

April 22, 2004

Determining Pasture Condition

Good pasture condition is vital to a successful grazing system. Pasture quality may vary greatly from paddock to paddock, or year to year. These variations can stem from differences in management, environment (e.g. dry growing season or winter kill), fertility, grazing pressure, or animal species. Assessing pasture condition early in the growing season can be beneficial. If you determine your pasture is in poor condition early on, you will have the maximum number of management options available to you, whether this is interseeding or renovation, rotating out of pasture, securing additional feed, etc.

There are three main factors to consider when assessing pasture condition: plant density, plant desirability and often percent legume.

A high plant density is important for pasture production. Bare and open spots are unproductive and allow for weed encroachment and soil erosion. Visually estimate the percent ground cover for desirable species. If your percent ground cover is less than 60% for an actively growing pasture, you should rate the density as poor. Ideally, you would like to have 85% or great percent cover.

Desirable plants are those that provide high quality and production for a significant portion of the grazing season. These typically include cool season grasses and legumes. Undesirable plants to be aware of are thistles, toxic and woody plants as they are typically not consumed by animals, decreasing pasture productivity. Other plants can be palatable, but offer low tonnage and/or poor quality forage (e.g. dandelion and wild plantains). If you have a high number of undesirable plants, you will want to take corrective actions.

Ninety percent of weed management in pasture is having a healthy, vigorous stand of desirable plants. If you have a major weed problem, you will want to look into why the desirable plant community is failing.

Legumes (e.g. clover and alfalfa) are also a key component to a productive pasture. Legumes produce good tonnage during hot, dry periods in the summer, are a good source of protein for dairy cattle, and fix nitrogen making the grasses more productive. Visually estimate the percent of the total biomass which is represented by leguminous plants. Ideally, 40% of the biomass should be legume.

For more information on determining pasture condition, see UWEX publication A3667 titled "Determining Pasture Condition." It is available online at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu> at no cost, or contact the Extension Office at 485-8600.

Pasture Walk Set for May 4th

The NW Graziers Network will have their first pasture walk of the year on May 4th at 1 p.m. at the Wayne Jansen farm near Turtle Lake. Topics will include when to turn cattle out onto pasture, rotational grazing and transitioning from dairy to beef grazing systems. Take County Road T north out of Turtle Lake about 3 miles to 183rd Avenue and head west. Farm is on the south side of the road.

Scab Management on Flowering Crabapple Trees

Last year's cool wet spring provided our area with a "bumper crop" of scab on flowering crabs. Many of the trees lost most of their leaves by the end of July. Several of these trees also had some level of winter injury.

With our dry spring so far, conditions are not favorable for a repeat of widespread scab this year. If we have a period of wet weather, that could change. Some varieties are more susceptible than others to scab. If your tree seems to annually have scab problems we are approaching the time of the year when a prevention program may be in order. Following is a review of what scab is and what to do about it.

Scab is a fungal disease that thrives in cool wet conditions and causes brownish scabby appearing lesions (hence the name) on the leaves and on the fruit of crabapple trees. The leaves often also turn yellow and/or brown and fall off the tree in June. While it is not common, under severe enough infections, all the leaves may fall off the tree. Trees may or may not put out a new set of leaves if they lose them. Most flowering crabs probably have a little scab every year. The scab that infects flowering crabs also has a very close relative that does the same thing to regular apple trees.

If your tree has a history of severe scab and/or the weather is cool and wet, then consider a preventative program by applying fungicide when the trees buds begin to open. Some fungicides used to prevent scab include Daconil 2787, Zyban, Duosan, Fore and Dithame M-45. Read and follow the label directions for these products. These products may need to be re-applied every 7 to 14 days until mid June, depending on how wet and cool the weather is, again follow the product label for re-applications.

How do I avoid problems with scab in the future? Cool wet springs may require the use of preventative programs in the future as well. It is wise to remove and discard fallen, infected leaves that are a major source of spores that cause scab infections. Also, consider replacing susceptible crabapples, apples and pears with resistant varieties available at your local garden center.