West Virginia Pasture Management

Effects of Soil Characteristics on Pasture Production

Developed by Roger L. Nestor, WVU Extension Service/SCS
for W. Va. Grassland Limited Resource Farmer Program

Introduction
Soil is the basic resource necessary to grow plants. Soil, however, does vary from site to site even within a very small area. Soils are classified by soil types. Soil types vary in many different ways, including yield potential. Consideration of soil differences is a must when planning your pasture management program.

Effect of Slope
Slope may influence yield potential by as much as one-half ton or more. Or to put it another way, a field that has a "C" slope may provide pasture one-half month longer than it would if it had a "D" slope. Steeper areas generally do not provide as much pasture as more level areas. Keep this in mind when you consider new fencing schemes.

Effect of Soil Type
Soil types vary drastically in their ability to produce pasture. Some soil types have only one-half the potential of other soil types to produce forages. You need to check your county Soil Survey Maps to determine what soil types you have in your fields. Some fields under the best management will never produce as much as another field that has a better soil type. Concentrate on the potentially more productive soils first. This should generate a quicker return on your investment. As you improve the more productive soil types then allocate resources to the less productive soil types.

Summary
Study the soil maps of your farm. Learn to understand what they mean. If you do not have soil maps of your farm, or if you do not understand your maps, contact your local Soil Conservation Office. The soil is your key resource. Know what you have. Allocate your resources to your best soils first.

Where to Get Help
For more information about soil and pasture production, 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.

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, handicap or national origin.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, West Virginia University and the United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperating.
Rachel B. Tompkins, Director, Morgantown, West Virginia. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Fall 1991

5921