**Dakota Farm Talk – Keep Range Land Covered for Better Forage Next Season**

**Pam Geppert**

Ranchers utilizing grazing as the hallmark of their winter feed program, are encouraged to manage livestock to prevent injury to rangeland soils. Natural Resources Conservation Service State Grazing Lands, Soil Health Specialist Tanse Herrmann urges ranchers to keep the ground covered.

**Tanse Herrmann**

Because uncovered soil is subject to higher evaporation rates and has a risk for wind and water erosion. And we cannot continue to spiral downward in soil health parameters when we have uncovered soils. So, keeping it covered is really, really important.

**Pam Geppert**

1 to 2 inches of standing forages after grazing is not enough, says Herrmann. Experts advise leaving 4 to 6 inches for about 800 to 1200 pounds of residual forage as the minimum to armor the soil.

**Tanse Herrmann**

Still holding on to that moisture courtesy of residue cover means more forage next year. The other thing is that healthy soils in general have larger pore spaces. So even if the soil is in a frozen condition, you should be able to infiltrate some water. Let's say we have snowmelt or maybe even a rain event here mid-winter. Healthy soils that have those larger pore spaces can take that water, even if that soil's frozen.

**Pam Geppert**

Rancher is supplementing grazing with winter feeding are encouraged to spread out the feeding areas targeting the low productivity spots plagued by poor soils and less vegetative cover. Herman explains waste hay and livestock dung can feed soil biology in these areas for greater productivity in the future. To learn more on soil health on rangelands, visit the NRCS at any U.S. service center.

I'm Pam Geppert reporting for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Helping people help the land.