

Protocols for Pasture Condition Score for CSP

The following outlines the steps to be taken when assessing Pastureland during the categorization of the CSP sign-up.

1. Identify and locate pasture acres being enrolled.
2. Take conservation plan map or aerial photo with pastures identified on it to the field and observe general condition of all pastures to determine which pasture(s) can represent all pastures to be enrolled into CSP by a producer.
3. Conduct pasture condition scoring on selected sites.
4. Compute average score for all pastureland being enrolled if more than one PCS assessment was done.
5. Determine CSP enrollment category based on PCS criteria for categories A through E.

Step 1. Identify and locate pasture acres being enrolled.

Identify and locate pasture fields as presently established by field boundaries and numbering or naming convention as shown on a conservation plan map or an aerial photo. Pastures that are stripped grazed (movable front and back fences moved with each forage allocation.) will be considered a single grazing unit. Other pastures that are subdivided with cross fences that are stationary for at least a full growing season will be considered to be multiple grazing units.

Step 2. Take conservation plan map or aerial photo with pastures identified on it to the field and observe general condition of all pastures to determine which pasture(s) can represent all pastures to be enrolled into CSP by a producer.

In MLRA's where forage suitability groups (FSG's) have been implemented, they will be used to determine the number of soil site conditions there are on enrolled pastureland for the farm or ranch. As a minimum, a PCS assessment will be completed in a pasture on the dominant FSG (most acres) for the pasture acreage being enrolled. Pasture and Hayland Suitability Groups (PHSG's) may be used if FSG's have not been established. Do PCS assessment on the dominant PHSG.

States that have not developed FSG's or PHSG's will need to rely on soil survey maps to determine which soil series is dominant on the enrolled pastureland. As a minimum, a PCS assessment will be done in a field where the dominant soil series name for the pastureland enrolled is found. Once soil site has been established, also choose to conduct the PCS assessment on the most widespread or representative landscape position found on the applicant's pastureland.

As a minimum, a pasture then is selected that is on the dominant soil and landscape position that is also indicative of the grazing and agronomic management applied routinely by the land manager. This management is applied with the needs of the pasture plant community in mind so that plant vigor and cover are maintained at a similar level of plant community and soil stability and productiveness over all pasture acres enrolled. If there is noticeable lack of consistency in pasture condition from field to field so that no

single pasture can represent overall pasture management, two PCS assessments will be required as a minimum, the worst appearing pasture and the best. Soil and landscape position chosen in those two fields will be the dominant one for each field being scored.

When irrigated (including sub-irrigated) pasture and dryland pasture are enrolled by an applicant, a PCS assessment needs to be done for both classes of pasture on a field representative of each.

Any pastures among those enrolled into the program containing a critical area, such as open water, riparian area, wetland, or eroding/slumping slope or embankment, will also be assessed with PCS. The portion of the pasture assessed will evaluate the indicator most appropriate to assess the condition of the critical area as well as the pasture as a whole.

If a sacrifice pasture is present among the pastureland being enrolled by the applicant, this sacrifice area must be sited on an area that is well drained, of moderate slope, and has sufficient grass buffers between it and any water body or channel to filter or absorb runoff from the sacrifice area. This sacrifice pasture is not PCS assessed, but it is recorded as being present and in an acceptable place. If the sacrifice area is alternated from place to place, all sites (previously used or proposed) should be identified on plan map or aerial photo and certified as acceptable.

Step 3. Conduct pasture condition scoring on selected site(s).

Use an approved Pasture Condition Score Sheet to document the site assessment. The "Guide to Pasture Condition Scoring" and the attached Appendix for "Pasture Condition Scoring" will serve as guidance to complete PCS.

Step 4. Compute average score for all pastureland being enrolled if more than one PCS assessment was done.

If two or more pasture sites are rated, an average score for all pastureland scored is calculated using a weighted average. The product of the PCS of each pasture scored times its acreage is added to the product of all other pastures scored times their acreage and then that total divided by the total number of acres of the pastures scored to get a weighted PCS. When pasture condition is different because of the presence or lack of irrigation water (different PCS forms have also been developed for each situation), then the average score is calculated by multiplying the number of acres of each times the representative PCS score for each, the weighted values added together, and then divided by the total pasture acres enrolled.

Step 5. Determine CSP enrollment category based on PCS criteria for categories A through E.

Compare the PCS value calculated with the enrollment category criterion for overall pasture condition scoring assessment for the Pasture land use in the Chart for CSP Enrollment Categories