

sangres.com
for your daily dose of
the Real Wild West



[Index](#) - [Colorado](#) - [New Mexico](#) - [Arizona](#) - [Utah](#) - [Nevada](#) - [Wyoming](#) - [Idaho](#) - [Montana](#)

Living the Life: Agricultural Issues Managing Your Pasture

[Living the Life Index](#) - [Agricultural Issues](#)

[To See Your Ad on This Page](#)

Small pastures are too easily over-grazed, and often are the most abused grazing lands in an area. To protect against this, you need to decide how you want your pasture to look: a mix of grasses and shrubs, shrubs only or grasses only. Over-grazing (too many grazing animals on a patch of land for too long) leads to weed infestations, unproductive pastures, bare ground and soil erosion. Goats and sheep prefer brush and green leafy plants over grass and will graze these plants, making them less prominent. Cattle and horses will search out the most palatable grasses and leave the brush, shrubs and less palatable grasses behind.

Beyond using different animals to naturally shape the vegetation, remember the "take half - leave half" principle: allow the animals to graze half the forage and leave half to regrow the forage. A second principle involves the time of grazing: grazing too early in the spring weakens the forage. The least critical time for grazing is late summer and fall, as long as the forage is not so consumed that its growing point is damaged. You'll also want to allow your pasture to go to seed regularly and replenish itself that way.

Because of the variabilities of soil and climate, annual dryland pasture production can vary from 300 to 1,000 pounds of air-dry forage per acre. Irrigated pastures can produce 1,000 to 6,000 pounds of air-dry forage per acre.

Grazing animals daily eat 2 to 3 percent of their body weight of air-dry forage. A 1,000 pound cow needs about 25 pounds of air-dry forage daily, or about 750 pounds monthly, under ideal conditions. Using 1,000 to 1,200 pounds of air-dry forage per month per animal is more realistic when calculating feed expenses.

A pasture's total carrying capacity can be estimated by taking the weight of air-dry forage and dividing by two (take half, leave half). This gives you the pasture's total available forage production. Then calculate the forage needed to sustain your animals for one day. Divide the pounds of forage available by the pounds of forage needed per day to determine the number of days during growing season that the pasture can sustain grazing. This is where most folks back up because it requires more feed than they thought. Then they have to deal with decreasing the number of animals, increasing pasture production, increasing pasture harvesting efficiency, or providing supplemental hay.

So then, the rules:

- Do not overgraze! Good grass is hard to re-establish, take care of what you have.
- Use a rotational grazing plan - This increases pasture harvest efficiency.
- Control noxious weeds - Many pastures have been abused in the past. Your local cooperative extension agent will have a copy of *your local state's Pesticide Guide* with herbicide recommendations and rates of application for various weeds.
- Re-seed - This is a worst case scenario and you'll want to get additional advice before re-seeding. With our dry climate and high spring winds, re-seeding can be expensive and difficult. Get advice about the best plant species, seedbed

preparation, weed control, and time of seeding before going this route.

- For more information call your local county cooperative extension agent, the Department of Natural Resources, or your local soil conservation district. (These phone numbers should be listed under county or state government.)

Agricultural Section Links:

[Agricultural Issues](#) - [Making Hay](#) - [Raising Beef Cattle](#) [Raising Sheep](#) - [Raising Pigs](#) - [Raising Chickens](#) - [Raising Rabbits](#)
[Raising Goats](#) - [Raising Horses](#) - [Alternative Livestock](#)

Living the Life Section:

[Living the Life Index](#) - [Living the Life with Dr. Jim Code of the West](#) - [Living Green](#) - [Legal Issues](#) - [Living with Wildlife](#)
[Native Diseases](#) - [Other Info](#) - [Where to Get Help](#)

sangres.com

For Your Daily Dose
of the Real Wild West

[Colorado](#) - [New Mexico](#) - [Arizona](#) - [Utah](#) - [Nevada](#) - [Idaho](#) - [Wyoming](#) - [Montana National Forests](#) - [National Parks](#) -
[Living the Life](#) - [Our Sponsors](#) - [Index](#)

All text, photos and images are copyright © 2006-2008 by [Sangres.com](#) - unless otherwise indicated.

All rights reserved. This page was last updated February 2, 2008

[Back to the top](#)