



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Water Quality Enhancement Activity – WQL19 – *Transition to Organic Grazing Systems*



### **Enhancement Description**

Transition to Organic Grazing Systems supports the conversion of a conventional to an organic livestock grazing system. Key to the enhancement activity is following ecological and pasture-based grazing requirements, applying materials according to the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances, and managing livestock according to National Organic Program (NOP) rules (Subpart C – Organic Production and Handling Requirements) for organic certification. This enhancement activity facilitates compliance with NOP rules for organic certification.

### **Landuse Applicability**

Pasture, Range, and Forest

### **Benefits**

Environmental benefits will be operation specific. Benefits may include, but are not limited to improved forage, soil, and animal health, and improved water quality.

Managing for recommended time and timing of grazing, minimum and maximum grazing heights, pasture/paddock rotation, and rest periods improve plant health, diversity, and productivity. Sufficient pasture/paddock rest or pasture/paddock avoidance that minimizes livestock contact with viable internal parasite populations can break parasite cycles, reduce ingestion of parasites and the need for treatment, and improve animal health. Soil organisms and soil quality are benefitted by the reduction or elimination of natural or synthetic pesticides typically used on forage and/or livestock. Rotating livestock through several pastures/paddocks minimizes the development of loafing areas and improves the distribution of manure nutrients for plant uptake. Nutrients are more uniformly available to forage crops and the potential for polluted runoff from high traffic areas is reduced.

### **Criteria for Transition to Organic Grazing Systems**

- Manage pasture grazing and rest periods to follow the NRCS Prescribed Grazing practice standard (528). Manage grazing and rest periods to maximize forage quality and palatability and to promote rapid recovery and forage regrowth.
  - Maintain a livestock watering system that accommodates a high frequency of livestock rotation through several different pastures or paddocks during the grazing season. Follow NRCS practice standard criteria for Prescribed Grazing (528), Watering Facility (614), Pipeline (516), or other related standards for appropriate supply and travel distance to water.



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- Use fencing that is permanent, semi-permanent, and/or temporary to facilitate pasture rotation. Follow the NRCS Fence practice standard (382). Additionally, follow NOP rules for allowable fence materials.
- Apply all materials, including plant nutrients and pesticides for forage production and animal health, in accordance with the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances.
- Comply with all NOP rules for livestock management (NOP § 205.236 - .239 for livestock origin, feed, healthcare, living conditions)
- Complete organic transition within three (3) years as verified by obtaining an approved Organic System Plan from a valid certifying agency.

#### **Documentation Requirements for Transition to Organic Grazing Systems**

- Provide a written grazing plan following the 'Plans and Specifications' guidelines in the Prescribed Grazing standard. Include time and timing of grazing, minimum and maximum grazing heights, and date rotated in and date off of pastures/paddocks in the grazing plan, as appropriate for the landuse.
- Provide a record of the application of inputs according to the NOP rules, e.g., type, date, rate, and amount of allowed nutrients and pesticides for forage and livestock.
- Provide a copy of the Organic System Plan when approved by the certifying agent.

NRCS Pasture Notes, graziers notebooks, or other record keeping systems for pasture livestock operations can be used to facilitate record-keeping.

## ALABAMA SUPPLEMENT TO WQL19 –TRANSITION TO ORGANIC GRAZING SYSTEMS

This enhancement is designed to improve the forage resource and livestock health through management intense grazing while transitioning to an organic farming status. Research has shown that rotational grazing which allows adequate rest for the grasses is very important in maintaining the root system and the plants' growing points. It also promotes faster regrowth of the forage, improves soil quality and water quality.

The days of rest needed for plant recovery and regrowth range from 7 to 45 days, depending on the forage species (see below table). Stocking rates and growing conditions can also affect the forage growth. Grazing systems should be designed to meet the rest requirements of a particular forage as well as the needs of the livestock. By using four pastures with 14 days of grazing per pasture, the grazing cycle is 56 days and each pasture rests 75% of the time or 42 days.

### FORAGE GUIDELINES FOR PRESCRIBED GRAZING SYSTEMS

Common Forages	Begin Grazing (in)	End Grazing (in)	Usual days of Rest
Alfalfa grazing types	10	4	35 - 40
Bahiagrass	6	2	10 - 20
Bermudagrass common	5	2	7 - 10
Bermudagrass hybrid	6	3	7 - 10
Big Bluestem	18	10	30 - 45
Dallisgrass	6	3	7 - 15
Eastern Gamagrass	15	8	30 - 45
Tall Fescue	6	3	15 - 30
Indiangrass	12	6	30 - 40
Orchardgrass	8	3	15 - 30
Switchgrass	18	10	30 - 45

Additional Alabama Criteria:

- Livestock will be rotated between at least 3 pastures in a particular functional group (warm season pastures or cool season pastures) to prescribed or rotational grazing. Starting and ending grazing periods will meet the guidelines in the above table or the Alabama NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Prescribed Grazing (528). Pastures will be sized and stocked to facilitate meeting the requirements for grazing heights and resting periods. It is anticipated that with a three pasture rotation that each pasture would rest about 66 percent of the grazing cycle.
- Adjustments to grazing management should be made as needed to address unexpected impacts of weather changes or even agricultural markets.

References:

AL NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Prescribed Grazing (528)

Southern Forages, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, D. M. Ball, et al.

National Organic Program:

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/ s.7 0 A/7 0 1OB?navid=ORGANIC\\_CERTIFICATION&navtype=RT&parentnav=AGRICULTURE](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/ s.7 0 A/7 0 1OB?navid=ORGANIC_CERTIFICATION&navtype=RT&parentnav=AGRICULTURE)

## Grazing Management Records

Keeping accurate records is a continual process in effective pasture and livestock management. Records help you track pasture conditions and effectively manage each pasture in your grazing system.

Pasture ID		Pasture acres	Forage type			
Soil test date		Lime/ Fertilizer rate	Lime/ Fertilizer type		Date applied	
Livestock		Date in	Forage height	Date out	Forage height	Notes (fertilizer applied)
Type	Number					

Pasture ID		Pasture acres	Forage type			
Soil test date		Lime/ Fertilizer rate	Lime/ Fertilizer type		Date applied	
Livestock		Date in	Forage height	Date out	Forage height	Notes (fertilizer applied)
Type	Number					

**ALABAMA SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION FOR THIS ENHANCEMENT**

***WQL19 - Transition to Organic Grazing Systems***

<b>Producer Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
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**National Organic Program**

**For specific information on the National Organic Program Rules for organic certification, refer to:**

<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?type=simple;c=ecfr;cc=ecfr;sid=4163ddc3518c1ffdc539675aed8efe33;region=DIV1;q1=national%20organic%20program;rgn=div5;view=text;idno=7;node=7%3A3.1.1.9.31>

**For specific information on the National List of Allowed Synthetic and Prohibited Natural Substances, refer to:**

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateN&navID=NationalListLinkNOPNationalOrganicProgramHome&rightNav1=NationalListLinkNOPNationalOrganicProgramHome&topNav=&leftNav=&page=NOPNationalList&resultType=&acct=nopgeninfo>

**For specific information on the National Organic Program Home Page, refer to:**

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop>

Attach copies of the grazing management plan, a record of the inputs according to the NOP rules and the Organic System Plan when approved by the certifying agent.

The attached documents accurately reflect the implementation of this enhancement.

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_