Love Your Grass as Much as Your Animals

Rationale

Participants need a basic understanding of the grass plant's growth cycle in order to manage their pastures' production potential, while protecting the soil and water resources and meeting their grazing animals' nutritional needs. They also need to understand that weed growth is often a result of poor pasture management. Teaching participants how to identify local noxious and nuisance weeds will help them learn how to control them. When all management practices have been employed without adequate results, then pasture renovation may be necessary.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Learn the basics of plant growth and plant response to grazing/mowing, which will set the stage for grazing principles and grazing management.
2. Learn to identify 10 to 14 common forage plants found in their area and will learn about their growth habits.
3. Learn how to manage grazing by several methods.
4. Understand the importance of monitoring their pastures.
5. Be able to identify common noxious or nuisance weeds in their area, as well as understand their life cycles and appropriate methods of control.
6. Have a general idea of how to renovate their pastures, if all other management practices have not resulted in sufficient pasture improvement.
7. Learn when to reseed pastures as well as how to prepare the soil for seeding, what species to seed, and how to take care of a new seeding.

Introduction

This module has four lessons. The first lesson provides an overview of very basic plant physiology and structure. The second lesson focuses on managing grazing. One of the goals of this lesson is to persuade the participants to allow their grasses to grow to a desired height before the animals graze them and then to allow grasses to regrow by providing rest periods. The third lesson is on noxious and nuisance weeds that are common to your area. One of the goals of this lesson is to show the participants that healthy forage is their best defense against weed invasion. Another goal is to teach them how to control their weeds once they have identified them. The fourth lesson contains information on how to reseed or renovate a pasture that has not responded adequately to management practices. This lesson covers seedbed preparation, species selection, and dos and don'ts during the first two years of establishment.