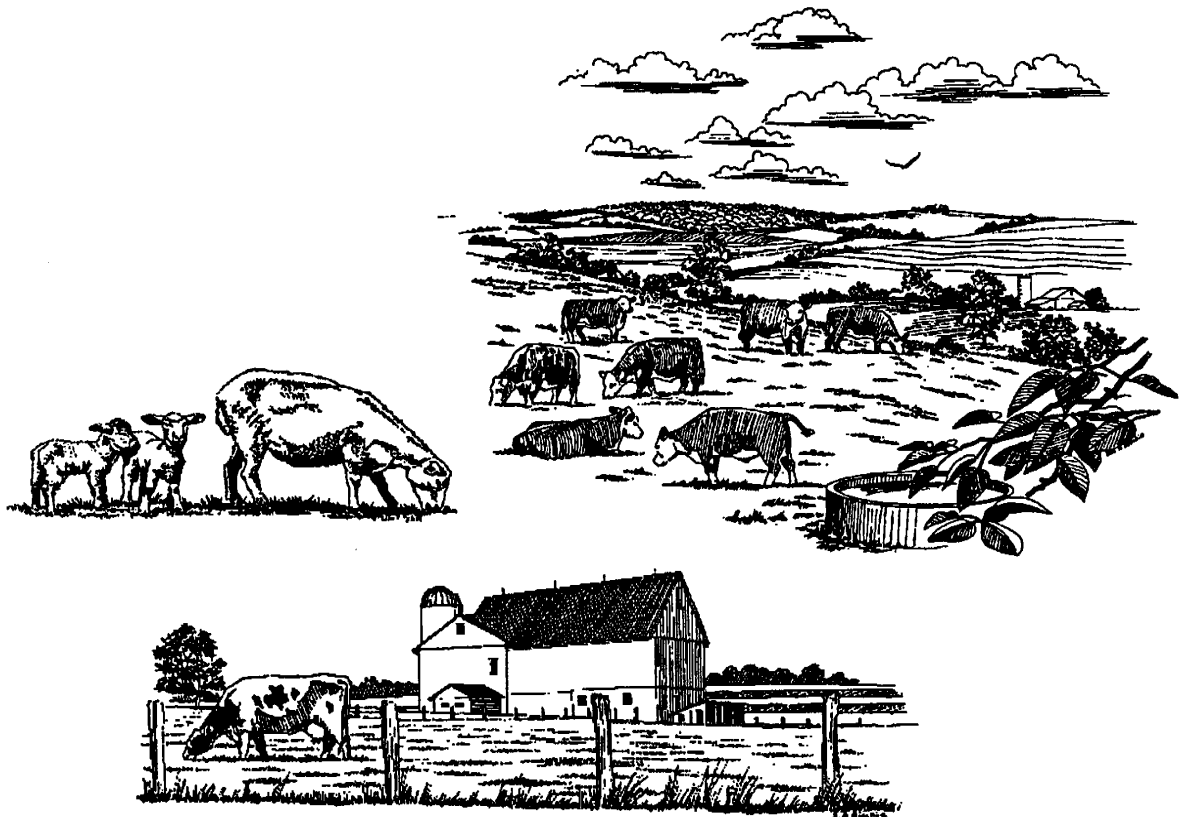


Pasture in the Northeast Region of the United States

Workshop Proceedings



April 26 - 28, 1988

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PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

Pasture In The Northeast Region Of The United States

A WORKSHOP

April 25-28, 1988

NORTHEAST PASTURE MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Ronald Allbee-Vermont Department of Agriculture
Barton Baker-West Virginia University
James Cropper-Soil Conservation Service, NENTC
Hillary Dustin, Forest Service, New York
Robert Francis-Soil Conservation Service, NENTC
Richard Hill-Agric. Research Service, Reg. Pasture Lab.
Joseph Hlubik-The Pennsylvania State University
Robert Lucey-Cornell University
James Mitchell-University of New Hampshire
Albert Smith-University of Vermont, Cmte. Chair
Rollin Swank-Soil Conservation Service, WV
John Titchner-Soil Conservation Service, VT
Lester Vough, University of Maryland

Ex Officio:

John Artz-Extension Service, Washington, D.C.
Dale Zinn-NE Director, State Agric. Exp. Stations

Proceedings Editor

James B. Cropper, Conservation Agronomist

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Workshop Overview

Fourteen million acres of pastureland exist in the Northeast. Of all the major land uses it is the least managed. Many a pasture has never seen a bit of lime other than what was inadvertently tracked from the barn floor by the cows' hooves. Most are exercise lots for dairy cows or heifers shortly after the spring flush. Fertilizer applications are those spread out of the backside of the grazing animal. Those poor animals were forced to scrounge for every bite, but it was they who were out there futilely trying to harvest it, not the farmer.

The low productivity went unnoticed and the resource ignored and unmanaged. Big blue was in. Automation made America what it is. The farmer and agricultural support institutions were impressed with the gadgetry that came with automation. It was labor saving! So the farmer spent hours sweating over haybines, rakes, choppers, blowers, plows, planters, and sprayers to produce and harvest forages. These tons of forages were hauled to high tech, budget-crunching monuments of steel and concrete, i.e., elaborate feeding facilities. All dependent on electricity and maintenance to keep running smoothly and efficiently.

Meanwhile, the most labor-saving and efficient machine on the farm was getting hoof rot and out of condition in the dry lot and free stall. Meanwhile, acres bought and paid-for, or being paid-for, were being wasted, not paying for themselves. Perhaps quite a few growing beautiful stands of multiflora rose and other assorted briars and weeds.

High tech is out; low tech is in. Low input agriculture is now the rage. Farmers, though, are not trendy. The basic fact is the cow or sheep is the most efficient harvester of forages. Never mind the old studies that compared production efficiencies between mechanically just-harvested forages with grazed forages. They conveniently ignored losses of dry matter during storage due to spoilage, fermentation, and seepage or the plain fact that on-the-farm losses at harvest due to weather and less than ideal harvesting techniques also prevail over hypothetical optimum conditions.

Today, the catalyst is here to make pasture management as widely adopted as conservation tillage. With conservation tillage, it was the wide array of effective herbicides and heavy planters. For pasture management, it is the recent innovation in fencing materials and chargers. Their ease of installation and maneuverability make rotational pasture much more acceptable. Before, the farmer was faced with building and maintaining the old hot wire or older yet barbed or woven wire fences for pasture divisions. If the divisions were too big or small, it was too late to change. It got real old, real fast. Low profit margins for several years have also taken the glamour away from automated feeding systems.

With this background, this workshop and its goal of rekindling interest in good pasture management is timely. However, this is only the initial step. The Northeast Pasture Management Coordinating Committee will be working on a Pasture Management Handbook, a series of fact sheets to promote the proper management of the various components involved in forage and animal production on pasture. The involvement of everyone from the various agencies represented will do much to produce valuable fact sheets and see that the fact sheets are employed by the grassland farmer.

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