Conservation Information Sheet

August 2001

Pastures Renovation

WHAT

Renewing a pasture through reseeding in order to establish palatable, -desirable forage species and improve forage production.

HOW

Soil test. Have a soil sample analyzed for nutrient, lime, and minor element needs. Take a sample of each different soil type or landform. The Soil Conservation Service or Extension Service can provide more information on how to collect a soil sample and where to have it analyzed.

Adapted species. Select forage species which are adapted to the soils and climate. Other factors which are important in species selection are the season of use and the type of livestock which will be grazing the pasture. Generally, it is best to select just one grass species and. one legume for a mix. The Soil Conservation Service can provide you with species recommendations for your particular site and management needs.

Quality seed. Buy only quality seed which has high germination and purity tests. Certified (blue tag) seed assures varietal purity and usually has better seed viability. Make sure that the variety is one which is well-adapted to your area. Ask what weed seeds are present in the seed. If undesirable weeds are present, reject the seed. The best way to prevent a new weed problem is to make sure that you aren't buying it along with the seed.

Season of planting. In western Washington, early spring is usually the best time to plant a new seeding. If your site is extremely dry or wet, however, fall seeding is probably a better option. In eastern Washington, spring seeding is recommended if the precipitation is greater than 16" and fall seeding if the precipitation is less than 14". The best planting time in areas where the precipitation is between 14"- 16" depends on the weather conditions the particular year of planting. If you are uncertain of the best planting time for your situation, the Soil Conservation Service can help evaluate your site.

Seedbed preparation. The seedbed should be weed free, which can be accomplished either with tillage, an herbicide, or a combination of the two. The seedbed should also be firmed if it has been tilled (a heelprint should only be about ½" deep). If soil compaction is a problem, now is the time to subsoil.

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Seeding depth. Most species should be seeded no more than ¼" deep. It is better to place the seed too shallow rather than too deep. Forage seeds are so small that they don't have enough energy stored in the seed to send the shoot up to the soil surface if they are buried over ¼" deep.

Seeding method. Seed can be planted with a conventional seed drill, a no-till seed drill, or by broadcasting the seed on the soil surface and harrowing the ground lightly afterwards. The objectives to achieve are good seed-soil contact and shallow seeding depth.

Weed control. Weeds must be controlled or they will out-compete the forage seedlings for sunlight, nutrients, and moisture. Weeds can be controlled by clipping regularly with a mower, use of an herbicide, or a combination of the two methods. The Extension Service can advise you which specific chemicals are labeled to control the particular weed species which are a problem.

Grazing management. New seedlings should not be grazed during the first growing season. The plant roots are not yet well-established, and the grazing action of animals can break roots or actually pull plants out of the ground. Mowing will not hurt the seedling, however, you should make sure that the mower blades are sharp.

WHERE TO GET HELP

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

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