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SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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News and Views



...from your

Soil Conservation District

With beef prices the best they have been in several years, cattle producers need to pay close attention to pasture improvement, a local conservation district leader says.

"Grasses and legumes are the cheapest source of good nutrition for beef and other grazing animals, but we need to keep a close watch on pasture stands and our fertilization programs," says Henry Lyphout, chairman of the Benton County Soil Conservation District.

"Low cattle prices and high fertilizer costs in recent years have diverted our attention from good pasture management," Lyphout says. "Quite simply, it was too expensive to maintain pastures while losing money on cattle."

"This cost-price squeeze also caused many producers to plow up sloping pastureland to plant to sorghum, corn, soybeans, or other row crops," Lyphout says. "It is time to reverse this trend and put our marginal cropland acres back into soil conserving forage crops."

"We think the time is ripe to fertilize, renovate, reseed, and above all, to manage our pastures for a good source of economical feed for cattle, and for conservation," Lyphout says. "We are particularly keen on this right now because a well-managed pasture — of all conservation practices — is one of the most effective

means of conserving soil and water, and keeping our streams and ponds clean."

"I estimate that there are 29,000 acres of pasture in Benton County that are showing problems from insufficient management," Lyphout said. "As cattle prices are once again favorable, these pastures should get attention this spring and next fall."

A pasture which is well drained and fertile could be torn up with a chisel or disk, fertilized according to a soil test, and seeded to 6 lbs. alfalfa and 8 lbs. brome grass per acre with one bushel of oats added as a nurse crop. This mixture will produce twice as much forage as a bluegrass pasture, according to Floyd Peters, District Conservationist. Another mixture which will produce more feed in mid-summer and will not require renovation as often, would be 6 lbs. birdsfoot trefoil and 2 lbs. of orchard grass along with 1 bushel of oats per acre. Wet areas could be seeded to 10-12 lbs. per acre of reed canary grass along with 1 bushel of oats, stated Peters.

SCS HELP AVAILABLE

Technical assistance is available from the Soil Conservation Service to help livestock producers solve their pasture improvement problems.

For more information contact the Soil Conservation Service Vinton, telephone number 472-2161.