



Praising Grazing!

By Karen Clifford,
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Much of Delaware County's terrain is ideally suited to pasturing animals, and many of Delaware County's farmers have begun managing prescribed grazing systems, developed specifically for their farms, to utilize an efficient, cost-effective method of providing high-quality feed for their livestock. A well-managed pasture system can reduce the amount of purchased feed, fertilizer and fuel as well as safeguard the environment by reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

Poorly managed pastures can lead to environmental concerns such as overgrazing and livestock access to streams. Delaware County's ***Agricultural Environmental Management*** (AEM) program can provide the tools to assess your pasture conditions and help you develop a plan to identify resources to maximize the benefits grazing provides to both your farm and your watershed.

What do we mean by a "***well-managed pasture system***"? The idea of prescribed grazing management is to carefully control the harvest of forages by livestock, using the best physical layout of pastures and a custom-tailored grazing schedule. A prescribed grazing system can optimize livestock use of forages while also optimizing environmental benefits because:

- Carefully managing the time livestock spend in each pasture and allowing the proper amount of time for regrowth keeps vegetation healthy.
- Pasturing versus mechanical harvest also reduces input costs and air pollution from the use of fossil fuels.
- Converting highly-erodible row crop land to year-round vegetative cover (pasture and hayland) can provide quality feed at less cost and labor while reducing soil erosion and water pollution.
- Managing livestock access to streams and other waterbodies protects water quality and enhances herd health.



This grazing system on a Delaware County farm uses temporary fence connected to a permanent fence, installed through the Conservation Reserve Enhanced Program, to lay out paddocks for rotating livestock.

Conducting an AEM Risk Assessment will help you examine your pastures to determine where improvements can be made to enhance farm efficiency and protect water quality. Many farms find that their pastures are already doing a great job of water quality protection and that necessary improvements can be as simple as management changes. Paddock size or layout, grazing time per paddock, or adjusting the paddock rest or regrowth period can improve pasture productivity and profitability.

If a more detailed prescribed grazing plan calls for costly physical changes such as permanent fencing and watering systems, the AEM process can help you with designs and accessing necessary technical and financial resources.

According to Davenport farmer, James Keator, “You can set up paddocks and move the animals around, but if you don’t have a good system for water, it just won’t work the way it should. Working through the Delaware County AEM program, the SWCD has designed a water system and helped secure cost share funding for implementation of the water system as well as some permanent division fence.”

Roger Hamilton, who has also set up a temporary water system and temporary paddocks at his East Meredith farm, commented after just a few weeks, “When I put the cows on new pasture there was an increase in milk production, and having less hay to cut saves fuel.”

The Delaware County AEM Program can help you increase farm profitability and protect water quality by increasing the efficiency of your pasture systems.

To learn more about pasture management and to schedule an appointment to complete an AEM Assessment or update AEM information for your farm plan, contact the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District at 44 West St., Suite 1, Walton, NY 13856 or phone (607) 865-7161.