What is silage? Literally, *silage* is anything stored in a silo, which may comprise a hole in the ground, a bunker, a tower, a covered heap, or a wrapped bale. The word “silage” derives from the Greek “siros” meaning a pit or a hole sunk in the ground for storing corn (*Zea mays* L.; McDonald et al., 1991). Missile weapons and dry grain are stored in silos, but neither is described as silage—the term is reserved for the fermented products of agricultural crops.

Woolford (1984) defined silage as “the product formed when grass or other material of sufficiently high moisture content, liable to spoilage by aerobic microorganisms, is stored anaerobically”. Silage is produced by *ensilage*, that is, the placing of crop material inside a vessel or a structure called a silo. The material may be an entire crop or only part of a crop, such as the grain portion. By placing the material inside a structure the objective is to preserve it and to prevent it rotting as in a compost heap. The crucial difference between a silo and a compost heap is that air moves relatively freely in the compost heap but not in the silo.

Silage is often compared with hay made from the same crop, and the most obvious differences are in the concentration of water and in the pH (acidity) of the two materials. The ensiling process is potentially as efficient as haymaking with regard to the preservation of the important nutrients in forage crops (see, for example, reviews by Ekern et al., 1975; Demarquilly & Dulphy, 1977; Waldo, 1977; Zimmer, 1977, 1980). Haymaking involves the removal of most of the water in the crop so that spoilage microorganisms do not develop during the storage period when the crop is stored in the presence of air and not in a sealed silo. Thus, in reality, hay crops can suffer from significant damage during the period of field drying if weather conditions are not favorable, with loss of leaf and reduced protein content, especially in the case of legume crops like alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.; Thomas et al.,