

GEHR Watershed Minute #16

Salt Hay Farming: (208 words)

Early Dutch and English settlers discovered the values of grazing livestock on the vast salt marshes and harvesting the salt hay of the Great Egg Harbor tidal rivers and bays. Salt hay was found to be very rot resistant, and cattle preferred grazing on the salt marsh hay over fresh hay.

And even though the task of cutting, raking, baling and transporting salt hay from the wet, muddy and insect infested salt marshes was hard manual work, it was offset by the fact that literally tons of salt hay could be harvested annually without the costs and efforts of cultivation.

All the meadowland along the tidewater produced a salt hay which was used for stable bedding and fodder for livestock, thatch for barn roofs, mulch for berry, vegetable, and nursery farming, stuffing for furniture, packing for glassware and pottery, insulation for icehouses, traction on roads, protecting newly poured concrete, as an ingredient in paper, for septic system cover and insulation, and for salt-hay rope.

In the past, it took resourceful manual and horse labor to harvest the salt hay from the soft wetland soils of the river. Today, salt hay harvesting has all but died out, with one of the last salt hay farms located on English Creek.