MN NRCS PASTURE and CROPLAND OUTWINTERING GUIDELINES

This is as much art as it is science. There is no one recipe for success, and producers must be flexible and willing to adjust their management due to unforeseen changes in weather and climate, as the site responds in relation to objectives, and/or as animal needs and/or health dictates.

Objectives:

- To minimize reliance upon feedlots.
- To manage nutrients more effectively.
- To improve pasture fertility.
- To improve pasture production.
- To maintain or improve animal health and performance.
- To minimize hauling manure.
- To utilize farm resources more efficiently.

Sensitive areas:

- Streams and rivers.
- Thin or shallow soils.
- Wetlands, ponds, or lakes.
- Woodlands.
- Prairie vegetation.
- Floodplains or lakeshore.
- Springs or seeps.
- Conservation structures.
- Areas with threatened or endangered species.
- Areas with archeological significance.

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Before you begin there are some things that you need to consider:

- Identify sensitive areas and develop your outwintering plan to minimize negative livestock impacts on these areas.
- Do not plan to feed livestock directly in a sensitive area, and plan a buffer between open water and your feeding area.
- If using woodlands for shelter keep feeding areas on open pasture to better distribute livestock activity and associated nutrients.
- Soil test your pastures to begin with a benchmark fertility and pH level, and to assist in identifying adapted forage species.
- Rank your paddocks from good to poor, and focus your outwintering to improve the fertility of your poorest producing paddock.
- Identify feeding areas, watering areas, and shelter areas. Develop a plan that incorporates each of these 3 livestock activity areas.
- Use temporary lanes to direct livestock movement between the 3 main livestock activity areas if distance is a concern.
- If at all possible, do not plan lanes across sensitive areas.
- Have a backup plan and a transition plan for moving livestock should the weather become an issue.
- Develop a plan to store feed near the outwintering location. This plan should consider protecting the feed from wildlife and livestock deprivation plus being accessible with equipment.
- Have a seeding plan and select species for reseeding prior to outwintering.
- These guidelines can work with early spring, late fall, and emergency feeding during times of drought as well.
- If outwintering on cropland have a spring time transition plan so livestock can be moved and fields can be prepared for planting. Planning is critical in seamless farm operation.
- Check with your local NRCS office for technical assistance to help in planning your outwintering system.
- Fencing cropland is not allowed in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at this time; however check with your local NRCS office to inquire about identifying eligible conservation practices and cost sharing to address your farm resource concerns.
- **Picture what you want the site to look like in the spring prior to preparing the site for seeding. Be aggressive with the disturbance level; create as much exposed soil as possible if pasture rejuvenation is the objective.**
**Outwintering management guidelines for pasture:**

- Do not feed hay that is contaminated with weeds. Feed hay that is clean with desirable species since propagation can occur with viable seeds.
- Avoid outwintering on too large of an area. The focus is to create a feeding area that uniformly distributes nutrients across a predefined area.
- If outwintering on a large area is unavoidable begin feeding from the furthest distance out from shelter and water, moving the feeding area closer as the winter progresses.
- For pasture, outwintering on the same ground should not be done more than once in a 5 year period to avoid excessive compaction, excessive nutrient loads, and to keep pathogens to a minimum.
- Harrow, rake, or lightly disk the outwintering area in the spring prior to seeding making sure large feed waste areas and manure piles are spread evenly. When using equipment disturb the soil surface as little as possible to avoid weed infestations, especially on very well drained sites.
- Early spring seeding is recommended.
- No-till your seed mix into the prepared outwintering area making sure the seed bed is fairly uniform with feed waste areas and manure evenly worked across the area. Be sure to seed as soon as possible after harrowing, raking, or lightly disking.
- Rest this rejuvenated area until late June or early July.
- Weed patches can occur and should be dealt with according to your weed management practices.
- Move mineral around to help with distribution.

**Common mistakes:**

**OUTWINTERING**

- Not having a plan.
- Must be flexible.
- No soils test and benchmark nutrient and ph levels.
- Does not get rotated every year and becomes a feedlot.
- Giving up.
- Feeding hay infested with weeds.

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SEEDING

- Waiting too long into the spring for seedbed prep and seeding. Competition becomes too strong.
- Species not adapted to site.
- Outwintering did not create enough disturbance to suppress existing sod. This is due to: feeding on too large of an area, not rotating feeding site around, or locating the 3 livestock activity areas too far apart from one another.
- Seed to soil contact was poor. Thatch and other material interfered with seed to soil contact.
- Poor weather (too little moisture, frost, etc…).
- Seed placed too deep.

PASTURE USE

- Not allowing enough recovery time before grazing. Most sites require the months of May and June to rest and recover from this event.
- Waiting too long to deal with weed outbreaks.
- Grazing forages too short.
- Not keeping stubble heights going into winter.

Outwintering management guidelines for cropland:

- Do not feed hay that is contaminated with weeds. Feed hay that is clean with desirable species since propagation can occur with viable seeds.
- Frequently move feed and bedding to assist in nutrient distribution.
- If outwintering on a large area is unavoidable begin feeding from the furthest distance out from shelter and water, moving the feeding area closer as the winter progresses.
- For cropland, incorporate your outwintering plan into your overall farm nutrient management plan.
- Harrow, rake, or lightly disk the outwintering area in the spring prior to seeding making sure large feed waste areas and manure piles are spread evenly.
- Weed patches can occur and should be dealt with according to your weed management practices.
- Move mineral around to help with distribution.
- Take care in planning your outwintering system on cropland to provide for adequate shelter and water.
- Utilize crop residues to lower your feed costs.

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THE 3 LIVESTOCK ACTIVITY AREAS

SHELTER

LIVESTOCK

FEEDING AREA

WATER

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