

Conservation Conversation



WHAT ARE YOUR EXCLUSION CAGES TELLING YOU? By Carl Jarboe

If you are part of a State Cost Share or EQIP contract you may have exclusion cages, sometimes referred to as grazing cages, set up in your pastures.

Have you taken time to visit the cages on your ranch? How does the grass inside the cage look compared to outside? Can you see a difference? Often times the grass inside the cage is much larger due to the protection it provides. This is a good indicator of how your pastures or range sites are performing.

If the grass is very short outside the cage and tall inside you may need to change your grazing rotation. This variation could have been caused by timing of when the livestock was in the pasture; but often times short grass indicates over-use and a change may be needed to help the pasture recover.

If you see grass as tall outside the cage as inside you are most likely grazing properly. Maybe you gave the pasture showing this result extra rest in the late summer, or you are trying to build a fuel load for a spring or summer burn. Often the cages in pastures that are grazed first in the rotation show the best results late in the grazing season.

This may indicate that a change is appropriate for next year. Starting your rotation in a different pasture is a great way to help your grass perform at its best. This should allow that pasture that was grazed hard in the late summer to rebound and look like more like the cage found with the grass of equal size in and out of the cage next fall.



An example of an exclusion cage; a couple of tee posts and a hog panel.

Grazing or Exclusion Cages, whatever you call them are a great tool. Like many tools you have in your tool box they only work when utilized. Take time to investigate how your pastures have performed. Have questions, don't hesitate to call the office. We would be glad to take a look with you, talk about the results of this past year and help plan for the future.

Don't forget to move your cages this winter, usually February or early March, to a new location so the health of your pasture can be measured again next grazing season.

The Barber County Conservation District regular board meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month.

Board of Supervisors
Matt Cantrell.....Chairman
Ted Alexander.....Vice-Chairman
Sam Baier.....Treasurer
Georgi Dawson.....Member
Calvin Boyd.....Member



Office Closings:
December 25: Christmas Day
January 1: New Year's Day
January 18: Martin Luther King Day

Conservation District
Annual Meeting is January 25, 2016

It May Be Native Pasture But It Isn't Native Range

By Dwayne Rice, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist

Converting expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields to productive pasture takes a little planning. Cattle won't graze seeded pastures the same as native range. Cattle are selective and if given a choice, experience has shown they will graze the native range much more heavily than the seeded pasture. The differences in grazing preference may last for several decades. Every situation is different but keeping the CRP field independent of the native range is usually the better option.

Additionally, the grass plants in most CRP fields are not vigorous enough to be grazed the first 3 to 4 years at a full stocking rate relative to native range. Years of non-use have resulted in plants with limited root systems and soils still low in organic matter. The low forage production can be improved over time with a management plan designed to increase stand density, develop a deeper, more extensive root system, and improve soil health. Due to the lower forage production, start with a low stocking rate the first couple of years and adjust the stocking rate upward a little at a time as production improves. A grazing system that provides some timely rest during the growing season will also be beneficial to stand and production improvement.

A prescribed burn or dormant season grazing can be used to reduce the amount of standing mulch and litter prior to spring green-up. Removing this old dead material will allow sunlight to reach the new shoots early in the growing season which should increase tillering and stand density. Dormant warm-season grasses are inherently low in protein so a supplement may be necessary to maintain intake and performance when grazing the old growth.

Fencing and water development may be required to keep the seeded CRP fields separated from the native range. These practices are eligible for cost-share assistance on expiring CRP fields through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Please contact your NRCS office or conservation district office located at your local county U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center (listed in the telephone book under United States Government or on the internet at offices.usda.gov) for assistance. More information is also available on the Kansas Web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

CONSERVATION POSTER CONTEST



Using the theme '*LOCAL HEROES, Your Hard-Working Pollinators*' 254 Barber County students submitted entries for this year's conservation poster contest. Sawyer Moody won first place in state and will be judged at the national level in February. Daisy Carlson and Braxton Wells both received honorable mention at the state contest. Great job kids! First, second, and third place winners in each age group are as follows:

K—1	2—3	4—6
Sawyer Moody	Endora Hamic	Cassidy Rambat
Aubrey Miltner	Cody Tomberlin	Clare Pollock
Lakota Azure	Mackenzie Woods	Mindy Wells
7—9	10—12	
Daisy Carlson	Braxton Wells	
Zoey Gleason	Cisco Almijo	
Drake Whitaker	Rusty Romine	

Coffee Shop Meetings

The Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation is gearing up for their winter Coffee Shop Meetings, beginning in January 2016. Mark your calendar to attend these great informational meetings. Registration for all meetings begins at 11:30 AM with chili and stew.

- **January 21st, Ashland Community Building: Invasive Workshop—Old World Bluestem, Tamarisk, and other state species of control.** Keith Harmony, KSU, Ag Research Center-Hays, Hays, KS and Scott Marsh, State Weeds Specialist, Plant Protection and Weed Control Program, Kansas Department of Ag, Manhattan, KS.
- **February 11th, Coldwater Community Building: Long-Term/Short-Term Weather Patterns and How to Adapt Management.** Larry Ruthi, Meteorologist in Charge, National Weather Service forecast Office, Dodge City, KS
Long-Term Adaptive Range Management, David Kraft, NRCS State Range Conservationist.
- **February 18th, Protection Community Building: “Back to the Future” Cover Crops, Soil Health, and Direct Marketing of Garden, Chickens, Beef, and ???** Gail Fuller, 3rd Generation Farmer, Emporia, KS
Holistic Grazing Management Grass-Fed Beef Marketing in the Flint Hills Keith Long, Owner, Graze the Prairie, Beaumont, KS
- **February 25th, Wilmore Community Center: Bud Williams: Sell/Buy Marketing** Wally Olson, Beef Producer/Rancher, Vinita, OK

DOES YOUR WINDBREAK NEED SOME HELP? By Carl Jarboe

How did the recent ice storm treat your windbreak? Often, after an ice storm, there is some clean up and pruning to do.

Broken branches should be removed. Many different tools are used; a chain saw or a hand clipper will work as long as they are sharp. Clean cuts heal faster and are less likely to lead to other problems. Leaving the broken branches hanging can lead to decay that could kill an entire tree if not taken care of promptly.

It is normally recommend to trim dead and broken branches off first then consider removal or trimming to balance or shape a plant. Sometimes the damage is to the extent that removal is the best answer. Plan to plant a replacement in the spring. When trimming large broken limbs its best to remove as much of the weight of the branch as you can safely before making the final cut up close to the trunk. This way you can prevent tearing of the bark as you make your pruning cut.

New windbreaks can use some help too. Consider spraying evergreens with an anti-desiccant product like “Wilt-Pruf”. This is like putting sunblock on the trees reducing moisture loss in the winter when the ground is frozen. It also helps protect against drying winds.

Another product that can be very helpful is a Deer and Rabbit repellent. These products, like “Liquid Fence” have a bad odor or taste that helps reduce damage from wildlife. Many new windbreak plantings have been ruined by rabbits and or deer. Rabbits usually hit right after the first big snow so getting the product applied before a snow is important. Re-application may be needed.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Barber County Conservation District will be held on **Monday evening, January 25, 2016, 6:00 PM**, at the Community Building in Kiowa. The business meeting will include highlights of the past year’s activities, full disclosure of the District’s finances, and election of one supervisor. Sam Baier’s term expires this year and he will not run for re-election.

A catered meal will be provided by the banks of Barber County. Bankers Conservation Awards will be presented, and an Outstanding Conservationist will be recognized. All entries from the Conservation Poster Contest will be on display, with special recognition to the top three winners in each category. Many Barber County businesses will donate door prizes for the event.