USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Key Practices for Iowa Grazing Land Operations

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns on private lands. EQIP supports the needs of all agricultural operations, offering ideas, science-based solutions, and guidance for successful and sustainable conservation farms. Below are some of the more popular conservation practices that Iowa farmers install to treat resource concerns related to grazing land operations as outlined in their conservation plans.

Fence (Conservation Practice Standard 382)

Fence is a practice that may be applied on any area where farmers need better control of animals. Fences are typically used to facilitate better management. Considerations include:

- Livestock management, such as handling, location, adequate watering and feeding facilities
- Soil erosion potential when constructing a fence on steep slopes
- Improved forage quantity and quality to meet livestock demand
- Wildlife movement needs

Livestock Pipeline (Conservation Practice Standard 516)

Pipelines are used to deliver water from a source of supply to points of use for livestock or wildlife. Pipelines can be essential for a successful prescribed grazing plan. For livestock water, the installation should have a capacity to provide seasonal high daily water requirements for the number and species of animals onsite.

Prescribed Grazing (Conservation Practice Standard 528)

Prescribed Grazing is applied as part of a conservation system designed to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

- Improve or maintain health and vigor of key species and maintain a stable and desired plant community
- Provide or maintain food, cover, and shelter for animals of concern
- Maintain or improve water quality and quantity
- Reduce soil erosion and improve soil health for resource sustainability

Stream Crossing (Conservation Practice Standard 578)

The stream crossing consists of a stabilized area or structure constructed across a stream to provide a travel way for people, livestock, equipment, or vehicles. This practice can:

- Improve water quality by reducing sediment, nutrient, stream loading
- Reduce streambank and streambed erosion
- Provide a crossing for access to other grazed lands

Forage and Biomass Planting (Conservation Practice Standard 512)

These plantings establish adapted and compatible species, varieties, or cultivars of herbaceous species suitable for pasture, hay or biomass production. Key decisions include seedbed preparation, seed species and variety selection, grazing requirements and biomass harvest frequency. When properly established, this practice can:

- Improve or maintain livestock nutrition and health
- Provide or increase forage supply
- Reduce soil erosion
- Improve soil and water quality
- Provide feedstock for biofuel or energy production

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Heavy Use Area Protection (Conservation Practice Standard 561)

The Heavy Use Area Protection practice stabilizes areas frequently and intensively used by livestock that require treatment to address resource concerns. Roofed livestock winter feeding stations provide a place for animals to feed during bad weather. Other heavy use areas (typically around troughs or as pads for feeding areas) are protected with vegetative cover or hard surface materials such as aggregate or concrete. This practice can:

- Reduce soil erosion
- Improve water quantity and quality
- Improve air quality and aesthetics
- Improve livestock health

Watering Facility (Conservation Practice Standard 614)

A Watering Facility (tank, trough, or other watertight container) provides access to water for livestock and/or wildlife at selected locations. Watering facilities are particularly suited to facilitating a prescribed grazing plan. This facility can:

- Protect and enhance vegetative cover through proper distribution of grazing
- Control erosion through better grassland management
- Protect streams and ponds from livestock contamination

Pond (Conservation Practice Standard 378)

Ponds serve as an excellent source for livestock drinking water. Keeping animals from entering a pond helps maintain higher water quality, which minimizes bacteria and disease. Fencing off ponds and pumping water to tanks, troughs or other watertight locations throughout a pasture will provide the healthiest and most environmentally-friendly livestock drinking water alternative. Other pond benefits include:

- Fish and wildlife
- Recreation
- Erosion control

Brush Management (Conservation Practice Standard 314)

Brush Management includes removal, reduction, or manipulation of non-herbaceous plants. This practice helps to:

- Manage noxious and invasive woody plants
- Restore desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, and enhance stream flow
- Improve forage accessibility, quality and quantity for livestock
- Protect life and property from wildfire hazards

Forage Harvest Management (Conservation Practice Standard 511)

Forage Harvest Management is caring for grasses and legumes so when machine they are harvested and treated appropriately, they provide the quantity and quality to meet producer objectives. When managed properly, this practice helps:

- The producer meet the nutritional needs of animals
- Control insects, diseases, and weeds
- Promote vigorous plant re-growth
- Maintain or improve widlife habitat

Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about EQIP technical and financial assistance.