

Introduction

The making of silage is by no means a common practice in the tropics. This is not because preservation of fodder as silage is inferior to other means of crop conservation; but mainly because no conservation of fodder whatever is carried out. The practice of haymaking is not established, in fact in many places it is impossible to store dried fodder owing to the high humidity and damage caused by white ants.

The necessity for crop preservation in the tropics varies a great deal. With an insular climate and a short dry season often ill defined because of occasional showers of rain, fodder preservation may be almost unnecessary. This is especially the case where cane is grown and the cane-tops are fed to cattle during the dry period, or where some semi-drought resistant grass, such as Uba cane (S. sinense var. uba) or Guatemala Grass (Tripsacum laxum) can be reserved for the dry season.

Crop preservation, however, becomes a necessity where the comparatively short dry season is severe and of variable duration from year to year. Under these conditions, cattle are normally kept, as in Trinidad, tethered on any spare piece of land, grass being gleaned from the road sides and brought to them. Then when the dry season comes, there is no green forage or pasturage and in severe years some cattle may die of starvation. Where no cane is grown, then a reserve of fodder in the form of silage made during the wet season would be invaluable.

Where there is a long dry season associated with low annual rainfall, i.e. the drier continental climates, then stock-keeping is usually a form of ranching, the animals being kraaled at night. Under such conditions it is usual to keep some pasturage in reserve for the dry season, often marsh lands and lowlands, and it is hoped that the cattle will maintain their weight on such pastures. Too often, however, they lose weight, and the value of the last wet season is lost. Obviously for economic reasons it is impossible to feed ranch cattle for any great length of time on silage, yet here again, a comparatively small quantity of the rich wet-season grass could be ensiled, just to tide the animals over those last few weeks of the dry season when food is most scarce and hence loss of condition and carcass weight is greatest.