United States Department of Agriculture

INDIANA CONSERVATION CHOICES

Pastures

Conservation practices that help improve soil health, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and provide other natural resource benefits for your pastureland.

INDIANA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

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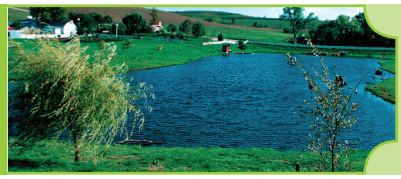
As a landowner or farm operator, you face many decisions when managing the natural resources on your land. When it comes to improving your pastureland, good management and the right conservation practices makes it possible to have lush, green pastures, clean water, and healthy animals.

Pasture management is managing the forages grazed and/or browsed by livestock by maintaining cover, providing adequate rest after grazing, and using stop-grazing heights to maintain live green leaves during the growing season. Good management also includes following the recommended stock density rate and rotating based on forage availability and livestock nutrition needs.

Well-managed pastures not only provide food for your animals, they absorb rainfall, filter runoff, and reduce erosion. Following a grazing management plan can improve nutrient cycling and increase soil organic matter, which can make your pasture more drought resistant. Other benefits often include a longer grazing season, greater forage production, and a more nutritious food source that improves animal health, milk production and weight gain.

This publication includes several recommended conservation practices that will help improve your pastureland. To learn more about grazing systems, visit your local NRCS office to discuss a long-term plan that can help you meet your goals and improve your land. NRCS and your local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) staff are available to help you make the right choices to protect your operation and resources.

		Description	Benefits
Prescribed Grazing		Management of forages by moving animals using a stop-grazing height and providing adequate rest for plants.	» Improves or maintains species composition and vigor of plant communities. » Increases quantity and quality of forage for animal health and productivity. » Improves infiltration and surface water quality.
Fence		Contains livestock and/or provides a barrier for sensitive areas; also used for subdividing fields.	» Contains and controls livestock movement. » Protects sensitive areas from grazing livestock, and eliminates access to unsafe or unstable areas.
Forage Planting		Establishing adapted and/or compatible forage species suitable for pasture, hay or biomass production.	» Improves forage quality and diversity. » Reduces soil erosion while improving soil health and water quality. » Improves infiltration and organic matter in the soil as plants recycle.
Heavy Use Area Protection		Stabilizing areas that are frequently used by livestock.	» Provides a stable, non-eroding surface for areas frequently used by animals, people or vehicles. » Protects or improves water quality when properly located.
Access Control		Limiting or preventing livestock access to sensitive areas such as streams, ponds, wetlands, and forests.	» Protects, maintains, and/or improves the quantity and quality of natural resources in an area. » Protects and maintains vegetation that is often essential to conserving other natural resources.
Water Facilities and Pipeline		Permanent or portable water source to provide adequate water for the grazing system.	» Supplies daily water requirements. » Improves animal distribution and reduces walking distance. » Provides an alternative water source to protect a sensitive resource, such as stream or pond.
Water Sources		Provides access to water where it is not available such as wells, ponds and spring developments.	» A clean source of water. » A source of water for more than one area. » Good water distribution that improves grazing and animal health.
Erosion Control		Maintaining plant cover, limiting trailing and installing structures as needed.	» Prevents sediment loss. » Keeps soil healthy and productive. » For more erosion control practices see the Indiana Choices publication "Erosion Control Management."
Stream Crossings		A stabilized area or structure constructed across a stream to provide a travel way for livestock, equipment, or vehicles.	» Provides access to another land unit. » Improves water quality by reducing sediment and nutrient loading of the stream. » Reduces streambank and streambed erosion.

For more information visit: www.in.nrcs.usda.gov

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