



AMERICAN FORAGE & GRASSLAND COUNCIL

Memo for NRCS – National Forage Week 2024

****For internal use within NRCS agencies***

As members of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we are at the forefront of advancing sustainable agriculture and stewardship of our nation's natural resources. With National Forage Week fast approaching, it's an opportune time for us to deepen our understanding of the critical role that forage systems play in agricultural sustainability and conservation.

Forage systems, encompassing a diverse array of grasses, legumes, and other plants, serve as the cornerstone of sustainable agriculture. They contribute to soil health, water quality, biodiversity, and climate resilience, while also providing essential feed for livestock and supporting rural economies. As stewards of the land, it's imperative that we recognize and promote the importance of forage systems in our conservation efforts.

During National Forage Week, let's take the opportunity to educate ourselves and our stakeholders about the significance of forage systems and the resources available to support their conservation and management. Here are some key points to consider:

- **Nutrient Cycling:** Forage systems play a crucial role in nutrient cycling, capturing, and recycling nutrients from the soil, which is essential for maintaining soil fertility and supporting healthy plant growth.
- **Livestock Feed:** Forages are a primary source of nutrition for livestock, providing essential nutrients such as protein and fiber necessary for their health and productivity. By promoting sustainable forage management practices, we can help ensure the availability of high-quality feed for livestock producers.
- **Soil Health:** Deep-rooted forage plants help improve soil structure, enhance water infiltration, and reduce erosion, thus promoting soil health and preventing degradation. By incorporating forages into conservation plans, we can enhance soil health and resilience on agricultural lands.
- **Climate Resilience:** Forage systems contribute to climate resilience by sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, helping mitigate climate change. Through conservation practices such as rotational grazing and cover cropping, we can enhance the climate resilience of agricultural landscapes.
- **Biodiversity:** Forages support diverse ecosystems by providing habitats for various plant and animal species, enhancing biodiversity, and ecological balance.

By promoting diverse forage species and wildlife-friendly management practices, we can support biodiversity conservation on working lands.

- **Water Quality:** Forage systems act as natural filters, trapping sediments and pollutants, thus improving water quality in streams, rivers, and aquifers. By implementing riparian buffers and conservation practices that protect water resources, we can safeguard water quality and aquatic habitats.

As NRCS personnel, we have a unique opportunity to promote sustainable forage management practices and support the conservation of forage resources on agricultural lands. Let's use National Forage Week as a catalyst to engage with our stakeholders, share knowledge and resources, and empower landowners to enhance the sustainability and productivity of their forage systems.

Together, we can make a meaningful impact in promoting the importance of forage systems and advancing agricultural sustainability for the benefit of current and future generations.

For more information and resources on National Forage Week, visit the American Forage and Grassland Council's website for resources to share with stakeholders:

<https://www.afgc.org/national-forage-week/>

About the American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC):

The American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC) is a national organization dedicated to advancing the science and practice of forage and grassland management. Through education, research, outreach, and advocacy, the AFGC promotes sustainable forage production, utilization, and conservation to enhance the productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability of forage-based agriculture.