

PASTURE CONDITION ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET (512)

Producer:	County:	Date:	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species
Farm/Tract:	Assessor:	PTS.*					
1) Plant Population The estimated % by weight is mostly	DESIRABLE INTERMEDIATE UNDESIRABLE	5 3 0					
2) Plant Diversity The diversity of plant species is	BROAD MEDIUM NARROW	5 3 0					
3) Plant Density Desirable and intermediate plants are	DENSE MEDIUM SPARSE	5 3 0					
4) Plant Vigor Desirables and intermediates are	STRONG MEDIUM WEAK	5 3 0					
5) Legumes in Stand Percent of legumes by weight	>60% bloating 20-30% <10%	0 5 0					
6) Severity of Use The degree and frequency is	LIGHT MODERATE HEAVY	0 5 0					
7) Uniformity of Use The uniformity of grazing use is	UNIFORM INTERMEDIATE SPOTTY	5 3 0					
8) Soil Erosion Sheet, rill, gully and/or stream bank erosion is	SLIGHT MODERATE SEVERE	5 3 0					
9) Harvest frequency Livestock rotation	≥twice a week once a week continuous grazing	5 3 0					
10) Plant Residue Dead and decaying plant materials is	EXCESSIVE SUITABLE DEFICIENT	0 5 0					

TOTAL _____

0-15 = UNSUSTAINABLE/ 15-25 = POOR / 25-35 = GOOD/ 35-45 = VERY GOOD/ 45-50=SUSTAINABLE

* NOTE: Use intermediate points as applicable (1,2,3,4 to reflect conditions)

PASTURE CONDITION ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET CRITERIA

This worksheet can be used to **visually estimate** the condition and trend on grassland. Use this form to inventory five different fields on the same day or the same field at five different times. If all pastures cannot be inventoried, choose representative pastures and evaluate these same pastures over several years to indicate trend. Record either field acres or total acres represented by the inventory.

Condition of rotationally grazed pastures with adequate rest periods should improve over time. If scores are below 35: management changes such as faster rotations and longer rest periods would benefit the soil and water resources and forage productivity and profitability. If scores are below 25: consider additional cross-fencing, liming, fertilizing and seeding, and even culling livestock, to restore soils and forages and protect water quality. Monitoring tools such as soil and forage testing and livestock body condition scoring can assist with decision-making. A forage stick with grazing formulas can also be useful with rotations.

- 1) Plant Population – Visually estimate the % composition by wt. of each plant grouping. Desirable, intermediate and undesirable species will vary with site, kind of livestock and producer goals. Intermediates are grazed plants that may not be as palatable as desirables or may be grazeable weeds, annuals and low-yielding species.
- 2) Plant Diversity – The number of desirable and intermediate species represented on the site. Broad requires eight or more species. Medium is three-six species. Narrow is one species. Grazing season is extended with a variety of warm and cool-season forages.
- 3) Plant Density – Visually estimate density of living desirables and intermediates, not including undesirables. Dense grass at six-ten inches height increases bite-size, and therefore intake. A thick sod protects the soil from erosion.
- 4) Plant Vigor - Rate the health and productivity of desirables and intermediates looking at color, size of plants and number of leaves. Undesirables can easily invade a weak stand of grass.
- 5) Legumes in Stand – Visually estimate the percent composition by dry weight, realizing that legumes usually comprise less of the stand by weight than it appears. A 20-30% legume stand can fix enough nitrogen to support the grass. If white clover comprises over 60% of the stand, bloat could be a risk.
- 6) Severity of Use – Heavy use without rest reduces vigor of desirable species and promotes erosion. Light use allows excessive residue buildup that blocks sunlight, reducing growth of young grass and legumes. Moderate grazing down to about three inches optimizes photosynthesis. Height of the plant above the ground mirrors the depth of roots below ground that in turn support top-growth.
- 7) Uniformity of Use – When all plants are grazed to a moderate, uniform height throughout the field, regrowth is more even. Spot grazing means some plants or parts of the field grazed too closely and others too lightly. The pattern is repeated in the subsequent grazing periods, and over-mature, less palatable plants continue to be avoided. Keeping plants vegetative improves animal intake.
- 8) Soil Erosion – Visually observe and collectively evaluate all types of erosion and determine the severity for the area being surveyed. Valuable topsoil and organic matter are lost to sheet erosion when soil is left unprotected by vegetation.
- 9) Harvest Efficiency – Daily rotations allow 60-70% efficiency. Twice weekly rotations (every 3-4 days) allow 45-50% efficiency and weekly rotations allow 35% efficiency compared with 30% efficiency with continuous grazing.
- 10) Plant Residue – Suitable residue provides adequate ground cover to retard runoff and enhance nutrient recycling. Excessive residue shades legumes. Deficient residue allows bare soil to erode.