West Virginia has two general types of pastures. They are:

1. Native pastures
2. Renovated pastures

Each of these types have subgroups. The subgroups may consist of:
(A) treated, (B) untreated, (C) cool-season, (D) warm-season.

Management will determine the subgroups. The species that are present are due to the management. If species must change, management must also change.

Native Pastures

Native pastures may consist of warm- or cool-season species. Some of the common warm-season species are broomsedge, little bluestem, indiangrass, and purpletop. Some of the common cool-season species are bluegrass, orchardgrass, red and white clovers, timothy, redtop, and meadow fescue. They may also be either treated or untreated. These pastures are usually found on farms that are leased or abandoned. Or, they are located on sites that are too steep or rough to be properly managed. These latter sites might be more appropriately managed as a woodland site. These areas usually provide adequate quality forage for animals that are pregnant or for animals where gain is not required. Native cool-season pastures would be suitable for some grazing through the month of June. If stocked at a proper rate, it could be suitable for animals with young or heavy yearlings that only needed grazing through June before they were moved to a feedlot. If a native warm-season pasture is available it might serve as the grazing area for those animals leaving the cool season pasture if very carefully managed. The key is graze the warm-season pastures before the plants are nine weeks old. This increases the quality of the forage being consumed. It also requires a good understanding of two different plant species management systems. Interested but inexperienced persons should seek some guidance before entering into a warm-season species management program in West Virginia.

Given a specific management regime, treated native pastures will usually yield more quality grazing and, consequently, better animal performance than their untreated counterparts. Acceptance of the forage by the animal is improved. Digestibility increases as well as protein and energy. A treated native pasture usually will not have as many different plant species present because those plants who thrive on higher pH and fertility levels will eventually successfully compete with some plants who prefer more acidic lower fertility soils.
Renovated Pastures

Renovated pastures may also consist of warm- or cool-season species. And, they may be treated or untreated. These pastures may actually be part of a hayfield when aftermath growth is grazed rather than baled. These pastures are usually found on active, productive, ongoing farm operations. They are usually located on sites that are accessible with equipment and therefore lend themselves to a higher level of management.

These pastures may receive seedings and periodical applications of lime and fertilizer if a soil test analysis shows a need. These areas could quite conceivably be used to graze animals that need to gain well. Even if left untreated for a few years, these pastures will still yield better than their untreated native counter-parts primarily because of species composition. A renovated pasture will have a smaller variety of species present than native pastures. Although the variety is limited the yield is not because higher yielding species are introduced at renovation time. Competition by undesirables is also addressed during renovation.

When pastures are renovated and treatment is a regular part of the management plan, the level of utilization and management increase. These areas may lend themselves to more intensive grazing schemes. They certainly will attract more management efforts whether renovated with cool season or warm season species.

Summary

Keep in mind that you need a management plan. Make your plans. Follow your plan. Be aware that the species that presently exist in your pastures are the best species for the level of management you are providing. If you want to change species you MUST change management.

Where to Get Help

For more information about pasture types, contact your local office of the Soil Conservation Service or the West Virginia University Extension Service. They are listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government" and "West Virginia," respectively.

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