Dryland Pasture for Sheep & Cattle

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The process for improving a dryland pasture should begin in late summer. Existing vegetation should be grazed to less than 1,000 lbs. per acre or clipped down to two inches before seeding. This allows for a good seedbed preparation, and allows the sun to reach the new seedlings upon germination.

When to Plant

Dryland pastures are seeded in the fall; prior to the occurrence of heave winter rains. Seeding early in the fall allows plants to grow while temperatures are relatively warm and also reduces erosion hazards from high intensity rains. Long-range weather records show that the most favorable period to seed is from October 1 to October 31.

How to Seed a Pasture

Mix the various seed before broadcasting. Small acreages, up to ten acres, can be seeded using a broadcast seeder operated by hand. This type of seeder will normally broadcast seed over a 15- to 20-foot wide swath. Each swath should overlap so that distribution is uniform.

The broad casted seed should then be covered by a ¼ inch of soil. This may be accomplished by ring rolling, or by using a spike tooth harrow with the teeth sloped at a 45-degree angle. A less desirable method would involve dragging the field with a 2" x 12" board about ten feet long.

DO NOT DISK the field to cover seed, as this will place seed too deep to emerge. It is advisable to use the no-till method of seeding, as opposed to disking and ripping the soil first. Disturbing the soil can bring up unwanted plant species. Dryland pastures are seeded in the fall; prior to the occurrence of heave winter rains. Seeding early in the fall allows plants to grow while temperatures are relatively warm and also reduces erosion hazards from high intensity rains. Long-range weather records show that the most favorable period to seed is from October 1 to October 15.

What to Plant

Seeding rates per acre:

10 lbs. Sub clover (inoculated)
Mixture of 2-3 types:
- ☆ Mt. Barker, Denmark, Woogenellup

8 –10 lbs. Tetraploid Ryegrass
2-5 lbs. Perennial Orchard Grass

Approximately 20-25 lbs. Total*

* Seeding rates will vary, depending on whether you are seeding a new pasture of improving an established pasture. Fewer pounds of seeds per acre are needed on an established pasture. Inoculation of sub clovers is crucial in establishing a good stand of clover. Only accept clovers that have been inoculated within the last two months. Inoculating the clovers yourself, assures higher

counts of effective rhizobium, which means greater success.

Type of Fertilizer to Use

Nearly all of our range and pasturelands are deficient in nitrogen and phosphorous, and some acres are also deficient in sulfur. Properly inoculated sub clover should fix 40 to 50 lbs. of nitrogen per acre on a yearly basis, which can be used by the grasses. The use of 200 lbs. per acre of 0-45-0-2 (treble super phosphate) or 150-200 lbs per acre of 11-52-0-2 (mono-ammonium phosphate) at the time of planting will supply adequate phosphorous and sulfur needed for the clovers. If only grasses are planted and/or nitrogen is needed quickly, the use of 250-350 lbs. per acre of 16-20-0-10 will supply adequate nitrogen and phosphorus. How often fertilization is repeated, depends upon the initial amount used at planting.

Grazing Management

Carefully control grazing the first year of pasture establishment, especially when soil is wet. Light grazing is recommended three to four months after seeding whenever the soil is firm. It is important to remove the grasses during the winter, thus allowing the sun to penetrate to the clovers. If subterranean clovers are shaded by the grasses early in growth, they will not grow properly and could be lost. Yields from a newly seeded pasture will be approximately 60 percent of future yield.

An important part of grazing management is implementing a controlled rotation grazing system that allows plants to rest and re- grow. Pastures should be managed to maintain animal health requirements while maintaining the needs of a new pasture.

What Type of Soil is Required?

Most soils that are 18 to 24 inches deep will grow satisfactory dryland pastures. Soils less than 18 inches deep will produce less forage because the soil moisture is exhausted sooner following the last spring rains.

Use of Supplemental Feed on Pasture

Supplemental feeding during certain periods will increase the utilization of the forage produced. Alfalfa hay, oat hay, or other appropriate food sources fed during the winter and summer months, may be necessary to need the nutritional requirements of livestock.

Quality of Forage from Pasture

The quality of forage produced is superior to most of our native pastures. Sub clover has a high percent of crude protein when green and will contain up to 12 percent crude protein in the mature, dry stage.

Acres needed per Animal Unit

An animal unit is a 1,000-pound animal, usually one mature cow or five sheep. An animal unit will consume approximately 2 – 3 % of its body weight per day, depending on its nutritional requirements. Therefore, on average, an animal unit will require 900 pounds of forage per month or five tons of hay or its forage equivalent on a yearly basis. This amount of forage can be supplied from five acres of well-fertilized, seeded, dryland pasture, allowing for adequate residual dry matter at the end of the grazing season.

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