Winter Pasture Management Tips
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With the change in temperatures and the recent moisture the last several weeks, how you manage your pastures now can make all the difference in forage quality, animal growth and weed control problems next spring.

Pasture Fertility Management
Healthy pastures need good fertility management to maximize forage production and animal health. During this time of the year as the weather gets colder, pasture grasses and legumes begin to go into dormancy and use little of the nutrients found in the soil, pasture fertilization is not normally a concern. But in fact, this is a good time to apply Phosphorus, Potassium and Sulfur, which are nutrients that tie up tightly to soil particles (less hazard to cause ground water contamination) and take a longer time to become available to the plant as compared to Nitrogen. During the winter months the rain and snow will help to move broadcasted nutrients into the soil so they will be available for next spring. Applications of lime for those with low ph problems is also suggested at this time of the year for the same reasons.

Note, winter applications or Nitrogen are not recommended as Nitrogen is very mobile and does not tie up well to soil particles and can move easily into the groundwater and cause contamination. It should be stressed that if there is potential for surface water runoff such as with hillside or severely compacted pastures etc., broadcast applications of any nutrient have the potential for causing surface water contamination, so extreme care must be exercised as to when and how applications are made.

### Grazing Animal | Forage Needed (Dry Matter) in lbs/month*
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1 Cow (1000 lbs weight) | 800
1 Horse | 1000
1 Sheep | 200
1 Llama | 300
1 Goat | 200

*These weights are for actual consumption; when feeding hay, include 10% more to account for waste.

It cannot be stressed enough that before you apply any fertilizer, if you have not tested your soil within the last 2-3 years this needs to be done first to know what and how much of a particular nutrient you need. Information concerning soil sampling techniques and where to send samples can be obtained from any OSU or WSU Extension Office.

Pasture Use – How Much Forage Can Be Removed and Not Hurt the Pasture
The Rule of Thumb for grazing is Take Half And Leave Half, and not graze pastures below three inches in height. Research and practical experience have shown that removing more than 50-percent of the grass or grazing below three inches is very damaging to pastures and will reduce long-term plant health. Excessive grazing in the winter makes pasture plants more vulnerable to winter damage, disease and reduces spring re-growth.
A second point with livestock in winter is soil compaction and plant damage. I have seen pastures destroyed by allowing livestock to stay out on the pastures during the winter when the soil is saturated. Animal hooves can destroy plants by cutting roots and crushing the plants, which reduce plant vigor and open up spaces for weeds to become established. Hoof pressure will also cause significant compaction, which will reduce root growth and water infiltration, which increases the potential for soil erosion and water contamination and takes years to repair. To avoid this problem it is better to bring the animals into the barn and corral area for the winter.

A new publication relating to mud, pastures and horses that has just been published is “Managing Small-Acreage Horse Farms” This publication focuses on how to manage horses during the winter months. This publication can be obtained by going to the OSU web site at http://eesc.oregonstate.edu. Select “Publications and Videos,” then “Agriculture,” then “Horses.” It can also be obtained by contacting the Wasco County Extension Office at 541-296-5494.

**How Much Does An Animal Eat**
Now that you know not to keep your animals out on your pastures when the soils are wet. The need then is to know how much hay you need to have on hand to keep your animals healthy. The following table provides a guideline about how much feed different species require on a monthly basis.

**Weed Identification and Control**
This is also a good time to map out and flag weed problems for control next spring. Most of the more important broadleaf weeds in the area such as the Knapweeds, Yellow Starthistle and Bull Thistle etc., start out as small rosettes in the spring, which is when they are most easily controlled whether you use herbicides or by hand. For those who are having trouble identifying what weeds they have in their pastures, the Wasco County Extension Office has a number of good resources available and include:

* **Weeds of the West.** This is an excellent resource book that provides very good photos of weeds found in our area and information on how they grow. It can be ordered through any OSU Extension Office or local bookstore.

* **Northwest Weeds** by Ronald Taylor. This is a smaller version of Weeds of the West. Again a very good resource for small farmers and can be ordered through any local bookstore.

* **The Field Guide to Plants Poisonous to Livestock: Western US** by Shirley A. Weathers. This is a good resource in identifying poisonous plants in your irrigated or dryland pasture and ordered through a local bookstore.

* **OSU has a large number of individual Weed Publications** covering a host of weeds including Russian Thistle, Puncturevine and various Knapweeds to name a few. Again, they can be ordered through any OSU Extension Office or from their web site at http://eesc.orst.edu. These publications have excellent photos and information on identification and control.

Those with questions concerning pasture management are encouraged to contact the Wasco County Extension Office at 541-296-5494.

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