

Grazing former CRP land takes care

By KAY LEDBETTER

MANY participants in the Conservation Reserve Program find themselves facing some tough decisions after being notified that their contracts will not be renewed.

"I think we need to keep most of this land in rangeland," says Ted McCollum, AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist, Amarillo.

Land idled into the CRP in the 1980s was planted in the High Plains primarily to native grasses, Old World bluestem or weeping lovegrass. Texas has about 4 million acres in CRP — and much of that is on the High Plains.

"About 10 years ago, when we first started seeing people come out of the program, we realized we would not be making the same amount as with government payments," McCollum notes. "But we know properly managed Old World bluestem and weeping lovegrass can produce more beef per acre than native rangelands in the region."

The first step is to renovate the pastures, he says. Renovation includes water development, fencing and rejuvenation of the forage stand. The land's exact needs will depend on whether the

Key Points

- Many government CRP contracts on land will soon expire.
- Putting CRP land back into production must be a careful process.
- Meeting water, fencing and forage needs are some basic steps to renovation.

land was utilized under the managed haying and grazing allowance and emergency drought provisions, or whether it sat idle the entire contract period.

Water needs

Water for livestock is vital. Water usage plans must be based on how much water will be required daily and where to locate the watering site.

McCollum says these decisions also must take into account fencing layouts and grazing management plans, so a producer should formulate some ideas on the overall operation and use of the land before developing water plans.

Consider the pumping, or refill, rate; the type and size of tanks, or drinkers; and storage needed to keep pace with daily consumption. He says cattle requirements for water generally are 1 gallon per 100 pounds of body weight in cold weather, and 2 gallons per 100 pounds of body weight in hot weather.

"Remember, cattle consume water in one or two drinking bouts per day, which means they take in a lot of water at once," McCollum says. "Watering tends to be a herd activity on large acreage, but an individual activity on small acreage, so that affects the storage and refill rate required."

Fencing is also part of the water management plan. In designing a fence layout, keep in mind grazing management, cattle handling and movement, machinery access for fertilization, well maintenance, and integration with other grazing areas.

Renovate forage stand

Landowners should think about how they want to renovate the forage stand to enhance plant vigor, stimulate tiller production and recruit new plants.

First, remove standing, decadent plant material and some of the thatch that can stifle developing tillers and seedlings. "Prescribed burning in the late winter or early spring is going to be the easiest way," McCollum says.

The material also can be cut and baled. Other means are shredding, disking or mob grazing during the forages' dormant season. Animal performance may be sacrificed, however, with mob grazing.

Stands seeded to weeping lovegrass and Old World bluestem can't be managed the same as stands seeded to native grasses or existing rangeland.

For stands seeded to native grasses, apply the same management practices recommended for rangelands, including attention to forage usage, maintenance of ground cover and residue, and seasonal deferment of grazing.

Ledbetter is with Texas A&M Agriculture Communications, Amarillo.



GRAZE THE GRASS: With many Conservation Reserve Program contracts soon to expire, some ranchers may choose to put CRP acres back into range and pasture. However, producers need to consider what type of renovation is needed for cattle production. A 1,000-pound cow will need 2 gallons of water daily per 100 pounds of body weight in hot weather, or 20 gallons per day.

Consider grazing season needed

PRODUCERS must consider whether they need seasonal or year-round grazing when bringing Conservation Reserve Program acreage back into production for livestock, advises Ted McCollum, Texas AgriLife Extension cattle specialist.

"Make sure you can accommodate a rest period before dormancy on the grass," McCollum says. "Your nutritional management of the cattle will be similar as that on rangeland."

Fertilization generally is not recommended on native grasses, but it may be beneficial during renovation, he says. Brush encroachment also needs to be managed.

Both Old World bluestem and weeping lovegrass can be productive forages that provide exceptional grazing value if managed appropriately, he notes.

Weeping lovegrass initiates growth in late March to early April. Due to its rapid growth and decline in nutritional value, management can be a challenge, and spot grazing can be a problem.

In addition, lovegrass must be deferred from September until after frost. The best management practice is to use rotational grazing for a limited time during the growing season, followed by removal of the excess residue during the dormant season.

Weeping lovegrass has its best nutritional value for 60 to 80 days beginning in late April, McCollum says. Hence, grazing during the growing season should be focused from May through July. In the winter, lovegrass residue is acceptable as forage for cows and stockers if it is supplemented with protein.

Take 8 steps to better lovegrass

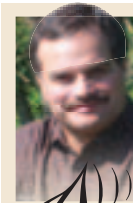
TEXAS A&M cattle specialist Ted McCollum offers eight ways to aid management of weeping lovegrass.

1. Remove old growth before spring green-up by grazing, burning or mowing.
2. Fertilize nitrogen in 30-pound increments beginning in April.
3. Accumulate 6 inches of new spring growth before turnout.
4. Rotationally graze using a 21- to 40-day interval. Graze only three to seven days on a paddock; then defer.
5. Cut or graze to a 4-inch stubble during each rotation cycle with grazing or hay harvest.
6. Control spot grazing.
7. Rest land during September, October and November, and then graze the aftermath in winter.
8. Use lovegrass as part of a forage system in combination with other range and pasture resources.

Old World bluestem

As for Old World bluestem, it initiates growth in mid- to late May, McCollum says. It can be managed under year-round continuous grazing but works best under rotational and limited grazing. Nutritional value and weight gains are good for 60 to 80 days beginning in June. During the winter, dormant Old World bluestem can be grazed by cows or stockers with a protein supplement.

Managing Old World bluestem is similar to weeping lovegrass, but fertilize with a single application of 30 to 50 pounds of nitrogen in May. Rotational grazing should be based on 30- to 45-day cycles with four to seven days of grazing on each paddock.



See Max Armstrong hosting 'Farm Progress America' on RFD-TV starting in September!

Upcoming programs:

• **Farm Progress America: Best of the Farm Progress Show** — Monday, Sept. 21, at 7 p.m. (EST) and Tuesday, Sept. 22, at 9 a.m. (EST).

• **Farm Progress America: Best of Husker Harvest Days** — Monday, Sept. 28, at 7 p.m. (EST) and Tuesday, Sept. 29, at 9 a.m. (EST).



RFD-TV is available on most cable systems throughout the United States, DirecTV Channel 345, Dish Network Channel 231 and other channels.

Vol. 99 No. 9

Fast find:

■ NewsWatch	1
■ Letters & Opinions	14
■ Crops	15
■ Natural Resources	22
■ Property Management	27
■ Livestock	28
■ Machinery & Technology	36
■ Marketplace/Classified	38
■ Life in the Great Southwest	47
■ Marketing & Management	48

Contact us:

Editor: J.T. Smith
jtsmith@farmprogress.com
 433 Graham St., P.O. Box 459
 Tuscola, TX 79562-0459
 Phone: 325-554-7388 Fax: 325-554-7389

Contributing Editors: Frank Holdmeyer, Alan Newport, John Otte, Arlan Suderman and John Vogel

Executive Editor: Dan Crummett

Corporate Editorial Director: Willie Vogt,
 651-454-6994, *wvogt@farmprogress.com*

Sales: Cherie Averill, 888-609-8787

Subscription Questions: 800-441-1410

For additional sales and company information, see last page of marketplace section.

POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to:
The Farmer-Stockman, 255 38th Ave., Suite P,
 St. Charles, IL 60174-5410



Keep up on ag news in the region; check out www.TheFarmerStockman.com. We feature updates on a wide range of topics, marketing data and weather information you can put to work in your operation.