

Shredded Fodder and Prosperity

THERE are men in my neighborhood," said a country merchant, "whom I call 'endless chain farmers,' while there are others whom I call 'breakers,' the latter so called because I know that there will be certain periods of each year in which they will have a break in their incomes. The first always pay as they buy, while I look out that the second only buy as they pay."

This merchant was not a farmer himself, but he had grown rich doing business with them, and he knew the financial standing and the farm methods of every man in his community. In a little speech which he once made he explained his endless chain theory.

"Farming," said he, "entails every law of political economy ever mentioned by John Stuart Mill. There is unearned increment, a margin of utility, the law of supply and demand, the manufacturers' profits, consumption of raw material, plant depreciation, and the labor question. Over some of these economic principles the farmer has present control, while over others he has none. He can more or less control raw materials, manufacturers' profits and plant depreciation—in fact, his success as a farmer depends on the way he handles these three factors. Taking the corn crop for example, his raw material consists of his corn and fodder, and his manufacturers' profits are determined by the way his cattle and hogs turn this raw material into marketable beef and pork, and his plant depreciation depends on the disposition he makes of the humus in building up his soil. A farmer who sells his corn as he harvests it, leaving his fodder to shrivel up in the field, who gives no thought of replacing the plant food which each crop takes from the soil, makes a profit only from his raw material, and when that is sold his income ceases.

"On the other hand, the farmer who saves his fodder, shredding it for the mow or chopping it for his silo, has cheap raw material where-with to feed cattle and hogs, who manufacture it into butter fat, beef and bacon, the sale of which bring in a steady all-year income. These in their turn provide fertilizer, which next year makes the soil richer, so that there is more raw material for feed, more cattle and hogs to sell, more money constantly coming in, and so on, year after year. These are what I call 'endless chain farmers.' They are the ones who live comfortably, enjoy farming, and send their boys and girls to college."

Comfortable Farmers.

Probably the most comfortable farmers of this country are the corn-raising farmers, because, as the little black dots on the government map show, they have more hogs and more cattle per capita than the others. There are approximately 100,000,000 acres of corn to be harvested this fall—the richest, most productive crop our country knows—and yet, in connection with this harvest, there is an equal probability that a fair per cent of the value of this crop will be wasted. Sad as it is, it required centuries to find out that from 30 to 40 per cent of the nutritive value of the corn is in the stalk, leaves and husks, and it has not been learned entirely yet that even without a silo the corn stalks on the farm, when properly shredded, have a feeding value practically equal to timothy hay and prairie grass and a fertilizing value far in excess of either.

All farmers do not have silos, but more are seeing the light, and each year thousands of these profit-getting obelisks are being erected. The value of the corn stalk is being widely advertised, but still there are those who do not realize that it is the finest auxiliary roughage when fed with either ensilage, clover or alfalfa, as a balanced part of the grain ration. For instance, in a recent experiment at the Agricultural College of Nebraska, it was found that—"stover fed with alfalfa returned a value of \$4.57 per ton, in comparison with alfalfa at

\$6.00 per ton as the sole roughness." In another experiment, this time at the New Jersey station, it was found that of 200 pounds of corn stalks fed to a cow during ten days, sixty pounds, or 30 per cent, remained uneaten. This corn was unshredded, but carefully harvested. The editor of Farmers' Bulletin No. 107, of the United States Department of Agriculture series, in summarizing the results, says, "shredding would, no doubt, result in more complete consumption of the stalks."

In none of these trials, however, has it been claimed that shredded fodder is as good as ensilage, for it is not, but the demarkation line between the two as rough feed for cattle is closer than the ordinary believer knows.

Stover vs. Silage.

In the Pennsylvania Station Bulletin No. 83, corn stover and corn silage were compared with two lots of six steers each. They were fed with the concentrates, corn and cottonseed meal. In 126 days of the test the average gain on corn stover was 214 pounds per steer, and on silage 240 pounds. The total cost of the corn stover ration was \$103.73 and of the corn silage ration \$109.91.

Husking and shredding machines will not efface the silo, far from it, but they will efface a portion of the enormous waste of our corn crop, both of silo owners and of others. How great this waste has been can only be conjectured as a whole, but by the acre a pretty accurate calculation can be made. Thus, for example, if the value of the ear corn from an acre of ground amounted to \$25.00, the value of the shredded corn stalk from the same acre would be normally \$14.68. Multiply this by every acre of corn left (unshredded) and the amount would be enough almost to support the poor of our big cities.

The average yield of corn stover is between two and three tons per acre. Were we only to allow it one-third of the average feed value of good hay, we should require only three acres of this fodder to equal one acre of hay. Now, hay is one of the most negotiable commodities coming from the field. There is always a market for it, and of late years it has commanded good prices, and yet, in nearly every part of the country where shredded fodder has become customary it required a short hay crop to awaken the community to the fact that shredded stover was hay or is hay in everything but name and reputation.

The Rebate.

Selling the hay and feeding the fodder are one link in the endless income. Cheap food and high-priced butter and beef are the second link. A third link, so to speak, is in the nature of a rebate. We get back part of what we give. In farming, as in business, we must render unto Caesar what we take from him, and in this case Caesar is the soil. Without going into the detail of soil chemistry, it is sufficient to say that unless we return nitrogen and salt containing humus to the field from which we gather our crop, our corn yield will grow less each year, just as wheat yields are diminishing in the prairies.

Stable manure is by far the best natural fertilizer within the reach of the average man, but the way it has been handled would cause a chemist to weep. Liquid manure is laden with gold-bearing nitrogen, but to be saved and utilized it must come in contact with something of an absorbent nature. Corn stalks do not absorb at all, many straws absorb poorly, but shredded stover, singularly enough, acts like a blotting paper. It is the king of beddings. It is easily handled, goes through the spreader nicely, and rots easily. It is next year's insurance for next year's income, and it does not lessen any of the returns for the current year.

The signs of the agricultural times indicate to those who can read signs that it is only a matter of time when barnyard humus will be as

jealously conserved in this country as it is now in Japan and India, and that the farm in the future without a spreader will be as unique as the farm today without a wagon. The United States Agricultural Department and the State schools, in advocating the wider use of shredded stover, are playing safe, because they are not advocating a policy which is going to cost those who practice it extra money.

Many tests have proved that husking by hand in the field as compared with cutting the corn with a binder and husking it with a machine, allowing for machine depreciation and all that, costs practically the same. The shredding is thrown in and the corn fodder is practically velvet. From 250 to 1,000 bushels of corn can be husked in a ten-hour day, depending on the equipment. And whether one owns the machine himself or hires a custom outfit, the annual cost of husking by hand and biding and husking by machine is so near identical that there is no choice.

The main difference between the two methods is that one gives you rheumatism and the other gives you fodder.—Douglas Malcolm.

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