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

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### **Challenges of Pasture Management for Horse Owners**

In an ideal world all horse pastures would be covered with lush green grass and horses grazing at will. That is the ideal but is not the reality usually. For horse owners the management of paddocks for the presence of grass can be a challenge which does not have an easy answer as most horse owners have less ground available than is ideal. Also the structure of horse's hooves are very hard on soils and plants.

A common problem observed in horse pastures is erosion or visible soil loss, which can lead to decreased pasture quality or can result in decreased pasture quality. The spring is a great time to identify soil erosion issues and take steps to boost your pasture quality.

Soil erosion has several impacts. The soil particles run into ponds and creeks and decrease water quality by making the water turbid and increase in nutrient load in the water.. Not only does the soil loss negatively affect water, but topsoil containing nutrients is lost from your pasture. Those nutrients are needed to support the growth of pasture grasses. The best place for your soil is in your pastures.

Erosion is most commonly seen in high traffic areas, such as along fence lines and near feeding areas or waterers, but erosion can also be widespread across a pasture. There may even be more bare soil visible than green plants and, in more severe cases, small gullies may be visible throughout the pasture. A sloping pasture is very prone to erosion. If traffic is not decreased, such in resting a pasture or limit grazing, there will be a decrease in grass which leads to more soil loss. The presence of growing plants helps slow down the displacement of soil during rain events and keeps the soil particles in place. Therefore, managing your pastures to have quality stands of grasses will help prevent erosion.

A soil test is the first step to increasing pasture quality. Soil test results gives a snapshot of what nutrients are currently present in your soil as well as recommendations for if nutrients need to be added A soil test also determines the soil pH and if the pH needs to adjusted for better plant growth.

Bare spots in pastures should be reseeded and recommended fertilizer applied to these areas .Areas that have been reseeded should be rested to allow grass to begin growing and healthy root systems to develop. Allowing the pasture time to establish is one of the most important management practices to increase pasture quality. If you have erosion in multiple pastures, start by tackling one pasture at a time to give enough rest time for a good stand of grass to develop before horses are returned the pasture.

Pasture and paddock quality does not have a "one size fits all" answer. Pasture management is essential and is driven by type of soil, fertility, presence or absence of organic matter and perhaps number of

horses that share that space. Limit grazing may be required. Care of pasture during rainy and other wet conditions is very important. Weed control, soil fertility and sloping ground all impact the quality of the pasture.

A good place to begin is by contacting your County Extension Office and asking for an Extension Agent to visit and discuss challenges you may be experiencing in your pasture. They will be glad to discuss remediation steps. They cannot work miracles but they can help and give suggestions.

For information on these and other 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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