Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Information
Michigan

Grazing Systems – Cost Considerations (Time and Money)

Is the use of grazing an alternative that would benefit your livestock production? Get better value from pastures with a managed grazing system. Consider the use of grass as a crop and let your livestock harvest their own forages. Grazing Systems are used to enhance livestock feeding by controlling the harvest of forages with grazing animals. The purposes of a managed grazing system are:

- Improve or maintain the health and vigor of plant communities.
- Improve or maintain quality and quantity of forage for livestock health and productivity.
- Promote economic stability through grazing land sustainability.

There is a time commitment and costs needed to install a grazing system. The following explains the NRCS conservation practices used in a grazing system and the typical time and costs to install and operate a grazing system. NRCS calls these systems "Prescribed Grazing" and develops Prescribed Grazing Plans for producers.

NRCS Grazing Practices:
Animal Trails and Walkways
Brush Management
Fence
Forage Harvest Management
Pasture and Hayland Planting
Pipeline
Prescribed Grazing
Spring Development
Stream Crossing
Water Well
Watering Facility
Your farm may use some or all of these practices as part of your prescribed grazing plan.

The first step in developing a grazing system for your farm is an inventory of the existing situation. At this visit the conservation planner will evaluate the existing situation and work with you to determine what actions are needed to start a grazing system. You decide if you want to continue to develop a prescribed grazing plan.

The plan will include what actions (practices) are needed as well as instructions (Conservation Sheets) on how to implement the practices. There may be cost-share money available to assist you to implement your plan. The information about participation in cost-share programs will be provided to you along with the development of the grazing plan.

Example of typical start-up and use of a grazing system:
This example is a beef operation with 40-60 acres of pasture with an existing well and functioning perimeter fence.

Start- Up Item	Typical Time Commitment in Hours	Typical Cost ($)
Soil Tests $0-15 per sample	2	30
Fence with gates for interior area to separate the pasture into paddocks	11 - 44	316 - 1,042
Water Troughs or Tanks in the paddocks	3 - 16	40 - 360
Pipeline to provide water to the troughs or tanks, buried or surface		660 - 4,690
Determine Hay Yield	2 - 4	-
Determine Number of Paddocks	2 - 4	-
Annual Operations Item		
Soil Tests	2	30
Move Cattle	9 - 20	-
Maintain Interior Fences	1	24 - 99
Maintain the Water System and Move Tanks or Troughs	0 - 2	31 - 52

Total implementation cost of example system is $1,000 to $6,100 and 40-110 hours of the producer's time. Annually, the cost is $50-180 and 15-30 hours of the producer's time.

Typical installation Cost for Grazing Practices in Michigan:

Practice Code	Practice Name	Unit	Typical Cost per Unit
575	Animal Trails and Walkways	Ft.	$30.00
314	Brush Management	Ac.	$40.00
382	Fence	Ft.	$1.00 - 2.50
511	Forage Harvest Management	Ac.	$5.00
512	Pasture and Hayland Planting	Ac.	$90.00 - 200.00
516	Pipeline	Ft.	$2.00 - $6.00
528	Prescribed Grazing	Ac.	$10.00 - 20.00
574	Spring Development	No.	$3,000.00
578	Stream Crossing	No.	$3,600.00
642	Water Well	No.	$4,500.00
614	Watering Facility	No.	$1,000.00

For more information on Grazing Systems and how to develop a grazing plan contact your local NRCS office.

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