First Step in Recovering Flooded Pastures and Hay Ground

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First Step in Recovering Flooded Pastures and Hay Ground

Abstract
Flood waters are receding, but the challenges in recovery for farmers and livestock producers are just beginning. We recommend producers get out in their fields as soon as possible to assess the damage to pastures and hay ground, then check out possible disaster assistance. Look for three things in the assessment: debris, silt on the forage, and thinned or dead forage plants. Debris includes wire, metal and trash that may be injurious to animal health and is usually found along fence lines and in the corners of fields.

Disciplines
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First Step in Recovering Flooded Pastures and Hay Ground

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Flood waters are receding, but the challenges in recovery for farmers and livestock producers are just beginning. We recommend producers get out in their fields as soon as possible to assess the damage to pastures and hay ground, then check out possible disaster assistance. Look for three things in the assessment: debris, silt on the forage, and thinned or dead forage plants. Debris includes wire, metal and trash that may be injurious to animal health and is usually found along fence lines and in the corners of fields.

Silt on forage is a big issue because it is unpalatable and could carry microbes affecting animal health. We need rain to wash off the silt. This early in the season, it is likely more
rain will come. If the forage is tall enough, chop silted forage back onto the field to encourage clean regrowth. By the time farmers are able to run equipment on a pasture or hay field, visual assessment of forage species survival can be conducted and should be rather obvious.

Whether the forage plants survived depends on three factors – plant species, time under water and how much of the plant was submerged. Some species, such as smooth bromegrass, orchardgrass, fescue and ryegrass, should grow through a moderate silt deposit (less than 2 inches) and can withstand several days of flooding without injury. Reed canarygrass can stand longer submersion than other perennial grasses; whereas, meadow bromegrass cannot tolerate any flooding.

Time under water affects the amount of oxygen available to the plant, which determines survival. Available oxygen is influenced by temperature. Fortunately, during spring flooding, cooler temperatures allow plants to survive longer under water. Flash flooding – as opposed to standing water – increases survivability because the plants experience less oxygen depletion in moving water than still water conditions. Also, plants with more leaves above water are more likely to survive.

The USDA Farm Service Agency administers the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), which provides funding and technical assistance for farmers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters. Pastureland and hay ground are considered eligible land under ECP. Eligible practices pertaining to pastures and hay fields include debris removal (cleanup of woody material, sand, rock and trash on pastureland and hay fields) and restoring fences (livestock cross fences, boundary fences, and livestock gates.)

Producers with pasture damage or hay field damage are encouraged to contact their local Farm Service Agency Office to report the damage and determine if they are eligible for assistance. If the requirements are met, a formal application will need to be completed.

**Category:** Crop Production

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**Crop:**
Biomass and Forage

Tags: flood damage  flooding  management of flooded areas  pasture management  hay pastures

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Brian Lang conducts Iowa State University Extension and Outreach programs in crop production and protection in northeast Iowa. Frequent clients include farmers, ag chemical and fertilizer dealers, seed dealers, crop consultants, and farm managers. Provide timely in-season crop management inform...