



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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Evaluating Pasture Conditions  
Technical Note  
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## PURPOSE

- Evaluate pasture productivity and resource concerns under current management.
- Identify treatment needs to improve pasture productivity or to better protect soil, water, and air quality.
- Provide baseline data to measure impact of installed practices or management changes over time.

## SUGGESTED USES

This evaluation tool will be used to record the "condition" of each pasture or farm over time. Some indicators change slowly in response to management or stresses caused by pests or climate. Scoring during various growing seasons and during periods of differential use patterns will provide a more balanced view of the resource condition. Pasture condition status can be used to make adjustments which will address economic and environmental issues.

## PROCEDURE

**Step 1** – Decide if you want to score each pasture or paddock that is managed as a separate unit or the farm as a whole. Scoring all management units individually lends more flexibility to how and when changes are implemented.

**Step 2** – Score all 10 indicators regardless of your understanding of their relative worth. Some of the indicators contribute more to the overall "pasture condition" than others; thus the weighted values.

**Step 3** – Estimate or measure as precisely as you think is needed to satisfactorily rate the indicator. Use the scale of 1 to 5 to score each indicator. *Plant diversity*, *Plant vigor* and *Erosion* indicators may require additional evaluation as discussed below:

***Botanical composition***- To support your estimates on botanical composition in pastures consider the line transect, step point method or dry weight rank methods.

***Plant Vigor*** – Enter a score based on the general criteria provided. If the plant vigor score is less than four (4), proceed to evaluating the "causative factors" which effected the low vigor score. Score each "causative factor" independently to aid in developing management suggestions. Do not adjust the original "vigor score" by averaging the scores for "causative factors."

***Erosion*** – Score all types of erosion (sheet, rill, gully, wind), and make a note of severity of erosion for each

type. Record on the score sheet the indicator with the lowest score because this will highlight the need for addressing the specific problem in the respective pastures.

**Step 4** – Total the score for each pasture using the weighted indicator values. If one is seeking a "whole farm" score then each pasture score should be weighted for acres. The "Overall Score" provides a general basis for evaluating farm condition. The manager should focus attention on the indicators or "causative factors" with scores below four (4).

**Step 5** – When a score for an individual indicator falls below five (5) determine the value in making changes to impact production efficiency or resource protection and sustainability.

Pasture Condition Score		Management Change Suggested
Overall Total	Rating	
46-50	Excellent	No changes in management needed at this time.
36-45	Good	Minor changes would improve resource sustainability.
26-35	Fair	Making improvements will benefit productivity and/or resource sustainability.
16-25	Poor	Changes are needed immediately to protect resources; expect high returns for improvements.
10-15	Very Poor	Resource degradation is evident and significant effort (time, expense) is needed to sustain the resource.

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