



Pasture Management Overview

Why Manage Pastures?

- When livestock are allowed to continuously graze pastures, grass plants don't have a chance to adequately rest and recover.
- As a result, the quality and amount of forage you gain from your pastures will decline over time.
- If grazing goes unmanaged, livestock will overgraze the preferred grasses until only the less desirable grasses and weeds remain.



Growing more grass for your livestock will lower your annual feed bills.



Use a web soil survey or the Skagit Conservation District to help determine possible yields for your field and soil type. Yields range from 1-6 tons/acre/year.

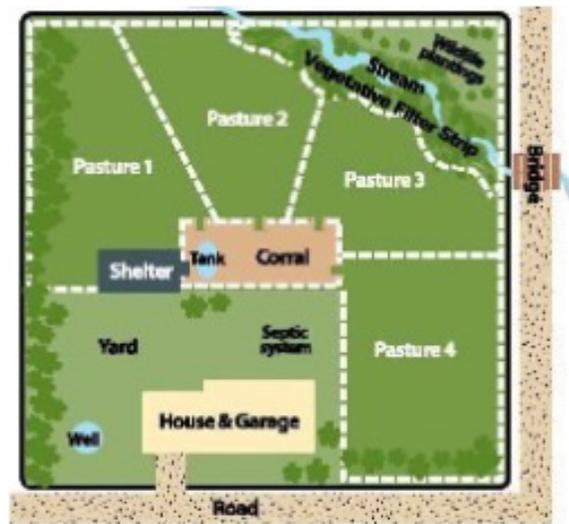
Take Half, Leave Half- Managing Grass Height



- Allowing livestock to graze below three inches will severely stunt grass growth.
- Grasses store the energy they need to grow in the lower three inches of the plant.
- Use the "Take Half, Leave Half" rule of thumb.
- Livestock should be turned out on pasture when the grass height is six to ten inches and removed from the pasture when grass has been grazed down to three to four inches.

Rotational Grazing

- Rotational grazing is when you take a larger pasture, break it up into smaller sections with cross fencing and rotate animals.
- Start animals in the first pasture when grass has reached six to eight inches.
- Move them to the next pasture when they have grazed it down to three inches.
- Once the animals have been rotated through all the available pastures, place them in a confinement area until the first pasture has reached six to eight inches again.
(Read more about confinement areas on the back.)



Mowing and Dragging



- After a section of pasture has been grazed, mow the remaining grass to a uniform height of three inches. This will help to stimulate equal growth of all plants and minimize weeds.
- After mowing, drag the manure piles to equally distribute nutrients.



*Adapted from the Skagit Conservation District Pasture Management Overview. This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement PC-01J18001 to the Washington State Department of Health. The contents of this document

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Create a Confinement Area



- A confinement area is an area surfaced with durable footing like gravel that is used to contain animals and keep them off pasture. This will allow you to protect your pastures from soil compaction, mud, overgrazing and weeds.
- Animals should be placed in a confinement area:
 - Late fall through early spring (October - March), when grasses are dormant and soil is damp and easily compacted. Or when soils are too dry from drought.
 - During the times in the growing season when all of your pastures have been grazed down to three inches.

Applying Compost or Fertilizer

- In order to grow, grass takes nutrients from the soil.
- If these nutrients are not replaced, growth will slow and weeds will thrive.
- Nutrients can be added back to the system by applying compost or fertilizer.
- Compost can be applied April through October, depending on soil and weather conditions.
- If compost is applied at other times of the year, the nutrients will wash away before the plants have an opportunity to use them.



Soil Testing

- How much compost, fertilizer and lime you apply and the time of year you apply, should be based on the results of a soil test.
- Contact the Skagit Conservation District, and we can connect you with a local soil testing consultant.

Weed Control

- The best way to control weeds is to use the management practices above to produce healthy, productive pastures.
- Weeds thrive when there are bare spots and grasses aren't healthy enough to compete.
- It is important to be able to identify common pasture weeds and remove them when they first appear.



Buttercup



Tansy Ragwort



Bull Thistle



Scotch Broom

Seasonal Management Calendar

Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not turn livestock out until ground is firm and grass is 6-8" tall. • Rotate livestock between pastures, do not graze below 3". • Apply 1/2" compost. • Clip and drag pastures once grass has been grazed to 3". • Check for and control weeds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue rotational grazing system, (maintain 3" grass height). You may need to remove livestock from pastures and feed hay if dry weather causes pastures to go dormant. • Mow and drag pastures at the end of each grazing cycle. • Check for and control weeds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test soil. • Apply 1/2" compost. This is the time of year to apply lime. • Animals should be removed from the pasture when all grass is grazed down to 3", when soils become wet, or by November 1 to allow plants to produce leaf growth for winter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use confinement area, do not allow livestock to have access to pastures during the winter. • Plan next year's grazing strategy.