United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

2013 Ranking Period 1

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.

Land Use Applicability
Pastureland, Rangeland, Forestland

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.

Conditions Where Enhancement Applies
This enhancement applies to only pasture, range or forest land use acres in the process of transitioning to an organic production system.

Criteria
1. Manage pasture grazing and rest periods to follow NRCS Prescribed Grazing practice standard (528) criteria for recommended maximum (begin) and minimum (end) grazing

heights by forage species or Ecological Site Description interpretations. Beginning and ending grazing heights are followed to maximize forage quality and palatability and to promote rapid recovery and forage regrowth.

a. 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.
b. 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.

Note: Contact your local conservationist for assistance with Conservation Practice Standards.

2. 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.
3. Comply with all NOP rules for livestock management (NOP § 205.236 - .239 for livestock origin, feed, healthcare, living conditions)
4. Complete organic transition within three (3) years as verified by obtaining an approved Organic System Plan from a valid certifying agency.
5. Follow a written grazing plan that meets the CSP eligibility requirements.

Adoption Requirements

This enhancement is considered adopted when the land use acre is certified via an Organic System Plan.

Documentation Requirements

1. 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 land use.
2. 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.
3. Provide a copy of the Organic System Plan when approved by the certifying agent.

NRCS Pasture Notes, grazer's notebook, or other record keeping systems for pasture livestock operations can be used to facilitate record-keeping.

References

Murphy, Bill. 1995. Pasture Management to Sustain Agriculture. Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture, 2nd ed, edited by Miguel A. Altieri. Westview Press. Boulder, CO. pp. 321-347.

Bezdicek, David. 1984. Organic Farming: Current Technology and Its Role in a Sustainable Agriculture. ASA Special Publication No. 46. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, Madison, WI. 192 P.

USDA-AMS. 2012. National Organic Program Final Rule – Access to Pasture
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