

RAMA UNIVERSITY, KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH

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Course: Principles of Organic farming
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Pasture management

Grass/pasture management is defined as the practice of growing healthy grass and related plants to profitably sustain forage availability and livestock production while ensuring ecological health.

Grass/pasture management practices provide strategies for conserving and enhancing native grass, improving forage production, restoring soil quality and quantity, improving plant communities and reducing overall operational costs.

Well-managed grasslands and pastures contribute significantly to the sustainability of a ranch operation and the health of surrounding ecosystems. Many ranchers now assert that their primary activity is growing grass, not beef. Nevertheless, grass management practices have traditionally been categorized under ecosystem or grazing management. The literature review revealed an increase in beneficial management practices relating specifically to grass/pasture management strategies, warranting the creation of a separate management category

Pasture management benefits

- Maximized forage production = lower feed bills
- Better livestock health = lower vet bills
- Minimizes risk of contaminated runoff from livestock manure and degraded pastures polluting local waterways
- Healthy pastures look better than muddy, weed-ridden fields

Pasture management

Pasture Rotation

In order to sustain a healthy field and grass crop, livestock need to be rotated through a system of pastures rather than being allowed to graze continuously on one large pasture. The pasture rotation system will include a system of cross-fence to define areas of smaller pastures that livestock can be moved through. This system will result in more forage, less overgrazing and reduced soil compaction.

Divide pastures with permanent or temporary cross -fencing to provide 4-7 smaller pastures. This allows you to control how long animals can graze a certain area.

Begin grazing pastures in the spring after the grass has reached a height of 6" - 7". Allow livestock to graze pasture down to no lower than 3" before rotating to the next pasture. Left on their own, livestock will graze their favorite grasses over and over again, allowing other less desirable species to thrive and go to seed. Be sure to allow each pasture a sufficient period for forage re growth after grazing; you want the grass to regrow to 6" - 7" height before rotating animals back to that pasture. Generally, 10 to 25 day rotations are required through the spring, lengthening to 25 to 30 days in the late summer.

Livestock may have to be removed to a confinement area when pastures dry out and grasses become dormant. If livestock are allowed to continue grazing

Pastures down to bare earth, the root systems are destroyed and the grass will not be able to recover when rain returns.

Establishment of Confinement Areas

Low light levels and low temperatures reduce forage growth from November through March. During these wet months livestock should be removed to a holding area such as a paddock or corral that is often referred to as a sacrifice area. The holding area should be located in the driest possible location.

Avoid Overgrazing

Overgrazing results when there are too many animals on too few acres or when animals are allowed to be on pasture all winter, which leads to loss of productivity and degradation of soils. Overgrazing kills beneficial plants by grazing them to death. The resulting bare spots encourage weed growth, erosion and runoff of nutrients into nearby streams, ditches, swales and wetlands. Overgrazing also causes soils to become compacted, reducing growing capacity and limiting the amount of water that can filter into the soil.

“It takes grass to make grass.” - Grazing or browsing too much of the leafy material will wear the plants down and reduce its ability to store energy in its roots for regrowth. Leave at least 3 inches of growth on your pasture forage. Vigorous plants can compete better with weed plants.