ON THE RANCH

How do I estimate how much corn is on the ground?

Prior to grazing cornstalks with cattle, an estimate should be made of the amount of corn that is present in the field. The UNL Extension Circular EC 287 Grazing Crop Residues with Beef Cattle provides information on a simple method for estimating the bushels of corn that are on the ground.

An 8-inch ear of corn contains about 0.50 lb of corn grain; therefore, 112 8-inch ears would equal 1 bushel (1 bushel = 56 pounds). By counting the number of ears, the amount of corn can be estimated. If corn is planted in 30-inch rows, count the number of ears in three different 100-foot furrow strips and divide by two to give an approximate number of bushels per acre.

For example, after walking three, 100-foot strips, a total of 30 ears of corn were counted. Total ears of corn, which is 30, divided by 2, equals an estimated 15 bushels of corn per acre on the ground. Small ears and broken ears should be counted as half ears, while very large ears could be counted as an ear and a half. Any amount beyond 8-10 bushels per acre will require a well-planned grazing strategy to ensure that too much grain is not consumed by grazing cattle.

Aaron Berger
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When to Rotate Alfalfa

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How do you decide when one alfalfa field has run out of steam and a new one needs to be planted? Here are some things to look for.

When should you rotate to a new field of alfalfa? One obvious answer is when the stand gets too thin. Okay, then, what is too thin? One guideline I use is density of alfalfa shoots and plants. Older, dryland fields should have 25 or more shoots coming from 2 or more plants per square foot to be worth saving. Irrigated fields need 40 shoots from 3 or more plants. If your stand is thinner than these guidelines, look for somewhere to start a new field next spring.

Also look at weed density. Are your fields getting weedier each year? Are many of the problems perennial plants like bluegrass, dock, or dandelions? If so, your alfalfa stand may lack the vigor or density needed to compete. A new field should be considered.

Alfalfa stands, though, sometimes last a long time. But just because your stand is thick and weeds aren't a problem doesn't mean you should keep the field another year.

This is especially true for many older dryland fields. Once dryland fields exhaust all available subsoil moisture, yields drop even though stands may remain thick. In these fields, yield is limited to only what annual rainfall can support. Many dryland fields reach this stage after four or five ears. Rotating to a new field can provide a fresh source of deep subsoil moisture.

And don't forget that the crop that follows alfalfa will get some free nitrogen as well as a rotation-based yield boost. Rotating alfalfa through your fields just a little more frequently will give you this boost more often.

Think about these factors as you decide whether or not to start new alfalfa next year.

2018 Nebraska Cow-Calf Pair and Stocker Rental Rates

Recent findings published from the Nebraska Farm Real Estate Market Highlights 2017-2018 indicate changes in cow-calf and stocker monthly rental rates were mixed when compared to 2017 (Table 1). Nebraska monthly grazing rates represent a typical fee for one month of grazing during the summer. Many leases run for a five-month grazing season subject to annual weather conditions.

Table 1. Reported Cash Rental Rates for Pasture on a Monthly Rate Basis for 2018: Averages and Ranges by Agricultural Statistics Districta

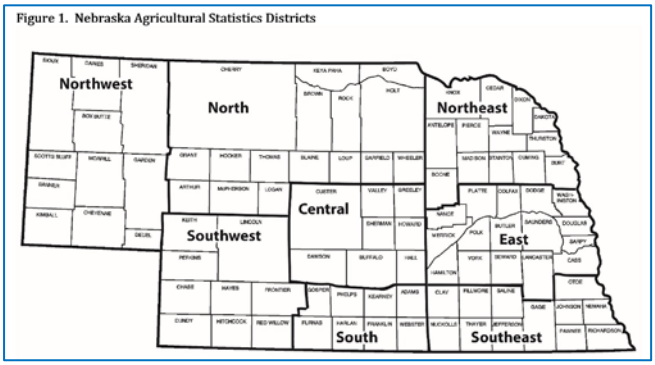
Type	Agricultural Statistics District							
	Northwest	North	Northeast	Central	East	Southwest	South	Southeast
	Dollars Per Month							
Cow-Calf Pair Monthly Rates[b]								
Average	35.65	58.95	52.55	52.30	48.25	49.50	46.45	47.05
High Third Quality	47.55	71.40	64.30	65.00	65.70	61.15	59.70	57.35
Low Third Quality	29.25	47.10	43.55	42.30	40.55	42.35	39.25	39.55
Stocker (500-600 lb.) Monthly Rates								
Average	22.70	34.60	36.65	31.90	37.15	34.40	33.50	34.90
High Third Quality	28.50	41.55	43.50	38.15	45.25	42.35	37.50	42.00
Low Third Quality	18.90	27.15	29.85	25.35	31.00	28.15	29.00	26.60

Source: [a] Panel members reported estimated cash rental rates (both averages and ranges) from the UNL Nebraska Farm Real Estate Market Survey, 2018.

[b] A cow-calf pair is typically considered to be 1.25 to 1.30 animal units (animal unit being 1,000 lb. animal). However, this can vary depending on weight of cow and age of calf.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Agricultural Economics annually surveys Nebraska land professionals including appraisers, farm and ranch managers, and agricultural bankers. Results from the survey are divided by rental rate class and summarized by the eight Agricultural Statistics Districts of Nebraska (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Districts



Reported rates for cow-calf pairs and stockers from the Nebraska Farm Real Estate Market Highlights include by district of the state the average, high third quality, and low third quality. The range in these averages reflect the differences in the quality of the grazing land. Panel members noted features influencing the quality of the grazing land include the mix of the forages present during the growing season, livestock water sources, fencing upkeep, and general market competitiveness for the area.

Contractual provisions such as maintaining fences, weed control, and checking or providing water during the grazing season may increase or decrease the rental rate of the lease depending upon the landlord or tenant's willingness to provide these services. Panel members noted these factors influence the negotiated rental rates in addition to the quality of the property as shown by the reported averages.

In addition, panel members also reported concern in grazing land leases due to potential drought in 2018. Provisions in grazing land leases addressing adverse weather-related events need to be reviewed by the appropriate agency or organization providing disaster related programs for pasture or range to ensure the property may be eligible in the event of drought.

Rental rates and land values presented in this report are averages of survey participants' responses by district. Actual land values and rental rates may vary depending upon the quality of the parcel and local market for an area. Complete results from the survey are available electronically via the Nebraska Farm Real Estate website: agecon.unl.edu/realestate