West Virginia Pasture Management
Managing Multi-Species Pastures
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for W. Va. Grassland Limited Resource Farmer Program

What
Many pastures in West Virginia consist of a variety of species. Monocultures essentially do not exist. Most research is conducted with respect to a particular species rather than a variety of species. Which management techniques to use can be a problem.

Why
A multi-species pasture is a complex environment. A specific "recipe" is not practical for management. Understanding how to manage a multi-species pasture should be based on the individual farm business plan and goals.

How
1. Evaluate your pasture
   a. Determine what species are present.
   b. Estimate the percentage of the total composition that the major species comprise.
2. Decide which species are the most important to your farm business.
3. Realize that the present management is responsible for what is in your pasture. If you want different species or a higher percentage of a particular species, you must change your management.
4. Provide management that will enhance the type of pasture you desire.
   a. If you want more legumes, you cannot overgraze.
   b. If you want more grasses, graze heavier.
5. To keep a multi-species mixture
   a. Provide a management system that slightly favors legumes.
   b. Do not begin grazing until the forage reaches an average height of at least 4 inches in the spring.

Summary
Begin your management with an evaluation, a goal, and the realization that the species that are present are the best suited to the present management. To change species composition you must change your management.

Where to Get Help
For more information on managing multi-species pastures, 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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