Storing Forage

There are two (2) ways to harvest and store crops to be used as forage:

- dry them or
- make them into silage.

Forage can be dried either naturally or artificially. This storage method, however, is not as efficient in maintaining the nutrient value of the forage as silage. Another advantage of silage is its ability to be stored for many years.

Drying forage

In drying forage, the primary concern should be to conserve the maximum quantity of nutrients. Fine leafed and stemmed plants are preferred, because they dry much more rapidly than plants with thick stems. In dry weather make a few bales of hay. High quality hay is defined as weed free forage dried without loss of leaves from handling. Forage must be sufficiently dry, with 18-25% moisture retained, before storing. Otherwise the quality of the hay will deteriorate leading to:

1. nutrient loss;
2. molding; and
3. the development of undesirable smells.

Test the moisture content of hay by squeezing a hand of the cut leaves. If juice flows from the leaves or grass blades bend in your hand it is not ready for storage. On the other hand, if it easily breaks forage can be safely stored. If shelter is not available, use vegetation (such as coconut fronds) or others means of cover to waterproof hay stacks on the outdoors. Fencing outdoor bales of hay will protect the forage from being destroyed by animals.

Silage

Silage affords greater maintenance of the forage's nutritive value by up to 80-85 percent. Silage is fermented feed due to storage of forage under anaerobic condition (absence of air or oxygen). Avoid having too much air being trapped inside the silo to ensure the production of high quality silage. If it is too hot proteins may burn up. Additionally, too much oxygen leads to the production of butyric acids, which has an offensive odour and makes the silage less appealing to livestock. Chopping the green forage, before placing it in silos, facilitates close packing and the escape of oxygen. This improves the palatability of silage and also makes it easier to chew. Good quality silage should have:

- a yellowish-green colour;
- a pleasant, sour odour;
- no mold growth;
- a moist, soggy feel;
- substantive retention of the nutritional value of the green forage;
- a good flavour to livestock.
- it is recommended to train sheep and goat to eat silage, especially those which had had no previous exposure to silage.