

Water Quality Enhancement Activity – WQL19 - *Transition to Organic Grazing Systems*



Enhancement Description

Transition to Organic Grazing Systems supports the conversion of a conventional to an organic livestock grazing system. Key to the enhancement activity is following ecological and pasture-based grazing requirements, applying materials according to the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances, and managing livestock according to National Organic Program (NOP) rules (Subpart C – Organic Production and Handling Requirements) for organic certification. This enhancement activity facilitates compliance with NOP rules for organic certification.

Landuse Applicability

Pasture, Range, and Forest

Benefits

Environmental benefits will be operation specific. Benefits may include, but are not limited to improved forage, soil, and animal health, and improved water quality.

Managing for recommended time and timing of grazing, minimum and maximum grazing heights, pasture/paddock rotation, and rest periods improve plant health, diversity, and productivity. Sufficient pasture/paddock rest or pasture/paddock avoidance that minimizes livestock contact with viable internal parasite populations can break parasite cycles, reduce ingestion of parasites and the need for treatment, and improve animal health. Soil organisms and soil quality are benefitted by the reduction or elimination of natural or synthetic pesticides typically used on forage and/or livestock. Rotating livestock through several pastures/paddocks minimizes the development of loafing areas and improves the distribution of manure nutrients for plant uptake. Nutrients are more uniformly available to forage crops and the potential for polluted runoff from high traffic areas is reduced.

Criteria for Transition to Organic Grazing Systems

- Manage pasture grazing and rest periods to follow NRCS Prescribed Grazing practice standard (528) criteria for recommended maximum (begin) and minimum (end) grazing heights by forage species or Ecological Site Description interpretations. Begin and end grazing heights are followed to maximize forage quality and palatability and promote rapid recovery and forage regrowth.
 - Maintain a livestock watering system that accommodates a high frequency of livestock rotation through several different pastures or paddocks during the grazing season. Follow NRCS practice standard criteria for Prescribed Grazing



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- (528), Watering Facility (614), Pipeline (516), or other related standards for appropriate supply and travel distance to water.
 - Use fencing that is permanent, semi-permanent, and/or temporary to facilitate pasture rotation. Follow the NRCS Fence practice standard (382). Additionally, follow NOP rules for allowable fence materials.
- Apply all materials, including plant nutrients and pesticides for forage production and animal health, in accordance with the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances.
- Comply with all NOP rules for livestock management (NOP § 205.236 - .239 for livestock origin, feed, healthcare, living conditions)
- Complete organic transition within three (3) years as verified by obtaining an approved Organic System Plan from a valid certifying agency.

Documentation Requirements for Transition to Organic Grazing Systems

- Provide a written grazing plan following the 'Plans and Specifications' guidelines in the Prescribed Grazing standard. Include time and timing of grazing, minimum and maximum grazing heights, and date rotated in and date off of pastures/paddocks in the grazing plan, as appropriate for the landuse.
- Provide a record of the application of inputs according to the NOP rules, e.g., type, date, rate, and amount of allowed nutrients and pesticides for forage and livestock.
- Provide a copy of the Organic System Plan when approved by the certifying agent.

NRCS Pasture Notes, graziers notebooks, or other record keeping systems for pasture livestock operations can be used to facilitate record-keeping.



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State Criteria

- To assist with formulating and evaluating the alternatives, the following forms can be used (or other forms that gather the same type of information):
 - Livestock Inventory and Forage Balance Worksheet (NE-ECS-61) 1 – current and for each alternative
 - Prescribed Grazing Schedule (NE-ECS-62) 1 – current and for each alternative
 - Maps identifying the facilitating and accelerating practices – current and for each alternative
- If livestock are on the operating unit, then prescribed grazing should be scheduled and applied from the beginning. If fencing and water development must be installed before applying the prescribed grazing plan, then they should normally be installed next.
- Water developments generally are installed before fences because the specific locations of planned ponds, wells, and pipelines may need to be moved to a new location, which may affect the location of the planned fence. Once the water developments are applied, then the fencing can be installed without worry of whether the pond can be built or the planned well will yield a sufficient water supply.
- After the fences and water distribution are installed, the prescribed grazing plan can be initiated. Accelerating practices, such as brush management, range planting, prescribed burning, and critical area treatment, can now be performed as fencing and water development will allow the needed grazing management to be applied. Each operating unit will have its unique set of circumstances that dictate the schedule of application. A major point to remember is that grazing management is the key to the success of all accelerating practices.

TABLE OF PLANNED AND APPLIED ACTIVITY – WQL19

Tract & Field#(s)	Total Acres	Management: Rotation or Non-Rotation ¹	Number of Livestock and Class of Livestock ²	Date In	Date Out	Forage use level (%) or residue height (in.) ³
T1234 R1	80	Non-Rotaion	40 Yearlings	5/1/09	9/15/09	Heavy >60%

¹**Rotation** – A grazing method utilizing recurring periods of grazing and rest between paddocks or grazing units. Livestock are rotated through multiple grazing land units/paddocks during the grazing season.

¹**Non-Rotation** – Cattle are not rotated to other grazing land units/paddocks during the grazing season.

²**Livestock Class** – cow/calf, yearlings, bulls, heifers, dry cows, horse, sheep, goats, etc.

³**Forage Use** - Record percent (%) use for current year in air-dry weight of forages at the end of the growing season: Light = 25-39%, Moderate = 40-60%, Heavy = >60%, or record residue height in inches of remaining forage at the end of the growing season.

I certify that the following information meets specifications and has been provided to NRCS:

1. Provide a record of the application of inputs according to the NOP rules, e.g., type, date, rate, and amount of allowed nutrients and pesticides for forage and livestock map with delineation of the area where the enhancement was applied if it is a partial field.
2. Attach completed written grazing plan: Job Sheet for Grazing System (NE-ECS-601, NE-ECS-611, NRCS-RANGE-4141, NE-ECS-621, NE-ECS-64over Crops
3. Obtained an approved Organic System Plan from a valid certify agency
4. A map showing where the enhancement is applied

I understand that it is my responsibility to obtain all necessary permits and to comply with all laws, regulations and ordinances pertaining to the application of these activities.

Certified by: _____ **Date:** _____