

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
VIRGINIA CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**PRESCRIBED GRAZING**

(Ac.)

**CODE 528**

**DEFINITION**

Managing the controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing animals.

**PURPOSES**

- Maintain or improve the health and vigor of plant communities.
- Maintain or improve livestock health and productivity.
- Maintain or improve water quality and quantity.
- Maintain or improve air quality.
- Maintain or improve soil condition.
- Maintain or improve wildlife habitat.
- Promote economic stability through grazing land sustainability.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies to all lands where grazing and/or browsing animals are managed.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

Graze vegetation according to its physiology and management unit characteristics.

Based on a forage balance worksheet, establish a stocking rate to achieve this standard's purposes and meet animal needs for forage quality and quantity.

Number of grazing units will allow adequate recovery time for the forage(s) within each unit.

Adjust grazing periods and/or stocking rates to meet the objectives of the grazing system (soils, plants, animals, and producer goals).

A minimum score of 35 from the Pasture Condition Score (PCS) sheet will be maintained on all grazing units.

Control or eliminate livestock access to streams and riparian areas. Provide stabilized crossings when streams must be crossed.

The duration and intensity of grazing periods will be based on the health and productivity of the dominant forage(s) being managed.

A contingency plan will be developed to protect the forage resource base and grazing/browsing animals as needed, i.e. sacrifice areas during drought and winter feeding areas.

Prolonged recovery periods may be needed to restore the desired plant community and health following severe damaging events.

Locate infrastructure to promote uniform grazing and manure distribution.

Manage grazing as a system consisting of soils, plants, water, and producer goals.

Animal health care will be adequate and timely.

Minimize concentrated livestock areas and trails to reduce soil compaction, runoff, erosion dust and odor and improve manure distribution and ground cover

**Criteria For Air Quality**

Increase carbon sequestration by managing the grazing system to improve plant health.

Reduce fossil fuel and nitrogen use by maximizing grazing days (stockpiling, proper stocking rate, forage species, use of legumes).

### **Criteria For Wildlife Habitat**

Incorporate forage species (natives, legumes, endophyte free grasses) beneficial to both livestock and wildlife.

Maintain adequate crop residue to provide shelter and protection to wildlife.

Do not graze or hay forages in pre-determined areas during critical nesting periods.

Manage for diverse plant communities.

### **Criteria to Promote Economic Stability**

Establish and follow a record keeping system to improve management.

Evaluate the economics of the forage system and associated infrastructure.

Develop a grazing system that minimizes off farm inputs.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

- Supplemental feed to meet livestock needs and/or producer goals.
- Use shade and/or shelters (Livestock Shade Structure VA 717).
- Extending the grazing season by stockpiling and combining different forage types.
- Pasture renovation if the stand is undesirable or unable to meet system needs.
- Fencing to facilitate grazing system implementation.
- Needs of other enterprises utilizing the same land.
- Adverse effects to endangered, threatened and candidate species.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

The prescribed grazing plan shall conform to all applicable federal, state and local laws.

The following Virginia Conservation Practice Standards will be incorporated into a prescribed grazing system as needed:

Fence (382) - perimeter and cross fencing necessary to implement the grazing system

Animal Trails and Walkways (575) - for proper movement of livestock

Brush Management (314) - control of invasive woody species in pastures

Conservation Crop Rotation (328) – grazed or hay crop fields while in annual/perennial cover

Cover Crop (340) - grazed without damaging the intended conservation effects

Forage Harvest Management (511) - harvest of hay or grazing

Nutrient Management (590) - proper use of nutrients on pastureland

Pasture and Hayland Planting (512) - establishment of forage species

Pest Management (595) - control insects, disease, weeds, and other organisms

Pipeline (516) - needed to properly distribute water development

Pumping Plant (533) - to facilitate the distribution of water from its source

Spring Development (574) - potential water development source.

Watering Facility (614) - water development distribution

Water Well (642) - potential water source development

Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580) - riparian area management in grazing systems

Stream Crossing (578) - A stabilized area across a stream to provide a travel way for livestock or vehicles

Other practices as necessary.

Prepare a prescribed grazing plan for all management units where grazing will occur according to state standards and specifications.

All of the following items must be contained in a written prescribed grazing plan.

1. Livestock producer's goals and objectives.
2. A map showing farm, tract, field numbers, soil mapping units, grazing unit layout, lanes (if any), acres, fencing, shade (if any), shelter (if any), watering system, and sacrifice areas.
3. Soil information (type, yield potential).
4. Identification of dominant forage specie(s) in each grazing unit and expected yields.
5. Identification of fields that may be used for hay harvest.
6. Identification of crop fields that may be used for grazing crop residues or grazing annual forages (cover crops).
7. Range of days in a grazing period and a recovery period for each grazing cycle with beginning and ending forage heights.
8. Number, kind, class, and average weight of livestock throughout the grazing season.
9. Forage-animal balance of the pre-planned grazing system and expected balance after plan implementation.
10. Pasture Condition Score Sheet.
11. Stocking rate.
12. Contingency plan for emergencies.

#### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

- Monitor the plan with appropriate records to assess whether the grazing strategy is meeting objectives.
  - Repair or replace fencing as necessary to control livestock.
  - Adjust livestock (demand) and/or available forage (supply) as necessary to maintain the sustainable function of the grazing system.
  - In times of drought, livestock will be moved to a sacrifice area, feedlot, or previously designated pasture in order to protect the integrity of the grazing system.
- Soil test fields/pastures annually until the desired fertility level is reached and then every 2 to 3 years. Apply lime and/or fertility as indicated by the soil test.
  - Soil test hay fields and those pastures that are hayed annually and apply lime and/or fertility as indicated by the soil test.
  - Clip pastures as needed to control weeds and encourage vegetative re-growth. Consider wildlife nesting concerns and time appropriately.
  - Renovate and/or re-seed pastures as needed.
  - Routinely check watering systems (pressurized watering systems on a daily basis) and repair and/or maintain as needed. Drain when not in use.

#### **REFERENCES**

NRCS, Virginia Technical Guide

Soil Survey for the County

The Agronomy Handbook, Publication 424-100, Revised 2000, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Grazing Manual

Controlled Grazing of Virginia's Pastures, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Publication 418-012, 1995

Southern Forages, Third Edition, 2002

Missouri Grazing Manual, MU Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia, Publication M157, 1999

Dairy Grazing Manual, MU Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia, Publication M168, 2002

Forage and Weeds of Pastures, MU Extension, University of Missouri-Colombia, Publication M169, 2004

Forage Field Guide, ID-317, Purdue University, 2004

Forages, An Introduction to Grassland Agriculture, Volumes I and II, Fifth Edition, 1995

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