USDA NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Management System (Pasture)

Alabama Guide Sheet No. AL 3

What is a Conservation Management System*?

A Conservation Management System on pastureland is combinations of conservation and forage management practices that allows for the use of the pasture in a way that meets the landowner/user's objectives while minimizing negative impacts to the resources and the environment on and off the farm. Conservation Management Systems on pasture may vary depending on type of grazing animals, grass/ legume species, and management objectives.

Resource Concerns Related to Pastureland

Resource concerns in pastureland include: forage suitability, forage condition, and management.

Forage Suitability

Existing grasses or selected species to be planted should be suitable for both the soil and climate conditions. Poorly adapted species of grasses or legumes will not produce forage at a level to meet the landowner/user's objectives.

Forage Condition

Existing grasses/legumes should be species or varieties that produce the quality and quantity of forage to meet the grazing animals' needs under normal management. Poor health and vigor of plants may be indicative of poor soil fertility, plants not adapted to site/soils, or improper management.

Management

Proper establishment and management of the forage plants are critical to a grazing system. Rotational grazing of the animals provides rest for the forage plants and sustained growth and production of the pasture. Managing fertility and controlling competition provides maximum growth and vigor of adapted pasture species.

Pasture Conservation Management Systems

The key practice in managing pastureland is rotation of livestock between pastures giving the grass a rest period to store nutrients and building a strong root system. Overgrazing is a pasture's worst enemy. Cross fencing and well-distributed water supplies allows the cattleman to manage
the grazing resource efficiently and maximize forage production. The following alternative grazing systems show some common examples of grazing systems in Alabama.

Essential Practices

Three practices are essential to all pastureland conservation management systems—prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and pest management. Prescribed grazing is the movement of animals from

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* Conservation Management System is also referred to as a Resource Management System in the National Planning Procedures Handbook.

one pasture to another pasture based on forage condition to allow the grass/legume to rest and store nutrients in the roots to maintain plant health and vigor. Nutrient management is the application of nutrients rates needed by the forage plants and are environmentally safe. Pest management is the application of pesticides according to their label recommendation to reduce competition to the forage, but minimize impact on the environment.

Open Perennial Pasture Grazing to Rotational Grazing

Existing perimeter fencing, cross fencing, troughs, pipeline, nutrient and pest management. Cross fencing is installed to separate out 2 or more pastures (4-6 preferable) which allows individual pastures 2-4 weeks of rest before regrazing. Ponds, spring developments, and/or wells can provide water supply. If a well or pump is used install pipeline and troughs allowing for at least one trough available to each pasture (travel distance to water should not exceed 1,000 feet for best grazing efficiency). Nutrient management assures plenty of good quality forage, while pest management minimizes the impact of weeds and insects on the forage and livestock.

Conversion From Other Land Use to Perennial Pasture

Establish adapted species of grasses and legumes, install perimeter fencing and cross fencing, troughs, pipeline, rotational grazing, nutrient and pest management. Plant adapted perennial grasses and legumes to achieve as close to year round grazing as possible. Install perimeter fencing and cross fencing to separate 2 or more pastures (4-6 preferable) which allows individual pastures 2-4 weeks of rest before regrazing. Ponds, spring developments, or wells can provide water supply. If a well or pump is used install pipeline and troughs allowing for at least one trough available to each pasture (travel distance to water should not exceed 1,000 feet for best grazing efficiency). Nutrient management assures plenty of good quality forage, while pest management minimizes the impact of weeds and insects on the forage and livestock.

Annual Forage Crop on Cropland

Establish small grain/legumes, grassed waterway, temporary fencing, pipeline and water trough, nutrient and pest management. Plant adapted small grains/legumes to provide seasonal forage crops. Grassed waterway carries concentrated runoff water from the field safely. Temporary perimeter and cross fencing allows for better utilization of forage. Troughs and pipeline should be placed to allow for rotational grazing of the forage.

Potential Effects of Conservation Management Systems on Pastureland

- Increases production of forage grasses
- Improves utilization of forage by livestock
- Provides clean and adequate supply of water for livestock
- Improves water quality of adjacent streams by minimizing livestock contact
- Improves health and vigor of grasses/legumes
- Protects soil from erosion
- Reduces the amount of sediment entering streams, rivers, and lakes

References

Other Alabama Guide Sheets related to this Conservation Management System are: AL 342, 378, 378A, 378B, 472, 512, 528, 561A, 574, 590, 614, and 728.

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