more feed per acre than the average of the one-eared varieties and nearly as much feed per acre as the very largest yielder, Eureka.

In Mississippi, for the years 1912, 1913 and 1914, Goliad, a large growing variety, produced from 26 per cent in 1912 to 50 per cent in 1914 more tonnage than Mosby, a standard and well known prolific variety.

In the Mississippi tests the Goliad made yields of 75 and 65.6 bushels per acre, respectively, in the years 1913 and 1914 on that part of the crop, not put in the silo; while that put in the silo only made yields of 10.9 and 10.2 tons per acre. The relatively low tonnage yields of silage for such a large growing variety as Goliad when such very large yields of grain were made is probably accounted for by the rather thin planting of the crop used for silage.

Spacing of Corn for Silage

THE exact spacing of the corn in these Mississippi tests was not definitely stated in the report before us, but it is advised that, "If the soil is rich enough to produce 50 bushels of corn per acre, the plants ought to be about 12 inches apart in the drill. With rows 3½ feet apart we believe 12 inches apart in the row not thick enough for silage on land that will make 50 bushels or more per acre, for obtaining the largest tonnage or the greatest feed production per acre. The wide spacing in these tests—wide for the character of the land when the corn is planted for silage—was unquestionably more or less to the advantage of the Goliad and to the disadvantage of the Mosby.

In the North Carolina tests the spacing of the one-eared varieties and the prolific varieties was also the same, which again was to the advantage of the large growing one-eared varieties.

The prolific varieties, when planted for grain yield alone, are best planted thicker than is best for the larger growing one-eared varieties. It therefore follows that they may be planted thicker for silage than the one-eared varieties, if total production of feed value is the object.

While it must not be overlooked that if the object is total feed production, the yield of grain or ears cannot be disregarded, it is nevertheless pretty certain and generally agreed that the total feed produced will be greater in growing corn for silage if the corn is planted a little thicker than is best for the highest yield of ears alone. Perhaps corn should be planted from 10 to 20 per cent thicker for silage than when grain yield alone is the object. In other words, if we assume that 12 inches apart in the rows is the correct distance on a given rich soil, then, when the crop is planted for silage, the stalks will be a trifle over 10¾ inches apart in the row; if it is planted 10 per cent thicker and 10 inches apart if it is planted 20 per cent thicker. With the prolific varieties we believe they should be planted about 20 per cent thicker for silage or total feed value in the plants than when planted for grain or ears alone. With the larger growing one-eared varieties, which for grain alone can

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