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## **News and Information from UT-TSU Extension Wilson County**

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### **Winter Conditions Can be Tough on Pastures**

Winter is tough time for pastures. Cold, rainy weather and the combination of livestock wreaks havoc on pastures. Winter is a great time to think about your pasture management and come up with a plan for what you may want to accomplish going forward. When renovating or reestablishing pastures, it is often a multi-year process.

Pull up a map of your farm and consider your pasture layout:

- Consider what will make grazing or grazing patterns more efficient
- Consider designating a sacrifice lot for wet times, winter times, etc.
- Consider rotational grazing and think about which areas to split and the pattern for rotation.

Taking care of pastures during the winter by not allowing livestock to nibble or trample the grass to the ground can be very beneficial to the future quality of that pasture. The grass is not growing when soil temperatures average below 50 degrees. Overgrazing and trampling damages perennial grass plants, which will take them much longer to recover in the spring. In addition, cattle or livestock hooves slice through the soil in wet conditions, damaging root systems and further slowing spring recovery.

A “sacrifice lot” would be an ideal place to turn cattle or livestock during the winter, or designate one pasture as the “winter pasture,” knowing that it will need to be renovated in the spring. If your sacrifice lots gets very muddy in the winter and spring, look into installing heavy use pads, which will help improve drainage dramatically. Talk to your Natural Resource Conservation Office in regard to constructing and using heavy use pads and areas.

Then keep cattle or livestock off the pastures in spring until they have recovered and grown back from the winter. A good guideline is to wait until there is 5-6” of growth before grazing. As soils warm and with plenty of good sunshine, grasses will quickly recover if they have not been overgrazed.

Another important part of pasture management is good fertility and that means soil testing. If you have not tested your soils within the last 3 years, you can take soil samples any time the ground is not frozen. It is important to collect a good representative sample of each of your pastures. Contact your County Extension Office for help and instructions.

For more information on Extension programs, contact the UT-TSU Extension Office in Wilson County at 615-444-9584. You can also find us on Facebook or visit our website: [extension.tennessee.edu/wilson](http://extension.tennessee.edu/wilson)

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