

Range Seeding

Nebraska Conservation Planning Sheet No. 15

What is range seeding?

Range seeding is establishing or reestablishing stands of perennial forage plants native to the site. It means selecting varieties that are superior in forage quality and quantity for long-term forage use. This includes preparing an adequate seedbed, which may require establishing a cover crop the year before the range seeding is completed, and appropriate seeding and management during establishment. It also includes reseeding or interseeding depleted (overgrazed) rangeland and “go back” fields (former cropland), or converting pastureland to rangeland.



How it helps the land

Selected varieties will restore rangelands to more productive plant communities with long-living vegetation. When reseeded land is managed properly, it will provide a long-term forage crop, erosion control, and soil moisture retention. Range seedings will protect the land from wind or water erosion, enhance surface and groundwater quality and provide habitat for wildlife.

Where the practice applies

Range seedings can be used to renovate existing native grass stands or on land being converted from other uses, like cropland. Range seedings

can also be used to improve wildlife habitat and provide a long-term quality forage supply, but should mainly be applied on lands where the principle use is for grazing animals.

Where to get help

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has lists of species, varieties, and cultivars that are well suited to geographic areas and range sites. For help in selecting mixtures of plant species and varieties, and establishment techniques for range seeding on your farm or ranch, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

Applying the practice

This practice is considered applied when the stand is established to prevent soil erosion and begins supplying forage.

Considerations in establishing a range seeding

Range seedings should not be grazed the first year after seeding and should be deferred during successive growing seasons until the stand is established, except where flash grazing is used for weed control. Flash grazing allows livestock to harvest forage in a short period of time. Flash grazing can be used to control annual grasses and broadleaf weeds, and should take no

more than 15 percent defoliation of the seeded plants.

- Use certified seed. If unavailable, use common seed from not more than 250 miles south or 150 miles north and/or 200 miles east or west from where it is planted.
- Select plant species that have compatible growth characteristics and are native to the site. Select varieties that provide the best quality and quantity for long-term production.
- Seedbeds should be weed free.
- Existing cropland stubble/residue may be used if adequate amounts remain to protect seedlings and the land from wind and water erosion.

If needed, drilling cover crops between June 1 to July 15 is recommended the year before range seeding. Drill crops, like grain sorghum or forage sorghum, at 10 to 15 pounds per acre, or sudangrass at 15 to 25 pounds per acre in rows not to exceed 20 inches. The cover crop should be clipped if there is excess forage or if mature seed will be produced. Stubble should be clipped at a height of not less than 12 inches or more than 18 inches.

Seeding Considerations

- The best type of seeding equipment is a grass drill equipped with depth bands and packer wheels able to plant fluffy and free-flowing grass seeds.
- Seed should be planted on a pure live seed basis. Common seed tested in accordance with Nebraska Seed Law can be planted.

- Warm season mixtures: seed November 1 to May 31.
- Cool season mixtures: seed August 1 to September 15 and November 1 to April 15.
- Cool and warm season mixtures: seed November 1 to May 20.
- Seeding depth should be between 1/4 inch and 1 inch. Seed shallower in clays and deeper in sands.
- A minimum seeding rate is 20 pure live seed/square foot.
- Broadleaf weeds should be sprayed at 4 to 6 inches high, when they are thick enough to shade the ground and grass seedlings are far enough along. Be sure to follow all label restrictions for the herbicide used.
- When forbs are planted with grass mixtures, herbicides can not be used for weed control. They may only be controlled by mowing and shredding.

Mowing or shredding at the wrong height or time can severely damage the seeding. Annual grasses, like Foxtail, that are competing with grass seedlings, should be mowed or shredded. Mowing or shredding should be discontinued in late July or when shredding removes more of the desired grass plant than the annual grasses. More leaves should be cut from weedy grasses than seeded grasses.

Maintaining the practice

It is important that proper range management be utilized to maintain healthy and vigorous range plants. For

information on maintaining the practice, refer to *Prescribed Grazing* planning sheet 14.

Prescribed burning may be utilized on certain range sites in some parts of the state and on non-sandy soils. If applied properly, it will decrease competition from weeds and brush and improve the health and vigor of desired plant species. The NRCS or Cooperative Extension should be consulted early in planning to determine whether a prescribed burn can help improve the range condition. Local fire district authorities must be notified and proper permits secured before conducting a prescribed burn. The producer is responsible for damages as a result of uncontrolled burns.



For more information refer to the Nebraska Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG) on line at (http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/efotg_locator.aspx?map=NE), Section IV, Conservation Practice Standard – Range Planting, (550), or visit your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office.