PASTURES

Good Pastures Produce
MORE Livestock Products

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION DIVISION
NORTH DAKOTA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
Fargo, North Dakota
Good Pastures Produce More Livestock Products

North Dakota farmers and ranchers are giving more attention to the place of vigorous, well managed grasslands in the efficient production of livestock products. Properly managed pastures yield more livestock products and better returns than those worn-out by overgrazing.

The most productive pastures are evenly covered with an abundance of nutritious grasses. Signs of overgrazed pastures are thinned-out grass stands and an increase in weeds -- both of which greatly reduce the returns to the farmer or rancher.

LOWEST BUTTERFAT COSTS

Records of dairy herd improvement associations show the value of pastures for milk cows.

Among these records is an instance where a herd was divided: One group was fed roughage and grain in the barn or feed lot; the other had pasture which was supplemented with grain.

During July, August and September, 1941, feed cost without pasture was 21 cents per pound of butterfat. During this period -- when pasture is not at its best -- feed cost was 12.4 cents per pound of butterfat produced by cows on pasture. If labor costs were included, the difference would have been much greater.

During this three-month period cows on pasture produced an average of 106.5 pounds of butterfat per cow, as compared to 94.0 pounds per cow for the herd on dry feed. This is a good three-months' butterfat production record when compared to the 12-month state average of 150 pounds per cow.

Low-producing cows usually are found on poor pastures.

Losses resulting from weedy pastures should be considered in valuing the pasture for milk cows.

Weeds are not relished by livestock, yet livestock is forced to eat them when the grass is short. Butter containing weed flavors is not liked by consumers. Therefore, creameries do not and cannot pay as much for the cream.

Each year farmers in North Dakota lose approximately $100,000 from weed-flavored dairy products.

BEEF RETURNS GOOD

Grazing Experiments at Fargo on mixed tame grass pastures produced over a four-year period an annual average of 131.4 pounds of beef per acre. Figuring grass-fed beef as worth 8 cents a pound, these pastures gave a gross return per acre of $10.51.

Since no seeding and harvesting costs are involved when land is pastured, the net returns per acre compared favorably with net returns from small grain crops. The pasture also resulted in a great saving of labor.

PASTURE FOR HOGS

Pasture for hogs should receive much more consideration in North Dakota. Michigan has studied the value of alfalfa pasture for hogs and finds one acre of alfalfa hog pasture replaced $31.90 worth of other feeds which had to be fed in the dry lot.

Remember -- the hog harvests and threshes the crop. Hogs on pasture usually are healthier. Changing hogs from one pasture to another each year -- rotating between two pastures -- is effective in controlling hog parasites and neurotic infection.

AVOID OVERGRAZING

Overgrazed pastures invariably are unprofitable pastures. The first step in making pastures pay is to stop overgrazing. Either limit the number of animals to the capacity of the pasture or increase the pasture area to meet livestock requirements. Every farmer can, by checking on a few of the following indicators, determine whether he is grazing his pastures heavier than desirable.

1. Is the pasture weedy, or getting weedy?
2. Is the grass stand becoming thinner?
3. Are the cattle reaching the fence for outside feed, or breaking out so many feed fences yokes to keep them inside the pasture fence?

Some increase in the carrying capacity will result from using a system of rotation grazing. Under such a system an area is grazed for a short period -- 3 to 6 weeks -- and then is given complete rest for a period usually twice as long as it was grazed.

Gains and milk production should be watched carefully. Losses in production are a good sign that the livestock should be moved to better pasture or given supplementary feed.

RESTORING PASTURES

Work done by the Soil Conservation Service indicates most depleted native grass pastures can be restored in one or two seasons by giving the pasture complete rest. If given a chance, the grass will usually crowd out annual weeds by the end of the second season.
Moving weeds in the blossom stage will speed up recovery.

Plowing up poor native grass pastures is not considered desirable. Native grasses produce better midsummer pasture than either annual crops or tame grasses and can be restored by resting.

**PLAN ADDITIONAL PASTURE**

While the pasture is being rested, provide temporary pasture of small grains, sudan grass, or sweet clover. However, do not entirely rely on annual pastures as they are not dependable in drought years. Sudan grass and second growth sweet clover can be used to supplement grass pastures in August and early September when grass pastures are dry.

**SEVEN-MONTHS PASTURE**

Good pasture seven months every year should be the goal of every North Dakota farmer who produces livestock. To get this pasture a variety of grass plants is recommended.

For early spring pasture use crested wheatgrass in the central and western, and brome grass in the eastern parts of the state. Both grasses are ready for grazing several weeks before the native grasses. Both provide good pasture till early July. During this period let the native grass grow up and displace weeds.

Late June or early July, depending on the amount of spring pasture available, move the stock onto the native grass pasture. Where no native grass is available, move to sudan grass or sweet clover pasture. When moving stock to sudan grass or sweet clover pasture, adjust animals to the new pasture gradually and supplement with dry forage to prevent bloating.

Along in September the stock can be moved back to the brome or crested wheatgrass pasture.

To make the tame grass pasture better, mix two or more grasses and add 2 pounds of alfalfa (preferably Ladak), or sweet clover, per acre. Use this mixture when seeding down a new pasture. Alfalfa and sweet clover raise the protein content of the feed. This helps because home grown feeds always are a little short on protein. This mixture also produces more pounds of feed per acre than when grasses are seeded alone.

Other grasses which can be used in mixtures or substituted for brome or crested wheatgrass are: Western wheatgrass, slender wheatgrass, Canada wild rye, Russian Rye and Feather bunch grass. In drier parts of the state, and on the more alkaline soils, western wheatgrass will do better than brome grass.

Information on when and how to seed grasses is available in another leaflet. If you want this information, obtain Grass Seeding Circular A-12 from your County Agent.

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