

PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Why should you be concerned?

Good pasture management is important not only for forage and livestock production, but also for maintaining healthy ecosystems. Understanding and recognizing the impact of livestock grazing on ecosystem properties, is key to maintaining productive pastures. Emphasis should be placed on careful management of pastures to ensure productivity and environmental concerns are being addressed. A healthy ecosystem can support diverse plant communities, protect sensitive species, effectively protect soil and water quality and provide productive pasture for your livestock.

You can lessen negative impacts on the environment and increase pasture productivity by:

- Understanding how many animals your pasture can support and stocking according to that rate;
- Controlling livestock access to waterbodies to preserve water quality;
- Maintaining pastures to prevent soil erosion;
- Managing manure and commercial fertilizer applications on tame pastures to prevent undesirable nutrient leaching and runoff.

Overgrazing results in decreased plant vigour and production, increased areas of bare ground, and eventually the loss of desirable species. It encourages weed growth and soil degradation. Overgrazing also leads to nutrient runoff into nearby waterbodies, impacting the sustainability of long-term pasture production, herd health and wildlife habitat. Using a flexible and environmentally sound grazing management plan not only reduces many environmental risks, but also improves the profitability of pasture and livestock production.

What can you do?

1. Use proper stocking rates that leave sufficient plant litter. Plant litter protects against soil erosion and retains soil moisture for future plant growth.
2. Provide rest periods that are adequate to allow plant recovery from grazing, drought or other disturbances.
3. Take measures to distribute grazing activity evenly, which in turn will return nutrients from livestock uniformly onto pastures.
4. Understand the nutrient requirements of a pasture, and ensure nutrient applications match, but do not exceed the needs of plants and livestock.
5. Conserve native grassland, forested land and wetlands.
6. Use this worksheet to see how well your pastures are managed, and if there are any improvements you can make.
7. Contact your local GO Office for additional information and support, or other appropriate agricultural extension specialist.