

# Pasture Management

Seasonal Notes by the Extension Division

**G**RAZED pastures on dairy farms should not be allowed to become rank during late spring and early summer. Even with the normal reduction in the area available for grazing through fields being set aside for hay and silage patchy rank growth will occur on grazed pastures. This should be controlled by topping the pastures with the mower.

## TOPPING PASTURES

Pastures should be topped in rotation in November and early December after grazing. If the quantity of toppings is small, the material will be readily cleaned up by young stock, but if the amount is large, it may be best used as hay. With the forage harvester it is possible to use such toppings for silage. The mower can be used effectively to control pasture growth at other times of the year as well as in spring. If a paddock is to be shut up in autumn for spring feed, it may sometimes have an uneven growth on it which would be better taken off before shutting up, and topping with the mower is a good method of evening up a paddock. Again in spring when autumn-saved pasture is being fed off the mower can be used to good effect to even up a paddock after grazing is completed.

—A. C. BURGESS

## EARLY CUTTING FOR HAY AND SILAGE

EARLY cutting is desirable for both hay and silage fields to avoid damage to the sward and to secure high-quality supplementary feed and a good aftermath. Weather naturally determines the period for haymaking, but with silage as an alternative, harvesting should not be interrupted by the need to wait for suitable haymaking weather. For hay wind is a much better drying agent than the sun, which bleaches the grass and shrivels the clover so that the leaves are lost in harvesting. Turning the hay prevents the sun bleaching and fluffs up the material so that the wind can have a better drying effect. Therefore the swath should be turned not later than the day after mowing and in hot, sunny weather this should be done a few hours after mowing.

If hay is turned frequently enough during curing, it will be dried quickly and will still retain most of its natural green colour and the aroma of freshly cut grass. Rain leaches the sugars and the valuable soluble food from the dried or partially dried grass and clover, and if hay in this condition is exposed to rain for long periods, it may be reduced in value to poor straw. Consequently if rain threatens, partially dried hay should be cocked properly so that the rain is largely shed, even though this adds much to the cost of handling the hay. Whenever rain is likely to fall unturned hay in the swath is better left until the weather is fine.

—P. A. DUNNE

## LUCERNE HAY

THE value of lucerne as a hay crop lies in its reliable high production over a wide range of climatic conditions and soil types and in the nutritious nature of the hay when properly made. Lucerne hay is high in protein and minerals and therefore especially suitable for high-producing stock such as dairy cows. To retain the maximum nutritional value the crop should be cut before the stems become too woody. The crop is at a suitable stage for cutting when new shoots have just begun to grow out from the bases of the plants. The first cut of the season may contain considerable weed growth and should be taken early enough to prevent the ripening of weed seed.

Because the leaves of lucerne contain the greatest food value, every effort should be made to avoid their loss. When stacking was widely practised hay crops were often cocked so that the leaf would not dry out excessively before the crop as a whole was fit for stacking. For the same reason some farmers have a side rake following immediately behind the mower before baling. This practice of raking lucerne into rows while it is still fairly green can be followed with safety only in the drier areas where damage from frequent rain showers is not so great.

—W. F. LEONARD

## STACKING BALED HAY

CONSIDERABLE waste can be caused by faulty siting and building of stacks. A good, dry, level foundation free from danger of flooding is the first essential. A site should be chosen well away from the railway line, where there is risk of fire, and from waterways. The stack should be sited end on to prevailing wet weather or preferably in the shelter of a plantation. If a base of any kind is used, it must be even and allow for a firm foundation layer of bales. This first layer must be placed with the cut edges down to avoid damage to strings. It is preferable for the outside bales to have a slight tilt inward; loose hay packed around the outside will help.

Whatever system of bale placement is used, all layers should be built from the ends to the centre and from the sides to the centre. Any gaps left must be in the centre. The endeavour should be to build perpendicular sides without protruding or receding bales. Each layer should lock the one below it in position so that there will be no danger of the ends or sides of the stack falling outward. It is always wise to have an eave layer, with the outside bales projecting a short distance over the edge of the layer beneath, so that run-off water will tend to fall clear of the sides. Where hay is used to cover the stack the top should have a fairly steep pitch; otherwise water will easily gain entrance, with disastrous results. Care and attention to these basic principles will ensure the safe storage of baled hay.

—J. R. MURRAY

## HARVESTING RYEGRASS AND WHITE CLOVER SEED

CUTTING when the seed is mature is essential if good-quality lines of ryegrass seed are to be obtained. The seed should separate from the heads on pressure from the hand, and greenness should be gone from the bulk of the straw. Samples for blind seed examination sent to the Department of Agriculture at this stage will give an indication of disease incidence and stage of maturity. Windrowing with either the mower or binder is general, though with Italian and short-rotation ryegrasses stooking reduces harvesting losses, especially if there is adverse weather.

Under average conditions perennial ryegrass is fit to thresh after a week in the windrow, but heating troubles are likely to arise if Italian or short-rotation ryegrass is threshed less than 14 days after cutting. Drum speed and concave settings should be to the maker's specifications. Any modifications necessary due to varying conditions should aim at the minimum drum speed and maximum concave opening to give efficient threshing.

Similar principles apply to the harvesting of white clover. The crop is fit for cutting when most of the well-filled heads are ripe and can be easily rubbed out. An even swath with sufficient body to be picked up readily by the header should be aimed at, and excessive bulkiness which would delay conditioning should be avoided. To avoid losses through cracking or incomplete harvesting the swath must be fit before threshing is attempted. Periodical examination of the sample and cavings will determine optimum header settings as for the ryegrass crop.

—M. L. CAMERON