

Get Pastures Back In Shape

Warm season pastures took a beating the past year due to heavy livestock grazing and severe cold weather. But some quick action can get them back in shape, said Don J. Dorsett, forage specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University System.

"Alternatives are to leave the pasture alone to recover on its own over a period of years or to promote fast recovery, beginning with a good fertility program. Fertilizer will sustain damaged pasture until top growth and root systems can redevelop," said Dorsett.

For an accurate inventory of fertility

needs, take a soil sample, suggests the specialist. A general recommendation for areas not deficient in potassium is to apply no less than 50 pounds of nitrogen and 40-50 pounds of phosphorus per acre. On hay meadows, double rates for the first application. In potassium deficient areas, put down at least 80 pounds of potassium for every 100 pounds of nitrogen.

"Weed control is the most obvious need after a fertility program," said Dorsett. "Severe winter weather broke the dormancy on many weed seeds as well as weakened grasses, thus causing increased weed problems. Controlling weeds eliminates competition between weeds and grass for light, space, moisture and nutrients, allowing pastures to recover more quickly."

Deferred grazing can also be used to

encourage recovery, said the specialist. Allow about six inches of forage leaf buildup.

Plants manufacture their own food source through the leaf surface since they do not use fertilizer elements directly. Instead, plants absorb fertilizer into their leaves where photosynthesis occurs to make plant food.

Over the next 120 days, pastures will recover faster with a good fertility and weed control program and some deferred grazing, Dorsett said. 

