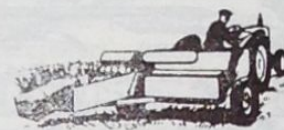


Farming Today

by NORMAN BORRILL



JUNE is the month for haymaking, and there can be no truer saying than 'make hay while the sun shines'. It is indeed impossible to make hay unless the sun DOES shine. Hay made without the sun ends up as a mouldy mess, useless as a feed and dangerous to those who handle it. It is probably the need for sunshine, and the lack of it during many of our summers, that has made many farmers, especially dairy farmers, turn to silage for their main source of winter feed for their cattle.

It would be quite possible to write a book on the various methods that have been tried in order to make good hay, and it is rather strange that almost a complete circle has been turned in attempts to quicken the arduous task. Many years ago the only way was to put the hay into large heaps in the field—all done by hand rake—and these heaps, or cocks, were more or less weather-proof. When the hay had matured enough to be ready to stack, it was laboriously forked on to wagons and taken to the yard to be stacked.

Later on, heaps were made much smaller and stacking was carried out more quickly. The heaps were less weather-proof and often the stacks, made in haste, heated and sometimes burst into flames. Just before the last war, the hay loader was invented. This machine towed behind the wagon or trailer, would pick up the hay direct from the swathe or row and put it on the load, which could then be taken to the yard and stacked with the aid of another machine, the stacking elevator. I think that loading hay on a wagon, using a hay loader, on a hot June day was about the hardest work ever done by a farmworker. Again, the danger of this method was impatience and sometimes, if bad weather threatened, the farmer would be tempted to stack too soon, with disastrous results.

After the war came the pick-up baler. This was a great advance, and large acreages of hay could quickly be baled and the carrying to the yard was fairly easy. There have been a large number of machines on the market to assist the handling of bales. Some have been successful; others have been a waste of money and the cause of frustration and annoyance. Stacking of bales often proved more difficult than expected, as these innocent looking bricks of hay would change shape and stacks would bulge in all directions.

Last year on my farm we made hay using the big round baler and, given the right weather, this method seems to be satisfactory. This is more like the old way of the big heap than anything which has been tried since, as these big bales can be left out in the field to mature without being damaged by rain, and they are easy to handle afterwards.

Silage also has an eventful history. Originally made in large concrete towers by a few pioneers before the last war, silage got a new lease of life in the early 40s when smaller, prefabricated types of silo became fashion-

able. The work load with these was heavy, progress was slow, and the resulting product was rather wasteful and the system did not really take on. Later, however, with the idea of the silage surface clamp or pit, there was another upsurge in the popularity of silage making. Then, with the invention of the forage harvester, tipping trailers and buckrakes, full mechanical handling became possible. At first, simple machines produced very fair results, but in the drive to attain perfection, more sophisticated equipment came on to the market. The grass was chopped short, like lawn mowings, and chemical additives were used to try to improve silage quality. Instead of cutting and carrying in one operation, wilting the grass for 24 hours was recommended, and what was originally a simple operation, almost independent of the weather, became a highly skilled job, almost as dependent on the weather as haymaking itself. I often wonder if it has all been worthwhile, as I still think that some of the best silage I ever made was cut by one of the first silage machines and carted and dumped in a very crude clamp.

When farmers are busy haymaking, or would like to be, there is always the temptation to take a couple of days off in mid-June to visit the County Show near Lincoln. What a magnificent job the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society has done in developing the permanent showground with its fine main buildings, hard roads and banked showring. How different it is from the days when the show used to be taken round the county, visiting the main market towns. Then the visitors had to put up with makeshift stands, makeshift car parks and, worst of all, makeshift toilets. Nowadays the whole showground is a place that the county can be proud of, and on show days there is something to interest everyone.

Best of all I still like to visit the machinery stands. This dates back to 1935 when as a small boy I was taken to the show at Louth and deposited for some of the time on the stand of the late W. E. Harness while my father went about his N.F.U. business. On this stand I had a glorious time, a boy let loose amongst all that wonderful array of tractors, binders and reapers. I can even remember that there was one new machine on the stand, a tractor-driven grass reaper, which was actually 'ours'.

In the days of the temporary showground parking was a great problem, and when visitors got into the park there was no knowing when they could get out as long queues formed and traffic jams were the order of the day. Today, in spite of the tremendous number of cars entering the ground, things run very smoothly.

There are lots of things of interest to see at the show, both for the agricultural and non-agricultural visitor, both male and female, young and old. Lets hope for the right sort of weather this year, not too hot, not too cold, to enable the ladies to put on those gorgeous dresses for which shows are so famous.