



# GRAZING ASSESSMENT

With good management, your pasture can produce vigorous grass stands with sufficient forage for the type and number of livestock you keep. The amount and quality of forage will depend on how you manage your land for grazing. Livestock will graze less in areas containing plants not palatable as forage; areas too far from water and mineral supplements; or areas too large in size to encourage even use of the entire unit. With proper management, you can control how and where your animals graze, and as a result, improve both plant conditions and herd health. For example, many livestock owners fence large pastures into smaller units. Animals can then be rotated through the pastures on a planned schedule that gives forage time to rest and regrow vigorous stands. With rotational grazing, you also have the opportunity to inspect animals more frequently and are often able to detect health problems in the herd earlier. At the same time, the soil will benefit from less erosion and damage from heavily used areas. Controlling livestock movement also results in better distribution of manure as plant fertilizer and reduces the risk of water contamination from concentrated nutrients in runoff.

## STEP 1: Complete The Following Grazing Assessment

**Instructions:** The following questions will help you conduct a basic self-assessment of your grazing management. Answer the questions below to identify areas where you may be able to improve grazing with pasture management strategies.

1. *On pastures and grazed lands, how many of the plants are grazed by livestock, as compared to plants that livestock do not touch?*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 80% | You are managing for uniform grazing use and likely have a healthy mix of plants.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 50% to 80%    | Grazing may be slightly improved with additional water points, smaller grazing units, and targeted placement of salt or mineral supplements.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20% to 50%    | Grazing would likely be improved by incorporating additional watering points, smaller grazing units, and/or targeted placement of salt or mineral supplements.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20% | Consider replanting with forage species that are more suited to your livestock. Also, consider adding additional water points, smaller grazing units, and/or targeted placement of salt or mineral supplements. |

2. *Do you have a problem with livestock eating or coming into contact with noxious plants, invasive or undesirable plants? Check all that apply.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noxious weeds      | Consider control measures as recommended by a licensed pesticide consultant. Change management practices to favor desired plants.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive plants    | Consider control measures as recommended by a licensed pesticide consultant. Change management practices to favor desired plants.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undesirable plants | Consider improving grazing uniformity. Replanting with more desirable species and adding additional watering points, smaller grazing units, and/or targeted placement of salt or mineral supplements may help. |

**Grazing Assessment** continued →

**Grazing Assessment (cont.)**

3. At the beginning of the grazing season, usually in April, how tall is the forage on your pasture?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 8 inches | If the forage is leafy, this is a good height to begin grazing. If stems are present in the spring, you may consider earlier management activities, such as clipping, haying or increasing grazing to leave 4-8 inches of leafy materials at the end of the season. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 — 8 inches       | Try to allow the forage to reach 8 inches in height before grazing.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 4 inches | Consider allowing more time without grazing in the latter half of the growing season to encourage better regrowth of leaves and roots. This will improve the vigor of your grass stand in the spring.   |

4. During the grazing season in spring and summer, how tall is the forage when you typically decide to move livestock to graze a different area?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 8 inches | Consider extending the grazing time in the pasture, reducing the size of the pasture, grazing with more animals or use one or more pastures for hay to increase grazing intensity. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 — 8 inches       | A height of 4 - 8 inches may be preferable when you remove livestock from the pasture.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 4 inches | Consider reducing the grazing time and/or animal numbers, enlarging the grazed area, or adding supplemental feed.  |

5. When grazing is finished at the end of the season, usually in October, how tall is the forage?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 8 inches | Consider clipping, haying or increasing grazing earlier in the season to achieve an 8-inch forage height. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 — 8 inches       | If forage is under 8 inches in height, consider ending grazing earlier to allow for regrowth.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 4 inches | Defer grazing in the latter half of the growing season to encourage plant regrowth.                       |

6. Do you rotate livestock regularly between pastures or do they graze on a single pasture continuously?

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continuous | Consider dividing livestock into several groups and rotating them between pastures. You may need to subdivide existing pastures. Rotational grazing allows plants to re-establish leaf and root systems. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rotated    | Allow for 4 to 8 inches of plant height (mostly leaves) prior to grazing to improve forage quality and plant health.   |

7. How would you describe the condition of your livestock?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Underweight/<br>unhealthy | Work with your veterinarian to determine the causes. If poor animal health is associated with grazing conditions, contact a professional for help. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy                   | Maintain your grazing system and re-assess animal health if changes occur.   |

**STEP 2:** Consider Additional Grazing Improvements

*As you review your responses on the Grazing Assessment in Step 1, consider implementing one or more of the following actions to improve grazing conditions for your animals while protecting the soil, water and plants on your grazed land.*

- Add permanent or temporary fencing to control grazing patterns and movement of livestock
- Balance grazing pressure with plant growth by rotating animals among pastures based on the number of animals, height of grasses and timing of scheduled grazing
- Replant pastures with more desirable forage species
- Add or develop sources of water for livestock
- Reduce the number of animals on your land
- Graze less and increase the amount of feed you purchase
- Secure additional pastureland
- Implement a fertilizer program

**STEP 3:** Complete the Grazing Enhancement Worksheet on the Following Page

*Using the guide below, complete the Grazing Enhancement Worksheet.*

Field: Indicate each section of your property

Deadline: Indicate a deadline for completing your goals

Goal: List your goals for each section of your property

Action: Describe methods for achieving your goals and include a list of the resources and assistance you may need to achieve your goals

**Field:** *SW pasture*

**Deadline:** *January 2018*

**Goal:** *Manage weeds*

**Action:** *Implement a weed management plan*

EXAMPLE

**Grazing Enhancement Worksheet** continued →

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Field:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**TIP: 1** Implement a Rotational Grazing System

The process of moving livestock among multiple pastures is known as rotational grazing. Rotational grazing improves pasture health by encouraging forage regrowth.

- STEP 1:** Fence pastures into smaller units. Ensure water is available in each section.
- STEP 2:** Rotate animals on a planned schedule that allows forage time to rest and regrow (roughly 30 days for irrigated pastures and three months for non-irrigated pasture). Beginning stands should be between 6” to 8” in height.
- STEP 3:** Move livestock to another pasture when grass height is reduced below 4 inches.

**Benefits of Rotational Grazing:**

- Maintains healthy grass stands
- Improves ability to monitor livestock health
- Reduces erosion and soil damage
- Improves manure distribution and reduces the risk of water contamination from concentrated nutrients in runoff

**TIP: 2** Manage Overgrazing

Overgrazing occurs when more than 50 percent of the plant’s leaf volume is removed in one rotation (see Table 1). Overgrazing stops root growth and reduces grass production. Pay special attention to areas close to water where livestock tend to graze more heavily.

To improve grazing distribution, consider the following management options:

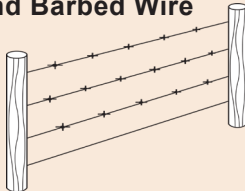
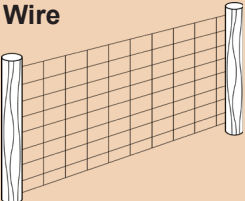
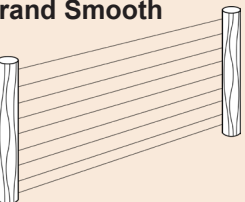
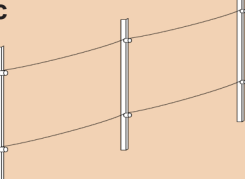
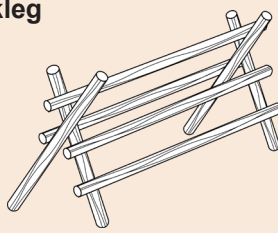
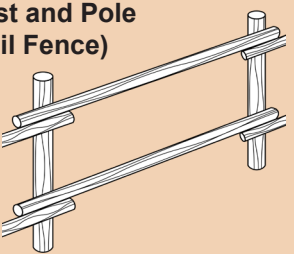
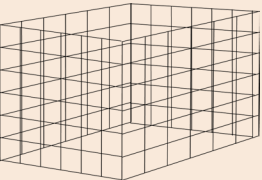
- Install additional water sources, such as a stock tank or nose pump. *(Be sure to check on your water rights prior to installation.)*
- Add additional tanks and pumps rather than allow livestock to drink from creeks and rivers. This will protect streambanks and maintain streamside grasses and shrubs.

Overgrazing Assessment Chart		
% Grass Plant Removed		% Root Growth Stopped
10%	→	0%
20%	→	0%
30%	→	0%
40%	→	0%
50%	→	2-4%
60%	→	50%
70%	→	78%
80%	→	100%
90%	→	100%

**Table 1:** Impact of grazing on root growth

TIPS continued →

**TIP: 3** Selecting the Best Fence for Your Pasture

Fence Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>4-Strand Barbed Wire</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good for cattle control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ May cause injury to animals</li> <li>✓ Labor and materials cost is high</li> <li>✓ Periodic maintenance required</li> </ul>
<b>Woven Wire</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good for sheep control</li> <li>✓ Discourages predators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Unsafe for wildlife</li> <li>✓ Labor and materials cost is high</li> <li>✓ Moderate maintenance is necessary</li> </ul>
<b>4-10 Strand Smooth Wire</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good for horses</li> <li>✓ Good for wildlife</li> <li>✓ 8-10 strand will contain large, exotic animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Labor and materials cost is high</li> <li>✓ Periodic maintenance required</li> </ul>
<b>Electric</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good for establishing pasture rotation program on small acreages</li> <li>✓ Lightweight and portable</li> <li>✓ Relatively inexpensive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Weathers poorly</li> <li>✓ May not exceed lengths over 1,000 feet</li> <li>✓ Requires regular maintenance</li> <li>✓ Requires solar or electric power source</li> </ul>
<b>Jackleg</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Aesthetically appealing</li> <li>✓ Durable</li> <li>✓ Withstands heavy snow</li> <li>✓ Good in areas where it is hard to dig or drive posts</li> <li>✓ May be adapted to marshy, wet areas</li> <li>✓ Low maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ High labor and materials cost</li> </ul>
<b>Post and Pole (Rail Fence)</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Durable in many areas</li> <li>✓ Withstands heavy snowfall</li> <li>✓ Low maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ High labor and materials cost</li> <li>✓ Less durable in high rainfall areas</li> </ul>
<b>Hog Panels</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ May be formed into small, portable pen</li> <li>✓ Inexpensive and easy to construct</li> <li>✓ Good for establishing rotational grazing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Appropriate for only a few small animals</li> <li>✓ High labor - should be moved once or twice each day</li> </ul>

**TIPS** continued →

### Gather Additional Information and Assistance

- ✓ *Kansas Conservation District*  
<https://kacdnet.org/districts/>
- ✓ *Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)*  
[www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov)
- ✓ *Kansas State University Extension Service*  
<https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/>

**NOTES:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---