Reseed Native Range Grasses? or Plant a Tame Pasture?

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Reseed Native Range Grasses?
or
Plant a Tame Pasture?
Reseed Native Range Grasses? or Plant a Tame Pasture?

By E. J. Dyksterhuis, Extension Range Specialist

Here is a quick check that takes some account of the kind of land and your needs. Mark your situation under each of the three headings labeled “My Operation,” “My Land,” and “My Grazing Shortage.”

If you check No. 1 under all three headings, your score is 3. This is the strongest possible indication for Tame Pasture. If you checked No. 5 under all three, your score is 15—the strongest possible indication for Native Pasture. If your score was 9 or near it (in the middle) and if kind of land is no problem, you can plant either tame or native. But, the choice may repay careful study. The proper choice depends upon: The kind of land to be planted or seeded; how other land in the unit is used; and, the time of year more pasture is most needed.

**MY OPERATION IS:**

- □ 1. Primarily a dairy operation.
- □ 2. Primarily a diversified farm.
- □ 3. Primarily a small grain farm.
- □ 4. Primarily a livestock farm.
- □ 5. Primarily a ranch with native range.

**MY LAND IS:**

- □ 1. Suitable for continuous row crops.
- □ 2. Suitable for pasture-row crop rotation.
- □ 3. Suitable for small grain with fallow.
- □ 4. Formerly cultivated (“go-back”).
- □ 5. Kind that shouldn’t be cultivated.

**MY GRAZING SHORTAGE IS:**

- □ 1. Throughout the growing season.
- □ 2. In May and October.
- □ 3. In July and August—but whole place is suitable for row crops.
- □ 4. In July and August—but some fields are not suitable for row crops.
- □ 5. Between November 1 and April 30.
THE KIND OF LAND

If the tract you want to seed should never be cultivated again—then reseed native grasses because tame pasture will not repay costs of maintaining higher yields than natives. Moreover, since tame pasture must be re-established periodically, such land is likely to become thinner and poorer each time it must be exposed by tillage during re-establishment. Loss of top soil by wind or water erosion, or loss of organic matter in sands, are hazards to be avoided.

If the tract is one suitable for at least periodic production of cultivated crops, you have a choice. You can plant and maintain tame pasture or reseed native grasses. Tame pasture on land ranked suitable for cultivation can provide much more grazing, per acre, than native pasture. The extent of the difference usually increases in proportion to the value of the land for the common cultivated crops.

THE OTHER KINDS OF LAND IN THE UNIT AND YOUR NEEDS

Additional tame pasture will be more profitable if:

• You need more grazing during the growing season.
• Your machinery and labor situation is such that use of fertilizers, weed control, and periodic re-establishment of tame pastures will not greatly increase your total annual costs.
• You should convert some cropland to tame pasture because you frequently now must feed roughage from cropland when animals might have had green pasturage.
• You like to work with machines, seeds, and fertilizers and have time and skills as an agriculturist to put to profitable use.

Additional native pasture will be more profitable if:

• You can use more grazing during the nongrowing (dormant) season.
• The machinery and labor necessary to maintain high yields on tame pastures, including periodic re-establishment or renovation, would be an excessive cost in your operation because of too little use for them over a period of years.
• You now are feeding roughage to breeding animals in cold months of the year when neighboring herds are doing well on native pasture or range—possibly with no more than a protein supplement.
• You like to work with native pastures and have time and skills that could be put to more profitable use in managing range livestock than in practicing intensive agriculture for more grazing.

remember

The best kind of pasture for your neighbor may not be the best kind for you. Value to you depends upon your kind of land and your needs (type of operation and season of pasture shortage).

Tame pastures can produce far more per acre than native pastures; but not without additional costs for maintenance and re-establishment. These costs are repaid with increasing net profit roughly in proportion to increase in value of the land for common crops and to your need for tame pasture in your year-round operations.

Costs of tame, over native, pastures become excessive on dry, steep, rocky, or easily eroded lands; and, where a farm or ranch already has sufficient pasturage for the period when the additional tame pasture would be green.

Tame pastures, like crops, must be harvested (grazed) in their season. Native pasturage grown in summer can be grazed in fall, winter, or spring as needed. It seldom is economical to feed roughage to breeding animals when absence of snow cover would permit grazing on the taller native grasses. Tame pasture on suitable land may produce more forage of better quality when most needed than would native pasture. Therefore, consider both tame and native pastures for as many months of grazing, each year, as your climate will permit.

Reserve enough standing grass on native pasture for winter and spring grazing. It is cheaper to haul cake than both hay and cake. The total number of livestock you economically can carry on your place depends upon quantity, not quality, of pasturage and roughage. A ton of alfalfa and a ton of native hay carry a cow about the same length of time. Quality governs gain and milk production but not numbers.

Tame and native grasses should be in separate pastures. There are few if any known instances, where a mixture of native and domesticated plants was maintained under grazing use with satisfactory production from both kinds. The management which favored one group has worked to the detriment of the other. Nature operates to restore the kind of plant cover originally on the land. We—in establishing and maintaining tame pasture, or any domesticated plants—must prevent this process.

For professional assistance with mixtures, establishment, and grazing management, contact your County Agricultural Agent or other local pasture or range specialist.
This is one of five new Fact Sheets for ranchers and livestock farmers, specifically aimed at common problems of ranges and tame pastures, published by the Cooperative Extension Service of South Dakota State University, Brookings. Titles of these are:

"Proper" Range Use: How To Rate Use on Your Native Pastures.
Reseed Native Range Grasses? or Plant a Tame Pasture?
My Rangelands: What Kinds? How Good?

Range Seedings: Kinds that Succeed and Kinds That Fail.
Graze Longer and Feed Less Roughage: Systems to Balance Native and Tame Pastures With Seasonal Needs.