Alberta

Tame Pasture Scorecard

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

What is the Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard?

- The Tame Pasture Scorecard is a simple, non-technical method to visually assess pastures.
- It uses farm level indicators and descriptions to describe pasture health and productivity. Healthy, productive pastures maintain and protect soil and water resources, provide sustainable grazing, and require fewer inputs.
- The Tame Pasture Scorecard allows tame pastures to be assessed without the use of technical equipment.
- It is a tool to raise awareness of pasture management and increase the working knowledge of pastures.

Why should I use the Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard?

- Pasture assessment is important to optimize pasture performance and evaluate the sustainability of pasture management systems.
- Regular use allows assessment of current pasture performance, records changes in performance over time, identifies potential problem areas, and provides a measure to compare fields and management practices.
- The Tame Pasture Scorecard can be used to make informed management decisions.

How Do I Use the Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard?

Step 1) All you need to complete the assessment is a pencil and a scorecard. (A pasture measuring stick can also be used to assess production.)

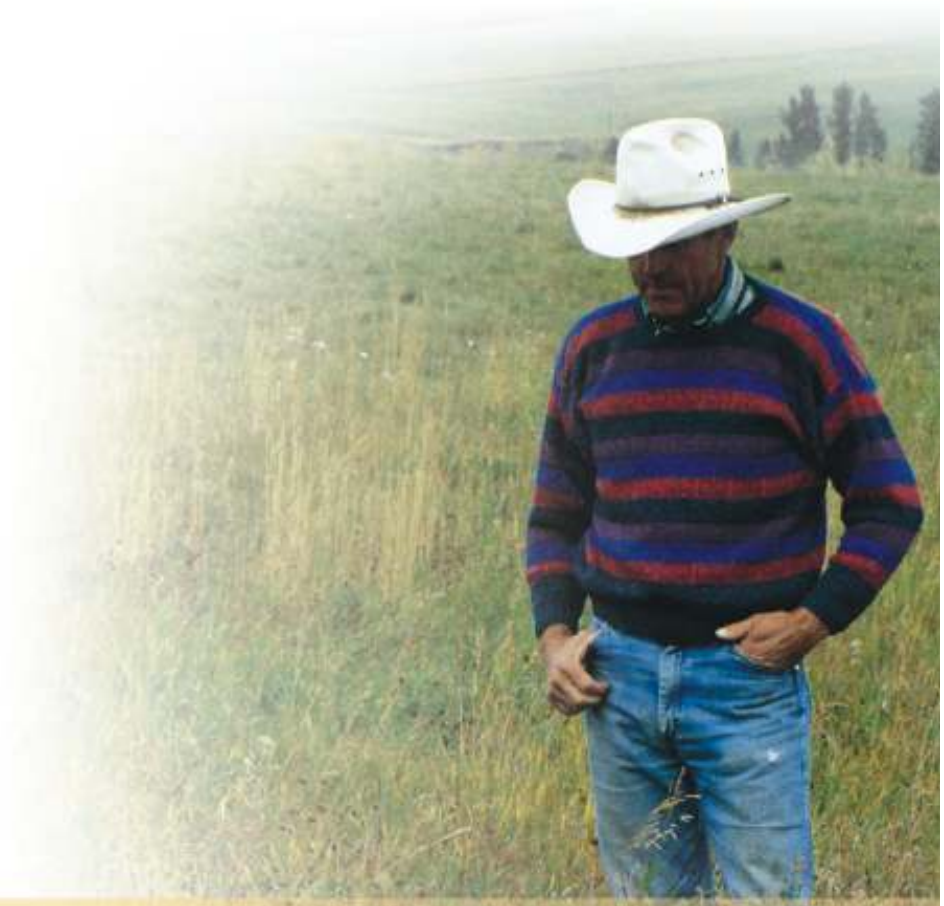
Step 2) Assess tame pastures during the growing season.

Step 3) Divide the farm or fields into separate sections for assessment based on management practices, soil type, or topography.

Step 4) Complete the field identification and management notes section with information regarding the field or area being assessed.

Step 5) Rate each indicator based on your judgment of the pasture and circle the ranking that best describes the pasture condition. For example, when asked for a "%," make your best visual estimate. Include other indicators that you think would help evaluate your pasture.

Step 6) Follow changes in each of the indicators over time. Note those indicators that need improvement and consider management options that might improve the pasture in those areas.



Note:

- Assessments are qualitative and subjective. They are most effective when consistently completed by the same person over time, under similar field conditions, and at the same time each year.
- Assess more than one spot in a field to obtain more accurate results. Do at least three assessments per pasture, more if the field is variable.
- Avoid areas near water, trees, or other areas where animal impact is concentrated when assessing the field. You may want to assess these areas separately.
- The scoring of indicators does not represent an absolute measure or value. Its purpose is to assess the ability of each pasture to function within its environment.

Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard
Field Identification and Management Notes

Field ID: _____

Assessment Date: _____

Rainfall: Normal _____ Wet _____ Dry _____

Temperature: Normal _____ Hot _____ Cool _____

Plant Species Present:

Desirable: _____

Less Desirable: _____

Problem: _____

Grazing System: Continuous _____ Rotational _____

Other _____

Past Management: _____

Date(s) Animals Entered Pasture: _____

Date(s) Animals Taken Out: _____

Number / Type of Animals Grazing: _____

Pasture Yield: _____ Pasture Size: _____

Fertilizer(s) Applied: _____

Field Map
(Mark cross fences, areas of special interest, and assessment points)

Additional Comments or Notes:

_____

_____

_____

Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard

Field ID: _____ Date: _____ Name: _____

Indicator	Ranking			Score
	Low (L)	Moderate (M)	High (H)	Circle One
Plant Population	Many undesirable or low producing species present, little forage from desirable forage species.	Some undesirable or low producing species present along with productive forage species.	Mostly productive, adapted, desirable forage species present.	**L M H**
Plant Density	Desired plants sparse. More than 25% bare ground or undesirable species.	Desirable plants moderately spaced. 5% to 25% bare ground or undesirable species.	Desirable plants densely spaced. Less than 5% bare ground or undesirable species.	**L M H**
Plant Vigor	Poor growth of forage plants, uneven stand, light green color, slow spring growth, slow regrowth.	Some uneven growth of forage plants, inconsistent forage production, often produces less than potential.	Healthy, vigorous forage plants. Plants dark green and leafy. Uniform stand, good production, plants grow rapidly.	**L M H**
Legumes Present	Less than 5% of forage yield from legumes.	5% to 30% of forage yield from legumes.	More than 30% of forage yield from legumes.	**L M H**
Weeds and Brush Present	Weeds and/or brush cover more than 20% of area.	Weeds or brush rare, patches small, cover 10% to 20% of area.	Few to no weeds or brush, cover less than 10% of area.	**L M H**
Ground Cover	Growing plants sparse. Dead and decaying plant material and mulch light. Bare soil present.	Growing plants plentiful. Dead and decaying plant material patchy, moderate, or excessive. Some bare soil present.	Growing plants, dead and decaying plant material, and mulch adequate and evenly distributed. Little bare soil present.	**L M H**
Soil Damage	Obvious soil drifting, washouts, or gullies present. Soil compaction and/or tramping present.	Some evidence of soil drifting, few gullies. Limited soil compaction or tramping.	No visible erosion, soil compaction, or tramping.	**L M H**
Nutrient Cycling	Manure concentrated in a few areas. Manure breaks down slowly. Forage around urine and manure patches darker green.	Some dark green forage near manure and urine patches visible. Manure fairly uniform across field, some older manure accumulation.	Manure distributed uniformly. Manure decomposes relatively quickly. Uniform forage color and production.	**L M H**
Severity and Uniformity of Use	Heavy, frequent use. Most or all plants at same height and growth stage.	Patchy or spotty use. Less desirable plants mature, old stems present. Other nearby plants grazed heavily.	Pasture used reasonably uniformly to appropriate level.	**L M H**

Remember to assess several places within each field to cover the variability across the area. Record the average scores on the Tame Pasture Scorecard.

Using Your Tame Pasture Assessment

High shows an area that is working well. **Moderate** may be an early warning sign that a problem is developing. **Low** suggests changes in management may improve pasture health and productivity. Follow changes in indicators over time. Note those that show improvement and those that are declining.

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How Can I Improve My Tame Pasture?

Plant Population
Desirable plant species vary with site, grazing animal, and intended use. Encourage productive, well-adapted plant species by cross fencing to control overgrazing and patch grazing, increasing rest periods during the growing season, varying timing of grazing, and managing soil fertility. If fewer than six productive plants per square foot are present, you may need to reseed.

Plant Density
Maximize forage production by maximizing ground covered by productive, adapted forage plants. Less productive plants compete for light, water, and nutrients, limiting overall forage production. Appropriate plant density varies with forage species present and environment. For example, bunch grasses will have more bare soil than creeping rooted grasses, and dry environments more bare soil than wetter environments.

Plant Vigor
Vigorous plants produce more forage. Plant crowns should have actively growing shoots to provide regrowth after grazing. Vigorous forage plants need to rest and recover from grazing during the growing season. Ensure adequate soil nutrients are present to support forage growth.

Legumes Present
Legumes fix nitrogen and contribute nitrogen to forage grasses. Thirty percent or more legumes in the forage stand may eliminate the need for nitrogen fertilizer. Manage pastures to maintain legume populations by ensuring phosphorus, potassium, and sulfur requirements are met, selecting long-lived, hardy legume species and varieties, and managing grazing periods.

Weeds and Brush Present
Weeds and brush reduce forage production and restrict livestock access to forage. Managing for vigorous forage plants increases competition and may reduce brush cover. Time controlled rotational grazing may also reduce weeds and brush. However, you may also need to use herbicides in combination with grazing management to control problem brush and weeds.

Ground Cover
Appropriate litter (dead and decaying plant material) levels and soil organic matter improve the water holding capacity of soil, improve water infiltration, reduce evaporation, and return nutrients to the soil. Appropriate litter levels vary with environment, site, and plant species present. For example, bunch grasses will tend to have less litter than creeping rooted grasses. Litter from productive tame forages in higher rainfall areas breaks down rapidly in the soil. Improve ground cover by enhancing desirable plant production and vigor, allowing litter to accumulate, and winter feeding on pastures.

Soil Damage
Reduce soil damage by reducing bare soil present. Increasing plant density and vigor and increasing the litter present will reduce soil damage. Grassed waterways and managed buffer zones along streams and rivers will help reduce soil erosion. Hoof action on bare soil (especially heavier soils) when they are damp can result in soil compaction and a breakdown in soil structure, which will reduce plant growth.

Nutrient Cycling
Ensure soil nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and sulfur levels are adequate through fertilization, applying manure, or winter feeding on pastures. Grazing livestock recycle large amounts of nutrients through manure and urine. Ensure nutrients are spread back onto pastures by fencing livestock out of trees, limiting loitering areas near water, and cross fencing to get more uniform distribution of manure across pastures.

Severity and Uniformity of Use
Overgrazing reduces forage plant vigor and production and can lead to a reduction in desirable forage species and an increase in grazing tolerant plants. Patch grazing may result in under-utilization of the forage resource. Cross fencing, rotational grazing, and ensuring water is available nearby will help you get more uniform use

For more information, contact Alberta Agriculture's Ropin' the Web website at

http://www/agric.gov.ab.ca (search using “pasture assessment”)

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