



GRAZING & PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Grazing

Controlled or rotational grazing of pasture grasses requires some areas to periodically remain ungrazed for regrowth of grass.

Generally in the Northeast US, 2-3 acres of good pasture per horse is needed for summer feeding purposes.

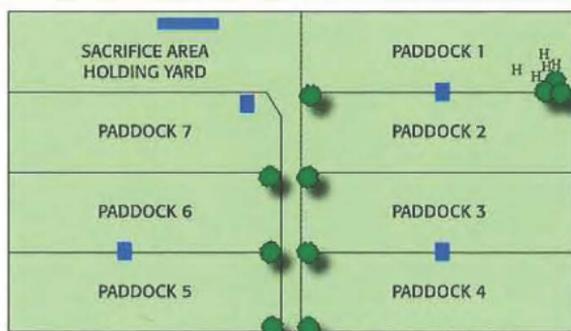
A good management tool for horse facilities on limited acreage is to provide at least one all-weather paddock (area of divided pasture) for foul weather turnout. Known as a sacrifice lot, this area takes the

worst wear to preserve grass in the remaining paddocks. This ungrassed exercise lot should be located away from water bodies, and should have green vegetation surrounding it to act as a buffer, to catch any runoff water, nutrients and sediments.

A rotational grazing system is the best way to maximize forage production and consumption on limited pasture acreage. A group of compatible horses can graze a paddock for a few days, then be moved (rotated) to a fresh paddock.

Rotational Grazing (not to scale)

- Consider portable fencing for internal fencing; can be moved as required
- Alley for easy access to all paddocks
- Graze each paddock for 3 days. Move horses to next paddock. This gives each paddock 21 days to recover and re-grow.
- The holding yard/sacrifice area can be used in wet weather to protect pasture or used to hand feed if pastures become overgrazed.



Rotational Grazing diagram

adapted from sustainablehorsekeeping.com.au

Importance Of Pasture



Pasture in need of better grazing management. Vegetation needs to maintain minimum 3" height after grazing.

Nutritional needs of horses vary considerably depending on age, weight, and level of activity. Horses naturally use forages as a primary component of their diets, since forages are a basic necessity for normal functioning of the digestive system. Forage needs are supplied most easily by pasture and hay.

Horses should consume at least 1% of their body weight in hay or pasture per day. Mature horses generally consume 2 to 2.5% of their body weight in feed everyday (1000 lb. horse= 20-25 lbs daily). Horses do not digest low-quality forages effectively, so high-quality forages are a must.

High-quality, properly fenced pastures are one of the best and least expensive sources of summer feed for a horse. It is also the most natural and healthy environment for exercise and rest. 1000 to 1200 lb. mature horses generally need the following amount of pasture: Mare and foal = 1.75 – 2.0 acres; Yearlings = 1.5 – 2.0 acres; Weanlings = 0.5 – 1.0 acres

Additional information on pasture and hay for horses can be found at <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/uc099.pdf>. For more information on pasture management and rotational grazing, consider <http://clark.wsu.edu/horticulture/smallAcreageProgram/PastureGrazingMgmt.pdf>.

Pasture Management

Pasture management is essential to keep desired species persistent and productive.

- ✓ Avoid over and under grazing—Horses typically graze in spots. Unless they are moved frequently, they can damage desired species in some areas, by overgrazing. Rotational grazing is desirable.
- ✓ Rotational grazing can also break the life cycle of some parasites.
 - ✓ Clip pastures regularly during the growing season. Clipping to a height of 3" after horses have grazed helps to control weeds and prevents grasses from heading.
 - ✓ Drag pastures with chain link harrow at least once per year. This helps spread manure, reducing parasites. And it smooths areas dug up by hoofs on wet soil.
 - ✓ Apply fertilizer as needed. Fertilizer needs should be based on soil tests every 2-3 years.