

## PASTURE CONDITION ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET (528)

Producer:	County:	Date:	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species	FIELD/ AC/ species
Farm/Tract:	Assessor:	PTS.*					
<b>1) Plant Population</b> The estimated % by weight is mostly	DESIRABLE INTERMEDIATE UNDESIRABLE	5 3 0					
<b>2) Plant Diversity</b> The diversity of plant species is	BROAD MEDIUM NARROW	5 3 0					
<b>3) Plant Density</b> Desirable and intermediate plants are	DENSE MEDIUM SPARSE	5 3 0					
<b>4) Plant Vigor</b> Desirables and intermediates are	STRONG MEDIUM WEAK	5 3 0					
<b>5) Legumes in Stand</b> Percent of legumes by weight	>60% bloating 20-30% <10%	0 5 0					
<b>6) Severity of Use</b> The degree and frequency is	LIGHT MODERATE HEAVY	0 5 0					
<b>7) Uniformity of Use</b> The uniformity of grazing use is	UNIFORM INTERMEDIATE SPOTTY	5 3 0					
<b>8) Soil Erosion</b> Sheet, rill, gully and/or stream bank erosion is	SLIGHT MODERATE SEVERE	5 3 0					
<b>9) Harvest frequency</b> Livestock rotation	≥twice a week once a week continuous grazing	5 3 0					
<b>10) Plant Residue</b> Dead and decaying plant materials is	EXCESSIVE SUITABLE DEFICIENT	0 5 0					

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

**CATEGORY:**    1    /    2    /    3    /    4    /    5  
**0-15 = UNSUSTAINABLE/ 16-25 = POOR / 26-35 = GOOD/ 36-45 = VERY GOOD/ 46-50=SUSTAINABLE**

\* NOTE: Use intermediate points as applicable (1,2,3,4 to reflect conditions)

## PASTURE CONDITION ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET CRITERIA

This worksheet can be used to **visually estimate** the condition and trend on grassland. Use this form to inventory five different fields on the same day or the same field at five different times. If all pastures cannot be inventoried, choose representative pastures and evaluate these same pastures over several years to indicate trend. Record either field acres or total acres represented by the inventory.

Condition of rotationally grazed pastures with adequate rest periods should improve over time. If scores are below 35: management changes such as faster rotations and longer rest periods would benefit the soil and water resources and forage productivity and profitability. If scores are below 25: consider additional cross-fencing, liming, fertilizing and seeding, and even culling livestock, to restore soils and forages and protect water quality. Monitoring tools such as soil and forage testing and livestock body condition scoring can assist with decision-making. A forage stick with grazing formulas can also be useful with rotations.

- 1) Plant Population – Visually estimate the percent composition of each plant group. Species in each group will vary with site, kind of livestock and producer goals. Intermediates are grazed plants that may not be as palatable as desirables or may be grazeable “weeds”, annuals or low-yielding species. Undesirables are seldom grazed or may be poisonous. Management adjustments may be indicated if undesirables are increasing.
- 2) Plant Diversity – The number of desirable and intermediate species represented on the site. Broad requires eight or more species. Medium is three-six species. Narrow is one dominant species. Grazing season is extended with a variety of warm and cool-season forages and legumes.
- 3) Plant Density – Visually estimate density of living desirables and intermediates, not including undesirables. Dense forage at six-ten inches height increases bite-size, and therefore intake. A thick sod protects the soil from erosion. Undesirables can easily invade a thin stand of grass.
- 4) Plant Vigor - Rate the health and productivity of desirables and intermediates looking at color, size of plants and number of leaves. Deeper root systems help rested plants better tolerate droughts.
- 5) Legumes in Stand – Visually estimate the percent composition by dry weight, realizing that legumes usually comprise less of the stand by weight than it appears. A 20-30% legume stand can fix enough nitrogen to support the grass. If white clover comprises over 60% of the stand, bloat could be a risk.
- 6) Severity of Use – Heavy use without rest favors less palatable species. Light use allows rank older growth to shade out new shoots. Moderate grazing down to about three inches for cool-season and 2” for warm-season grasses optimizes photosynthesis. Height of the plant above the ground mirrors the depth of roots below ground that in turn support top-growth.
- 7) Uniformity of Use – When all plants are grazed to a moderate, uniform height throughout the field, regrowth is more even. Spot grazing means some plants or parts of the field are grazed too closely and others too lightly. The pattern is repeated in the subsequent grazing periods, and over-mature, less palatable plants continue to be avoided. Keeping plants vegetative improves animal intake.
- 8) Soil Erosion – Evaluate all types of erosion and determine the severity for the area being surveyed. Valuable topsoil and organic matter are lost in a thin sheet when soil is left unprotected by vegetation. Rills, or small gullies, form where run-off concentrates. Controlled grazing of buffers along waterways creates filter strips that trap sediment and nutrients before they leave the farm.
- 9) Harvest Frequency – Continuous grazing only allows about 30% efficiency and no rest. Weekly rotations enable at least 35% efficiency and 75% rest. Twice weekly rotations allow 45-50% efficiency and 87% rest. Daily rotations improve efficiency to 70% and rest to 95%. Faster rotations and longer rest periods improve pasture utilization, diversity and vigor.
- 10) Plant Residue – A light ground cover of dead leaves slows runoff and enhances nutrient recycling. The shade of excessive residue retards new seedling growth. Deficient residue could allow erosion.