

# Grazing Lands Management

## How NRCS Can Help

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### What Is It?

Grazing land is land which supports vegetation that can be harvested by grazing animals. In Nebraska, grazing land could include rangeland, pastureland, or hayland. As an owner or manager of grazing lands, NRCS Conservationists can help you maintain or improve your grazing land resources.

### How?

The first step is for you and the conservationist to discuss and observe, on the land, some factors that affect grassland management. These include:

- Identifying major plants that grow in your pastures.
- Discussing how these plants grow, how they respond to grazing, and how grazing can be managed to enhance the most productive plants.
- Observing various plants to understand why some plants are grazed and why others remain ungrazed.
- Observing Ecological Sites and Forage Suitability Groups (areas with specific characteristics that produce distinctive types and amounts of plants). Some sites have a higher potential to produce forage than other sites. The types of sites located on the ranch and their condition will influence the stocking rate.
- Evaluating the similarity index (or condition) on each of the ecological sites on the ranch. This will give you an idea of how much forage is being produced in relation to how much forage the site is capable of producing.
- Determining the trend on the unit, which is an indication of whether similarity index is improving or deteriorating. This can be determined by observing plant vigor, the abundance of seedlings or young plants, plant residue, composition changes, and condition of the soil surface.
- Discussing the production potential of each forage suitability group or ecological site.
- Identifying major wildlife species that are on the ranch, then discussing habitat requirements, and determining the condition of existing habitat.
- Completing and evaluating a forage inventory of the ranch based on the current stocking rates.
- Develop prescribed grazing schedules and other grazing land management recommendations based on the ranch owners' and operators' goals.

### Grazing Lands Inventory

After these factors have been observed and discussed, the conservationist can help inventory your grazing land resources, including:

- Ecological sites or forage suitability groups, which can be recorded on an aerial photograph
- Similarity index (condition) by ecological sites
- Trend
- Grazing patterns
- Fences
- Forage inventory and production potential of each pasture

- Wildlife habitat
- Location and amount of available water
- Location of salting and feeding areas
- Location of corrals
- Other physical features and resources

## **Alternative Treatments**

As the resource data is collected, grazing management problems and opportunities usually become obvious. When they have been identified, the conservationist can help you consider treatment alternatives in developing a grazing plan to meet your objectives. These alternatives might include proper grazing use of key plants, short growing season deferments on some pastures, or a planned grazing system. Also, brush management, range seeding, pasture planting, cross fences, additional water development, better livestock distribution, and wildlife habitat improvement may be planned. You may want to consider recreation potential. All of these alternatives can be evaluated as to the cost-effectiveness in meeting your goals.

## **Grazing Plan**

As you develop your grazing plan, conservationists can help you record your decisions which may include:

- A plan map, or aerial photograph, showing permanent features, forage suitability groups, ecological sites, and production information or similarity index.
- A list and schedule of your planned treatments.
- Information used in determining your similarity index.
- A forage inventory as well as an annual grazing plan to guide manipulation of livestock and vegetation.
- Brush management overlays used in planning wildlife habitat improvement.

## **Follow-up**

After you develop the plan and put it into action, the role of the conservationist is to assist you with needed follow-up that might include:

- Technical information needed to apply conservation practices.
- Continued evaluation to ensure success of applied practices.
- Helping to keep you informed of new techniques in grazing land and wildlife management.
- Helping you watch for needed changes in the grazing plan as it is applied.

But YOU make all the decisions. The NRCS's role is to help you understand your grazing lands and to provide the needed technical assistance to help you carry out your decisions.

## **Where to Get Help**

For more information on grazing lands 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.