

Ohio Working Lands for Wildlife - Program Update



Overview

Ohio's Northern Bobwhite in Grasslands project is part of a national Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) partnership; a collaborative approach to conserving habitat for declining species of conservation concerns on farms and working forests. This program targets 31 counties in Southern Ohio.

In Southern Ohio, WLFW aims to assist farmers with incorporating native warm season grass (NWSG) into their grazing rotation (Forage and Biomass Planting 512). In addition, WLFW can assist with financial assistance on grazing resources, like fence and water pipelines, and also wildlife practices, like native shrub planting, edge feathering and pollinator habitat.

WLFW programs are win-win outcomes. Grazing native warm season grass combats the summer forage deficit (summer slump), in a fescue-based grazing system. These native grasses also create critical habitat for bobwhite quail and other grassland nesting birds. Many of these species are in decline in Ohio and other states.

Native Grasses for Cattle?

The majority of NWSG have been used primarily as plantings for wildlife habitat. NRCS has been able to put tens of thousands of acres of NWSG on the landscape, primarily through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

In fact, NWSG have been used so much for wildlife habitat plantings, they have lost the attention of cattle producers. With careful paddock design and best establishment methods, a producer can achieve grazable NWSG pastures by the end of the second growing season.

How Many Acres of Warm Season Grass?

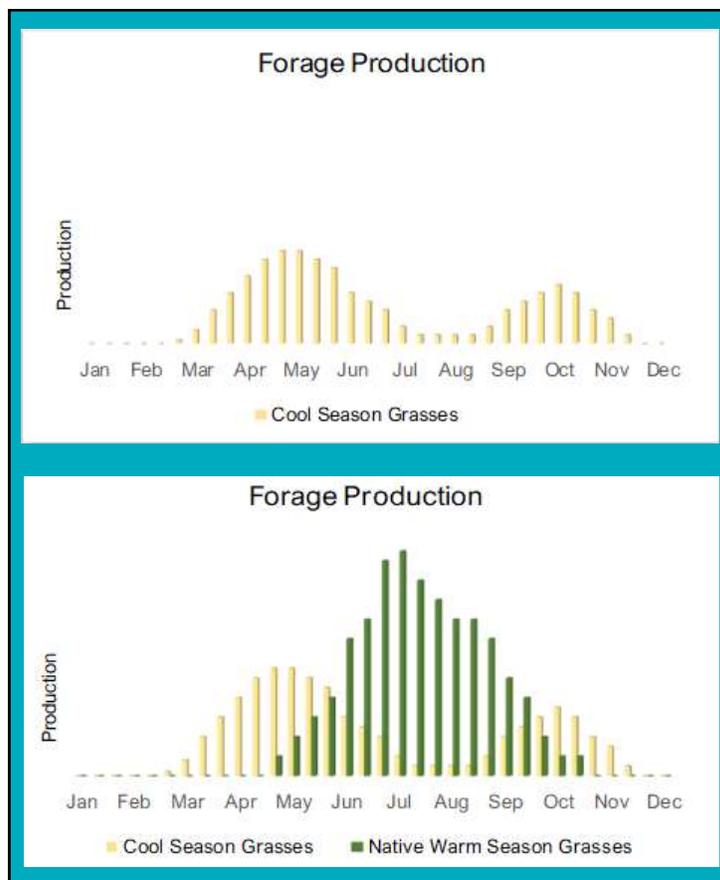
There are several factors that may affect how many acres you plant in NWSG, including what kind of stock, how many months a producer has stock, and grazing intensity.

In general, about 25% of grazable acres could be converted to NWSG, however this could fluctuate from 10-30% depending on specifics of the operation.

Grazing Warm Season Grasses, Is It Worth It?

In the graphics below, notice where the forage deficits are in a fescue-based grazing rotation. Then notice how incorporating native warm season grasses can fill one of those gaps. In addition, grazing natives during the summer will allow a producer the ability to stockpile more fescue for winter grazing. This also means less hay expenditures.

For these reasons, the producers have taken an interest in how they can plan to incorporate NWSG.



Above, the first figure shows the challenging gaps in the grazing calendar. Many forages can help fill those gaps (grazing cover crops, summer annuals, etc.). This example focuses on using NWSG, which fills in the summer slump of cool season grasses.



Demonstration Sites

Since the national launch of WFW in 2017, Ohio WFW has established a demonstration farm in Highland County. Moving forward, some WFW projects will be showcased for workshops and pasture walks to share their experience with NWSG. This also presents Ohio with an opportunity to draw state-specific data on forage production of certain NWSG species and best establishment methods.

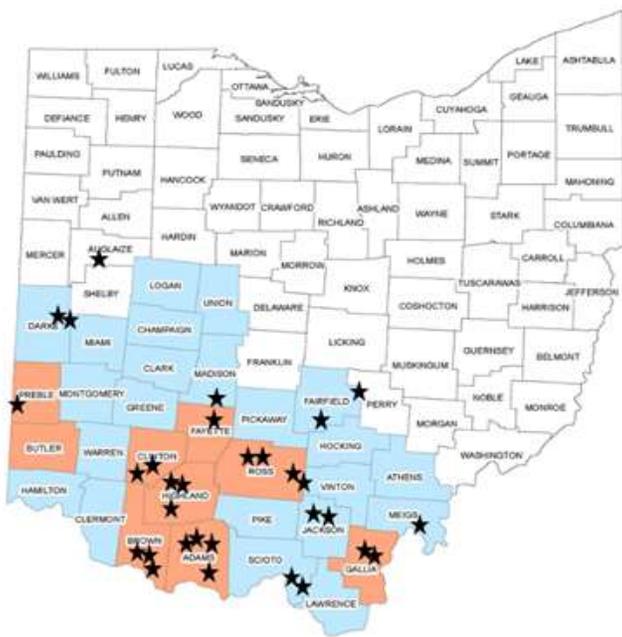
Future surveys for bobwhite quail and other grassland birds are planned as part of the demonstration areas. These are aimed at showcasing preference over cool season grasses.

Where Is the Interest?

Both grass-fed beef and rotational grazing operations. Interest has been with producers that are putting effort into diversifying forages allowing them to graze more days, and feed less hay.

WFW has also drawn the interest of those producers and landowners with an extreme interest in quail and their habitat. Both research and on the ground WFW projects have shown that Bobwhites truly coexist well with rotationally grazed cattle operations.

NRCS Ohio WFW Focus Area



Within the WFW Focus area, the red counties represent the strongest quail numbers. The black stars represent landowners interested in NWSG grazing.

A herd grazing indiagrass and big bluestem (both native warm season grasses). Photo taken in mid July, Highland County, Ohio.

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New for Fiscal Year 2020

Previously WLFW bobwhites in Grasslands had only two Core Practices, Prescribed Grazing (528) and Forage and Biomass Planting (512). Most contracts will continue to include both, however, adding the additional habitat focused Core Practices will now allow for participants with existing rotational grazing operations and/or existing quail populations to promote much needed woody escape cover for bobwhite quail.

When planning a WLFW Quail contract that includes Forage and Biomass Planting (512), Wildlife Habitat Planting (420) Native Species must be included. This provides additional high-quality forage for livestock and important broadleaf forbs and legumes utilized by quail and other ground nesting birds.

Wildlife Habitat Planting (420): In FY20, Ohio will allow for introduced legumes to be included under the (420) *Native Species*. When planning a Wildlife Habitat Planting under the WLFW Quail Initiative, the following guidelines should be followed.

Introduced legumes: no more than two (2)

Native Forbs & Legumes: a minimum of two (2) required when paired with introduced specie(s). If no introduced legumes used, a minimum of three (3) native forbs or legumes shall be planned.

Forage and Biomass Planting (512): Native Warm Season Grasses: two (2) or more species

NOTE: Having the Wildlife Habitat Planting as a separate component allows for payment to be competed in different fiscal years for 512 and 420, where previously participants had to wait a full year for payment once interseeding of the forbs and legumes took place after the initial 512 in contract year one.

Northern Bobwhite in Grasslands Practice List

Core Practice Name	Practice Code
Early Successional Habitat Development / Management	647
Forage and Biomass Planting	512
Hedgerow Planting	422
Prescribed Grazing	528
Tree/ shrub Establishment	612
Wildlife Habitat Planting	420

Supporting Practice Name	Practice Code
Access Control	472
Brush Management	314
Conservation Cover	327
Cover Crop	340
Fence	382
Field Border	386
Firebreak	394
Herbaceous Weed Control	315
Livestock Pipeline	516
Prescribed Burning	338
Pumping Plant	533
Heavy Use Area Protection	561
Spring Development	574
Stream Crossing	578
Structures for Wildlife	649
Tree/Shrub site Preparation	490
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	645
Watering Facility	614
Water Well	642

Contacts

The WLFW coordinating position is designed to accelerate delivery of NWSG grazing/haying and bobwhite quail management, including conservation planning, field visits, establishment/management recommendations, workshops and tours of demonstration sites.

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