



Converting CRP Contract Land to an Active Grazing System on Your Farm—Evaluating Resources and Setting Goals

SUMMARY

- Set management goals before converting CRP land to active grazing.
- Evaluate livestock, pasture, and management resources.

The first step when considering converting CRP contract land to an active grazing system on your farm is setting management goals. Well-defined goals and a realistic evaluation of your livestock, pasture, and management resources will help you make and implement decisions. The following questions may help you get started. They are not goals themselves, but focus on important components of a forage/livestock enterprise that may lead to production goals.

Goal-related Questions

- Are you managing just to maintain a livestock enterprise or to achieve a high level of production?
- If managing to achieve a high level of production, do you want to manage for a high level of production per animal or production per acre?
- With the addition of forage acres from CRP, do you anticipate increasing animal numbers?
- Will the expanded enterprise be profitable? How soon?
- Will the expanded enterprise provide a positive cash flow? How soon?

Resource-related and Management-related Questions

- With the addition of forage from CRP, do you anticipate having an abundance of pasture?
- What forage species are currently in the pastures?
 - a good mixture of grasses and legumes?
 - a good mixture but a thin sod or ground cover?
 - an undesirable forage mixture?

- If the CRP forage is not currently adequate, do you want to develop productive pastures right away or will you gradually work up to higher production levels?
- Are you willing to lime and fertilize?
- Do you currently have or anticipate severe weed problems such as thistle or brush, which must be taken care of before you intensify your system?
- Are you willing to feed supplemental grain or hay to make up pasture deficiencies?
- What is the condition of the fence?
- Are the water sources considered adequate for the anticipated livestock numbers?
- If animal numbers are increased, are there adequate hay land resources for the stored winter forage needs of an expanded enterprise?
- If animal numbers are increased, will additional animals be purchased immediately, or produced from the existing herd/flock over several years?
- How intensive do you want your management to be?
- Is there adequate labor, capital, and management commitment available to accommodate the increased pasture/livestock enterprise?
- Are there cost-share or grant programs available in your county that will contribute toward the cost of CRP development?

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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Production Goals

Production goals should be established first. They should be both attainable and measurable. They should be written down and reviewed regularly. Some examples of production goals are:

- to double the herd/flock size in five years,
- to wean an average of 500 pounds of calf per cow bred,
- to wean or sell 600 pounds of calf per acre,
- to have the forage/livestock enterprise cash flow in three years, or
- to develop a grazing program that provides a 270-day grazing season.

Goal statements such as “to make more money” or “to develop a rotational grazing program” are less useful because they are vague, are not production oriented, or lack a means of measurement.

Production goals and management strategies are interrelated. Developing a rotational grazing program, renovating pastures, stockpiling forage for autumn/winter grazing, or initiating a terminal sire cross-breeding program are management strategies that may lead to the attainment of one or several of your production goals. Alternative management strategies and day-to-day management decisions should be evaluated with an established production goal (or goals) in mind.

For More Information

To learn more about management and decisions regarding land being removed from CRP, see the following:

- CRP-1 Life After CRP—Decisions, Decisions!
- CRP-2 Lease Alternatives for CRP Land
- CRP-3 Tillage Options After CRP
- CRP-5 Applying Fertilizer and Lime to CRP Land
- CRP-6 Resource Inventory Guide
- 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-15 Insect Management for Corn and Soybeans
- CRP-17 Strip Intercropping: A CRP Conversion Option
- CRP-18 Planting Corn or Soybeans into CRP Sod Ground
- CRP-21 Interseeding Small-Seeded Forages into Sod with Conventional Corn/Soybean Planters
- Pm-1713 Pasture Management Guide

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