Haymaking

Soon farmers will be cutting the early hay crops, for there is a fair chance of obtaining good haymaking weather during the last week of November, and as good, or better, chance of settled weather in early December as in late December. Since the quality of the grass rapidly declines as the grass grows older, the cutting of one field at least on the early side is to be commended, particularly on those farms where silage is not made. Early cutting of some of the area saved for hay is of advantage also in bringing about better distribution of the labour, and cutting in rotation also spreads the risk of weather damage.

ALTHOUGH the time of cutting is very important in determining the quality of the crop, the weather after cutting is more important still. Farmers can obtain up-to-the-hour information concerning the weather by sending a collect telegram to "Weather, Wellington," indicating that they require information as to the fitness of the weather for haymaking and the period involved. Although great improvement has taken place in the science of meteorology, the weather cannot yet be forecast three or four days ahead with accuracy. Knowledge concerning the weather on the third or fourth day after cutting, unfortunately, is more important than knowledge about the weather on the day after cutting, for rain falling shortly after cutting is not so harmful as that which falls after the crop is partly or wholly cured.

Quick Drying the Aim

After cutting the aim in haymaking is to get the material dried as quickly as possible, and at the same time maintain the natural colour and aroma of the freshly-cut material. If left exposed to the hot sun for long, the grass will bleach and the clover leaves—the most valuable part of the hay—will become brittle, many falling off and being lost in the handling of the hay. The wind is a better drying agency than the sun, but the farmer must make use of whatever drying agency Nature provides. If it is wind, the grass is fluffed up with tedders or swathe turners to take advantage of every puff of wind that blows; if the sun, the hay is turned to prevent bleaching and to dry both sides of the swathe. In sunny weather, as soon as it is reasonably dry, make windrows to minimise the bleaching preparatory to stacking or baling, but if rain threatens, the material should be put into cocks from the windrows. The drier the material the larger may the cocks be made without risk of undue heating. If rain does fall in the night or for a period to follow, little harm is done to hay in well-built and well-raked cocks. After the rain has gone the wet material should be spread to dry thoroughly before stacking or baling.

Stacking

The site for the stack should be level, well drained, and in a position for easy transport of the material, which is placed on a foundation of straw, or, better still, of logs, permitting of bottom ventilation. Before stacking make certain that the material is sufficiently cured. Even experienced haymakers at times find difficulty in deciding the fitness of the material for stacking or baling. **This commonly occurs when haymaking in hot weather; the hay appears to dry quickly, whereas it is still sappy.** If the hay is too moist before stacking, it will heat, go brown or black in colour, become mouldy, or may even catch on fire. The addition of salt may have an effect in preventing heating of the material or the formation of moulds, and it improves the palatability. Sprinkle it evenly over each layer as stacking proceeds, using about 15 to 20lb. for every ton of hay. If the material is sappy, there is less likelihood of heating if small stacks are made. The small, conical-shaped stack seldom heats unduly or catches on fire.

After the stack is finished it should be well protected from the weather by the provision of a cover of some kind or another.

With greater use being made of the contractor, much more hay is being baled than formerly, when baling was seldom carried out except for transporting the hay long distances. If the contractor does not arrive in time to bale from the windrows, place the hay in large, well-built cocks, with covers properly weighted to prevent damage from rain and strong winds. By baling much labour is saved in feeding in the winter, and no dependence need be placed on the co-operative system.

Co-operative Harvesting

Most of the hay is still harvested on the co-operative system, each farmer and his staff forming part of a gang which may do all the harvesting on several farms. This system has its drawbacks, as all farmers operating