

Range Management Managing for Year Round Forage

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General

Livestock operations that have high quality forage available for grazing throughout most of the year are more flexible and have the greatest chances for success. There is no one plant that will provide high quality forage throughout the year. However, there are plants that produce high quality forage during their individual growth cycle. Producers should select a combination of forages with different growth cycles that will best support the objectives of their operation. Especially important is to have quality forages available during weaning, prior to breeding or, during any other stressful time.

Planning

Selecting an effective forage program will require thoughtful planning. Decisions based on one forage source seems simpler than managing several different types of forages, but there are pitfalls. A farm with all the pasture planted to only one species will be totally dependent upon that one species. Should disease, weather conditions, insect outbreaks or other catastrophes occur, extra costs will be incurred to restore the stand. This may also leave the business operation vulnerable by having to buy costly feed or sell on forced markets. A diversity of forages allows options.

All pastures should have perennial grasses as the foundation. Each single species with a lagoon in the pasture will help pastures to maintain nutrient balance, providing a forage supply that is high in protein and total digestible nutrients.

Considerations for planning a forage system include:

1. Overall forage/livestock system objectives,
2. Management ability of the system's manager,
3. Nutritional needs of the animals in the system,
4. Time of year livestock will be on the system,
5. Total amount and time of forage need,
6. Capabilities and needs of the land resource,
7. Adaptability of the forages to the land resource,
8. Management requirements of the selected forage,
9. Nutrient requirements of the selected forage,
10. Economic performance of various forages.

("Optimum" rather than "maximum" production, should be the goal.)

Complimentary Forages

Overlaying the nutrients provided by the forage onto the nutritional needs of the animals gives a good visual profile of where deficiencies may occur. It is at these deficient time periods when complimentary forages can be used. Winter grazing is more cost effective than feeding hay. Remember, any nutrients not provided by the forages must be purchased, increasing the cost of production.

Some pastures may not be available for grazing at all times of the year because of wet soil. Wet soils cause feeding difficulties and boggy conditions for livestock

ing forages that grow during different times of the year allow the grazer to manage his animals so they will have access to high quality forage for the longest possible period. Optimizing production and return from the forage resource system makes sense to the prudent forage manager.

Where To Get Help

For more information on rangeland management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS personnel give technical assistance to landowners and operators through local natural resource districts.