

Are You Ready for Spring?
Are your Pastures?
April 2011
Crops Issue
Lancaster Farming

Finally, warm weather has arrived. I was outstanding in my pasture over the weekend (my husband tells me I am always outstanding in my field) and I am sure I saw the grass growing right before my eyes. Even though the air temperature was not much above 50 degrees, our sunshine is growing in intensity.

We have officially passed into spring. That means our days are getting longer and the sun is shining more on the earth. Even with low air temperatures the sun is heating up our soils and our plants are growing. As seen this weekend, with very little change in temperature and adding a little water the response is great.

So have you finalized your grazing plans for this growing season? Do you want to make changes? Do you have conservation issues on your farm? Do you need assistance? With cattle and lamb prices increasing do you want to add more livestock to your operation?

It is not too late to search out someone at your local agricultural service center either with Cooperative Extension, the USDA NRCS, or your local County Conservation District to assist you in making some important decisions on your grazing operation.

There are also many field days, pasture walks, conferences, and grazing activities available in your area this year that can serve to answer questions or get you started if you are a beginning grazer. Often even the experienced grazers go to these events. They learn from other producers. I do not know any two producers that do anything the same way. Often the other producers way of doing it may help them do things better on their operation.

Other decisions you may be pondering are: How much fertilizer, if any, do I need to add to my pastures? Do I want to convert cropland to pasture land to save on harvesting and manure hauling expenses? How do I protect that stream that runs through my field?

Pennsylvania has regulations concerning agricultural land (including pastures) that are being revised. These regulations are looking at erosion control, manure management, and proper nutrient application on agricultural land.

When looking at erosion control pastures are really amazing. We look at ground cover in our grazing areas and it varies from soil to soil, hill to hill, forage species to forage species. The one thing you can be sure of is that forages, when grown under good management conditions, will build soil. This is evident when you look at a fence row or pasture area by a building. The fence or building base, which is the original ground, is

either higher or lower. If the area under the fence is lower than the pasture, the field has built soil, if that same area is higher you are losing soil.

Areas where supplemental feeding occurs is also being evaluated. Are those areas cleaned up? Has the wasted feed and manure been gathered and spread over the field and is the vegetation re-established for the growing season? What is the location of these feeding areas? Are they close a stream? Do you need to move them away from a stream or drainage way so as to establish a good vegetative buffer to keep nutrients out of our surface water? These are all points of concern with the state regulations.

Grazing has many economic benefits that are obvious but are worth listing such as better animal health, higher quality feed sources, increased profits, more desirable life style, and energy savings. I hope everyone is looking at how they can better utilize their pastures this year on their operations. After all, it can't hurt! It might just satisfy some state regulations.

“Til next time: “Let the grass grow greener and taller on your side of the fence.”

For more information contact your local USDA NRCS field office and get the scoop or call me at (717) 237-2247 or write me at USDA NRCS, One Credit Union Place, Suite 340, Harrisburg, Pa. 17110-2993.

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