



Important considerations about the Disaster Pasture Renovation Program for agency partners.

Written December 7, 2018

Matt Poore, NC State Extension, NC State University

and

Julie Henshaw, Soil and Water Conservation Division, NCDA&CS

The Disaster Pasture Renovation Best Management Practice, part of the Agricultural Cost Share Program managed by the Soil and Water Conservation Division at NCDA&CS was funded at a level of \$500,000 in the autumn of 2018 to address the need to renovate perennial pastures damaged by the affect of Hurricane Florence. The allocation was made because of the need for suitable vegetation to support livestock and to reduce erosion from poorly vegetated fields. Pastures and spray fields in disaster counties that were flooded for an extended period of time may have been killed. Even fields that did not flood may have suffered enough damage from the heavy rainfall such that complete renovation would be beneficial. One special intent of the program is to provide financial assistance to farmers to renovate spray fields that are part of an animal waste management plan.

At the time of this statement an initial allocation of funds has been made and the initial application period will close Dec 31, 2018. Initial allocations were based on pasture acres in each district within the declared disaster counties. Additional allocations will be made as needed across the region (as long as funds are available). If funds from other disaster practices within the Disaster Relief Cost Share Program are not all used, they may be reallocated to the Disaster Pasture Renovation Practice.

As the local soil and water conservation boards evaluate applications it is important for them to consider the extent to which pastures need to be renovated and the management level apparent on the farm making the application. These are difficult things to assess, so local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are encouraged to consult with Extension, NRCS, and the regional agronomists to develop a strategy for determining whether renovation is needed for a particular site and for prioritizing applications for this practice. In the case of sprayfields, recent inspection reports might be used to help demonstrate the need for renovation. In most cases, a visit by the local team to assess the site would be highly recommended.

Forage type will be critical in the ability of local advisors to determine the need for renovation at this time. Fescue pastures that were flooded for an extended period have died by this point and the loss is evident. Bermudagrass and Bahiagrass may have suffered severe stand loss, but those forages are dormant at this time, and it will not be possible to adequately assess the stand until spring. However, since funding is limited there may not be funding available at that time. In that case, it would be best for the farmer with potential damage (prolonged submersion under flood waters) to apply to the program pending a final decision on the renovation. There is no penalty for cancelling a contract, so if producers think they will probably need to renovate they are encouraged to apply for the program. Districts may also request additional funds if needed; however additional funding may be limited by requests.

The length of the pasture renovation contract is 3 years, so producers have until June 30, 2021 to get their perennial pasture well established. We encourage producers to take the time necessary to completely renovate the pasture including controlling problem weeds, correcting fertility deficiencies or imbalances, and improving management if necessary. Farmers are encouraged to work with their local advisors to develop the renovation plan for their farm that will lead to long-term success. The renovation practice requires farmers to do a good job of grazing management (observing start and stop grazing heights) such that the practice will last 10 years. This will take some education in most cases, so the local team is encouraged to work with contract holders to ensure they employ a level of establishment management that will result in successful initial stands, and a level of grazing management that will allow a long life for those stands.