



Converting to Pasture or Hay— Evaluating Current Vegetation

SUMMARY

Evaluate current CRP vegetation. It may be adequate, be easily upgraded, or need major renovation.

How good is your CRP land after 10 or more years of non-use? Some CRP fields were established hurriedly with minimal cost and effort. Some were sown with second or third choice seed mixtures due to seed shortages in the early years of the CRP period. For these reasons and others, many CRP fields have thin grass sods, undesired grass species, or weeds and brush present. Fortunately, some have developed into dense, weed-free stands of the species that were planted.

Don't make a hasty decision and destroy your current CRP vegetation until you have seriously evaluated what you now have. In some cases it will be adequate, as is, to begin grazing or harvesting for hay or may need only minor improvements or management steps to upgrade it to an acceptable condition. In some situations however, major changes or renovation will be necessary before the site can be used successfully in a forage/livestock enterprise. Use table 1 to help you evaluate the adequacy of vegetation on your CRP site. It offers alternatives if improvements are needed.

Table 1 shows some forage management practices that can improve the productivity or quality of the existing types of forage (remove weeds or include legumes). Various seeding and renovation methods allow you to add more desirable grasses and legumes to what you already have. Examples follow.

- Rather than a broadcast herbicide treatment which might harm legumes, use clipping and “spot treating” with herbicide for weed or brush control where desirable legumes exist.
- Use phosphorus and potassium with no or only low rates of nitrogen on grass/legume stands to keep the grasses less competitive and to favor the maintenance of the legumes.

- Use moderate to high rates of nitrogen on all-grass stands to stimulate grass production and improve vigor and stand density.
- Where grass stands are thin and you wish to include more grass or legumes, use interseeding (no-till, sod seeding) or “frost seeding” to introduce the legume component without destroying the existing grass.
- Where grass that is present is not necessarily the desired grass, complete renovation either with tillage or by no-till means may be the best and quickest way to return to a desired forage production condition.

For More Information

See the other bulletins in this CRP series.

CRP-1 Life After CRP—Decisions, Decisions!

CRP-2 Lease Alternatives for CRP Land

CRP-3 Tillage Options After CRP

CRP-4 Livestock Watering Systems for CRP Land

CRP-5 Applying Fertilizer and Lime to CRP Land

CRP-6 Resource Inventory Guide

CRP-7 CRP—Characteristics and Perceptions

CRP-8 Fencing Systems for CRP Land

CRP-9 Evaluating Resources and Setting Goals

CRP-10 Converting to Pasture or Hay—Evaluating Current Vegetation

CRP-11 Converting CRP Land to Pasture—Managing Weeds and Fertility

CRP-12 Converting to Pasture or Hay—Repairing, Replanting CRP Land

CRP-13 Converting to Pasture or Hay—Forage Seeding Mixtures

CRP-14 Adams County CRP Research and Demonstration Project

Table 1. Checklist for Evaluating and Improving Vegetation on CRP Land

Evaluating Vegetation				Improving Vegetation											
Desirable Legumes		Weeds & Brush		Desirable Dense	Thin Uniform	Thin Patchy	Fertilize		Frost seed Legume	Interseed		Total Renovation	Weed Control		
Yes	No	Yes	No				N	P&K		Grass	Leg.*		Clip Weeds	Spot-Spray	Broadcast
Existing grass species are acceptable.															
X		X		X				X		X	X				
X		X			X			X		X	X				
X		X				X		X							
X		X		X				X				X	X		
X		X			X			X				X	X		
X		X				X		X				X	X		
	X	X		X				X	X	+					
	X	X			X			X	X	+	X				
	X	X				X		X	X	+	X				
X	X			X				X	X	+			X	X	
X	X				X			X	X	+	X		X	X	
X	X					X		X	X	+	X		X	X	
Existing grass species are undesirable.															
	X	X		X							X	X	X		
	X	X			X	X		X	X		X	X	X		
	X	X		X							X	X	X		
	X	X			X	X		X	X		X	X	X		

*legume

+Frost seeding and interseeding of legumes frequently are not successful when grass sod is dense, particularly when nitrogen is being used to further stimulate grass growth.

This bulletin is part of a series to help CRP contract holders assess the land-use options available to them when the contracts expire. The series is funded in part by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Other bulletins in the series and additional information are available at county ISU Extension offices.

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