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# Pasture Management

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Extension Service

Livestock Specialist Section

Pasture Management

James J. O'Connell<sup>1</sup>

Many good pastures have been established only to be lost through careless management. Good pasture management involves the following practices.

CONTROLLED GRAZING

Nothing contributes more to good pasture management than controlled grazing. At its best, it encompasses the following:

1.-Protection of First Year Seedlings--First year seedlings should be grazed lightly or not at all in order that they may get a good start in life. Where practical, instead of grazing, it is preferable to mow a new first year seedling about 3 inches above the ground and to utilize it as hay or haylage, provided there is sufficient growth to so justify.

2.-Rotation or Alternate Grazing--Rotation or alternate grazing is accomplished by dividing a pasture into fields (usually 3 to 4) of approximately equal size, so that one field can be grazed while the others are allowed to make new growth. This results in increased pasture yields, more uniform grazing, and higher quality forage. Generally speaking, rotation or alternate grazing is 1) more practical and profitable on supplemental pastures than on permanent pastures and 2) more beneficial where parasite infestations are heavy as is usually the case with sheep.

3.-Shifting the Location of Salt, Shade and Water--Where portable salt containers are used, more uniform grazing may be obtained by the practice of shifting the location of the salt to the less grazed areas of the pasture. Where possible and practical, the shade and the water should be shifted likewise.

4.-Deferred Spring Grazing--Allow 6 to 8 inches of growth before turning out to pasture in the spring, thus giving grass a needed start. Too, the early spring growth of pasture is high in moisture and washy. Turning on pasture early in the spring as soon as grass starts to green up is a common mistake in eastern South Dakota.

5.-Avoiding Close Late Fall Grazing--Pastures that are closely grazed late in the fall usually start late in the spring. With most pastures, 3 to 5 inches of growth should be left for winter cover.

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6.-Avoiding Overgrazing--Never graze more closely than 2 to 3 inches during the pasture season. Continued close grazing reduces the yield, weakens the plants, allows weeds to invade, and increases soil erosion. The use of temporary and supplemental pastures, such as sudan, may "spell off" regular pastures through seasons of drought and other pasture shortages and thus alleviate overgrazing.

7.-Avoiding Undergrazing--Undergrazing seeded pastures should also be avoided, because (a) mature forage is unpalatable and of low nutritive value, (b) tall growing grasses, such as brome, may drive out some low growing plants due to shading, and (c) weeds and coarse grasses are more apt to gain a foothold when the pasture is grazed insufficiently. It is a good rule, therefore, to graze the pasture fairly close at least once each year.

#### CLIPPING PASTURES AND CONTROLLING WEEDS

Pastures should be clipped at such intervals as necessary to control weeds and to get rid of uneaten clumps and other unpalatable coarse growth left after incomplete grazing. Pastures that are grazed continuously may be clipped at or just preceding the usual haymaking time; rotated pastures may be clipped at the close of the grazing period. Weeds may also be controlled by chemicals.

#### TOPDRESSING

Like animals, for best results grasses and legumes must be fed properly throughout a lifetime if good yields are to be expected. It is not sufficient that they be fertilized at or prior to seeding time. In addition, in most areas it is desirable and profitable to topdress pastures with fertilizer annually. Fertilizer treatments should be based on soil tests and usually applied in the spring or fall.

#### GRAZING BY MORE THAN CLASS OF ANIMALS

Grazing by 2 or more classes of animals makes for uniform pasture utilization and less weeds and parasites, provided the area is not overstocked. Different kinds of livestock have different habits of grazing; they show preference for different plants and graze to different heights.

### IRRIGATING WHERE PRACTICAL AND FEASIBLE

Irrigated pasture can be a profitable means of summering livestock. Research from other areas has shown that irrigated pastures can compete favorably from the standpoint of dollar return per acre with other crops. Irrigated pasture studies at the Newell Station from 1952-1960 indicate that an average of 260 lbs. of lamb can be produced per acre. In 1958, 1959 and 1960, lambs were weaned about August 1, they remained on pasture and the ewes were removed during these 3 years. Gain per acre in 1958 was 378 lbs., in 1959 it was 327 lbs., and 1960 it was 341 lbs. The pasture consisted of alfalfa-brome.

### EXTENDING THE GRAZING SEASON

By careful planning the grazing season on most farms can be extended by the use of sudan grass for supplemental pasture during dry periods and winter rye. Fact Sheet 302, Grazing Management Based on How Grasses Grow, has a pasture calendar showing periods of high and low forage production for best pasture grasses for South Dakota. A copy can be obtained from your local county agent.

Other helpful publications that are available at your local county agent's office are:

Fact Sheet 298	Native Grasses for Pasture and Hay
Fact Sheet 299	Tame Grasses for Pasture and Hay
Fact Sheet 307	A Pasture System for You