



Pastures Inventory...



What

One of the first steps in developing or updating a pasture management plan is an inventory of resources. Assistance is available from the local Soil Conservation Service office to make this inventory.

Inventory Includes

Forage inventory. The location, kinds, and amount of existing forage resources are noted. Amount is measured in pounds per acre.

Soil type. The various soils on the farm are noted on the plan map. The combination of soil type and climate determine the species of plants which will grow best on the site, as well as the potential forage production.

Pasture condition. Pasture condition compares the present plant community and forage production to the potential for the site. An experienced conservationist can determine if enough desirable plants remain to achieve improved pasture condition through management. Even an area which has been overgrazed may still have enough of the desirable plants left to reestablish the stand. If there are not enough good plants, the area may need to be reseeded.

Fence locations. The location of existing fences are mapped, as well as the potential locations that could improve grazing distribution and livestock management. If fenced alleys are needed for livestock handling and movement between pastures, these are also planned.

Water supply. Livestock need an adequate supply of clean water for optimum production. In addition, water location has an effect on grazing distribution. Providing water supplies may be necessary in order to implement a good management plan.

Grazing distribution patterns. The grazing patterns are observed for each paddock to determine if livestock are overgrazing some areas and under-using others. Achieving proper use of individual plants and even grazing distribution across the field are critical for maximum sustained forage production.

Erosion. Pasture that has a long history of overuse often has trampled areas and exposed patches of bare soil. It may need shaping and reseeded or some other kind of erosion control. Temporary fencing may also be needed to protect bare areas until vegetation is established.

Location of stream or ditches. The location of streams and ditches are noted on the map. They often are natural locations for pasture cross-fences. Fencing streams and ditches out of the field prevents young animals from falling into the water, restricts animal access to water which may carry contaminants or parasites, and improves stream habitat for fish and wildlife.



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Brush and weed control. Invasion of brush or weeds not only reduces production of grasses and/or legumes, but can also affect grazing patterns. Problems with brush and weeds only get worse unless control measures are taken. The kinds and location of brush or weeds are inventoried when developing a management plan.

Location of feeding areas. Is the location of existing areas causing problems such as overgrazing, manure runoff into streams and ditches, undesirable distribution of grazing, or erosion? A conservationist can assist in determining more desirable locations.

Wildlife and recreation potentials. Wildlife species are part of any operation. An inventory determines if food, cover, and water are adequate for both domestic and wild animals. If they are not, this could become part of the management plan. The potential for various kinds of recreation could also be inventoried.

Summary

Before plans can be made to improve or better utilize pasture, a livestock producer must know both what resources are available and their condition. A detailed inventory of the items listed above can provide this information.

Where to Get Help

For more information on pasture management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service. SCS personnel provide technical assistance to landowners and operators through local conservation districts.

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