



Pasture Condition Score

What is the Pasture Condition Score?

A well-managed pasture optimizes plant and animal productivity while protecting and/or enhancing soil, water and air quality. Pasture condition scoring is a systematic way to check how well a pasture is managed and evaluates overall pasture health. It serves as a planning tool to establish a baseline for pasture conditions and helps monitor improvements as producers implement new pasture management and conservation practices. Basically, if the pasture is located on the proper site and well managed, it will have a good to excellent overall pasture condition score.



Pasture condition scoring involves the visual evaluation of 10 indicators: percent desirable plants, plant cover, plant residue, plant diversity, plant vigor, livestock concentration areas, erosion, wind, percent legume and soil compaction.

Each indicator is scored from the lowest (1) to the highest (5). Each indicator is evaluated separately. They may be combined into an overall score for the pasture unit or left as an individual score to help target areas of improvement.

When to conduct a Pasture Condition Score

Good managers are looking at their pastures on a regular basis. While they may not be documenting every evaluation item, they are checking to see how well the forage is growing and if there is adequate supply for their livestock. They then make management decisions based upon these observations.



It would be good to document a condition score annually for all the pastures. Then producers can see trends in their pasture to help them evaluate the success of their management decision and/or to change management to address issues the scoring identifies.

An annually documented PCS should be completed at about the same time each year. This will provide some consistency and reduce the chance that scoring changes are the result of when the evaluation was completed during the grazing season and not because actual changes in pasture condition.

Pasture condition scoring can be useful in deciding when to move livestock or planning other management actions. It sorts out which improvements are most likely to improve pasture condition or livestock performance.

Pasture Condition Scoring and the Conservation Security Program

In addition to serving as an important planning tool, Pasture Condition Scoring is also used in the implementation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). After a pasture application has been accepted into CSP, it will be assigned a category based on its pasture condition score. Funding of CSP applications, will be decided by USDA officials in Washington DC based on an application's category.

Helpful websites

For Pasture Condition Score

- <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.usda.gov/GLTI/technical/publications/pasture-score-guide.pdf>
- <ftp://ftp-fc.sc.usda.gov/GLTI/technical/publications/pasture-score-sheet.pdf>

For CSP:

- <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/>

- <http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp.html>