

Haymaking and utilization

Introduction

Farmers around North Shewa Zone, Ethiopia, have good knowledge and experience of hay making. They make hay mainly from naturally growing pasture during the main rainy season (July–September). Harvesting and hay making are normally done in October.

1. Harvesting grass for hay making

Grass is harvested when the weather conditions are suitable. There must be at least two weeks of sunny weather during the harvest. To ensure optimum yield and quality of the hay, harvesting is done when the grass is at least at the 50% flowering stage.



2. Preparation/drying of the harvested grass

The harvested grass must be dried on a dry plot before collection. Drying is done by spreading the harvest thinly on the plot to allow sufficient ventilation and sunlight to extract moisture. The spread grass is turned while it is green and dry so that both sides are dried effectively. Daily follow up and monitoring are done to ensure effective drying.

The dried material is heaped on the plot before being transported to a permanent storage area. Prior heaping on the plot ensures that the grass is intact and reduces wastage during loading and transporting.

A good quality hay maintains its greenish color, and the stem is easily broken when it is bent. Some grass takes a long time to dry while some dries within 3–5 days.

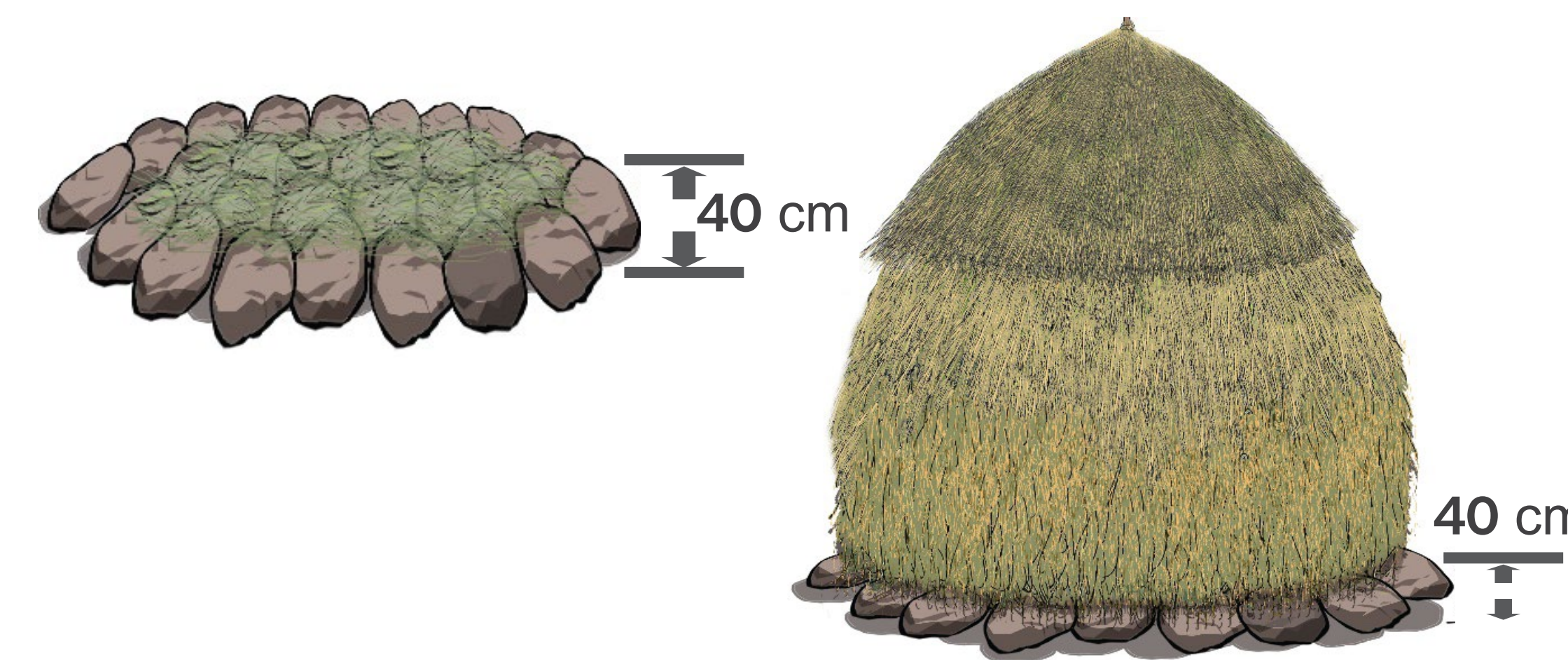


3. Transportation

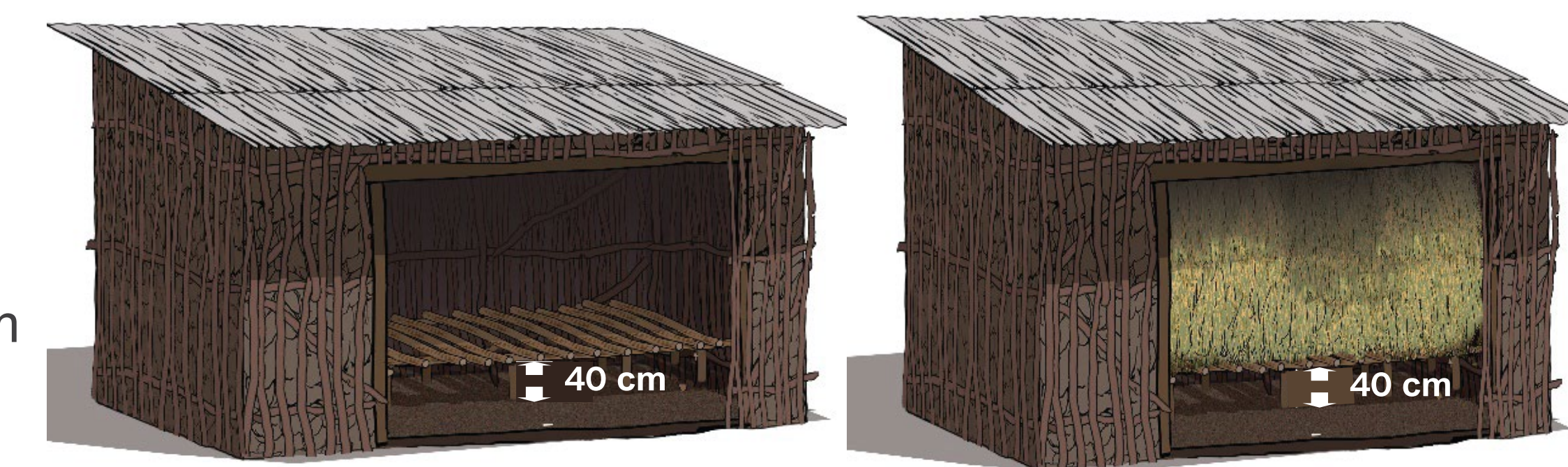
The dried hay is transported to the place where it is stored permanently by making bundles of a manageable size and loading them on donkeys. The transportation and heaping in a permanent place are done when the day is sunny. This helps to remove dust and other soil contaminants from the hay and create a tidy heap.

Hay is stored in two ways.

1. Stored/heaped outside the homestead



2. Stored in a specially made shed. This is mainly used to store feed for fattening sheep or feeding calves.



4. Utilization

Hay consisting of tall grasses is difficult for the animals to eat. Thus, it is chopped into smaller pieces before feeding the animals. First, the animals are fed hay alone, then, after a few hours, they are given other types of feed such as bran, oil seed cakes or homemade ration, depending on availability.

