



LEOPOLD CENTER

Iowa Pasture Management Guide

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Budget:

\$8,000 for year one
\$8,000 for year two

Abstract: *While there is a great deal of information available on pasture management and utilization, there is no one existing publication that could serve as a comprehensive source of advice on the subject for Iowa farmers. Using feedback from a focus group, a handbook to aid Iowa farmers in pasture management has been prepared.*

Background

Forage crops are an important component of sustainable farming systems, particularly on marginal lands. Perennial forages provide continuous cover and play an important role in soil conservation and maintaining or improving water quality. In livestock operations, forage management decisions must be made on the basis of nutritional and other needs of livestock consuming the forages.

Management of forage-livestock enterprises is more complex than that of row crops. These operators need broad-based knowledge to manage their resources successfully. There are many forage species available and the most productive livestock operations utilize several species in order to capitalize on the unique characteristics of each.

Knowledge of forage crop management and utilization has diminished over the past 30 years, offering a special challenge to farmers trying to make the transition from monoculture row crop operation to a more diversified farm operation. Considerable forage/pasture information is available but is widely scattered, and not always easily accessible.

Objectives of this project were to:

- produce a comprehensive reference to Iowa pasture management,
- survey users of the published pasture guide to determine impacts of the publication,
- explore potential for an electronic (CD-ROM) version of the pasture guide.

Approach and methods

A focus group of ISU research, Extension, and teaching faculty and forage stakeholders, including agency professionals, representatives of the forage industry, and forage producers, met and affirmed the need for a guide to Iowa pasture management. They discussed the form and content of the publication. It was agreed that this document would not look like a traditional Extension publication, but would feature a “magazine” format. Information would be highly condensed using boxes, sidebars, graphics, tables, and photographs in addition to the text.

An Editorial Committee developed the outline for the publication and assigned authors to the various topics to be covered. The text was to be written by ISU Extension professionals and researchers representing a variety of livestock and forage production disciplines. The Editorial Committee wanted the Iowa Pasture Management Guide to be inclusive enough to meet the needs of a very diverse group of people, including those already practicing management-intensive grazing, those new to grazing management, and those who teach grazing management. The publication would not serve as an advanced topics guide for any of the subject matter covered.

The guide is divided into five chapters followed by an appendix and glossary of terms. Beginning with an introduction explaining that a pasture is much more than grass, the

authors go on to discuss tactics for managing pasture plants. This chapter covers forage establishment and quality, weed and brush control, fertilization of pastures, and pasture maintenance, renovation, and improvement.

The second and most lengthy chapter deals with livestock management issues. Topics of interest here are: nutritional needs of grazing animals, health considerations of grazing animals, pasture systems and grazing methods, understanding grazing animals and their management, managing during drought and excess precipitation, fitting livestock to the seasonal forage supply, adjusting production systems to forage supply, and integrating supplemental feed resources.

Chapter 3 explores planning for improvements in grazing systems. Goal setting, planning tools, explanations of rotational grazing and management intensive grazing systems, and suggestions for designing a pasture system are found here.

Monitoring and evaluating the grazing system is discussed in Chapter 4. Record keeping for animal performance, pasture productivity, and pasture costs is described. Chapter 5 examines managing risk in grazing systems with examples of cow-calf management under several different grazing regimes.

As a secondary goal, the guide was to serve as a support publication for the five-videotape series on Management Intensive Grazing funded by another Leopold Center grant (#95-04, Production of a Videotape Series Demonstrating Improved Grazing Practices to Pro-

duce Forage-Based Livestock Production in the Upper Midwest).

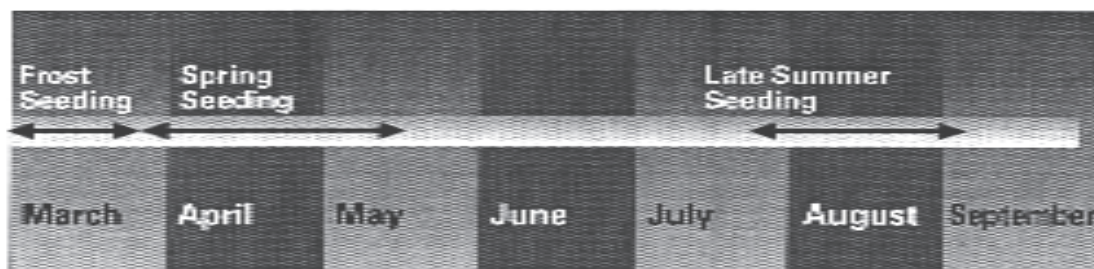
Results

Due to unforeseen difficulties in coordinating the writing and editing of the multipart guide in a seamless, user-friendly manner, production has been delayed. The projected publication date is currently summer 1998. Plans are to print 2,000 copies of the 100-page, four-color document. Printing and distribution will be overseen by the ISU Extension Communications group and copies will be available for a price intended solely to cover publication and distribution costs. Following publication of the Iowa Pasture Management Guide, the editorial committee plans to survey users to determine the value and effectiveness of the guide. This input will be used to make decisions about the publication of the guide in an electronic format.

Though the Iowa Pasture Management Guide is targeted to producers within the state, the topics and advice are applicable to other Midwestern states and may have possibilities for national usage. No similar publication available in the U.S. covers the scope and complexity of pasture and grazing management practices and issues.

The Iowa Pasture Management Guide (PM 1713) will be available from ISU Extension Publications Distribution, 119 Kooser Drive, ISU, Ames, Iowa 50011-3171, phone 515/294-5247.

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Seeding chart from the Pasture Management Guide.