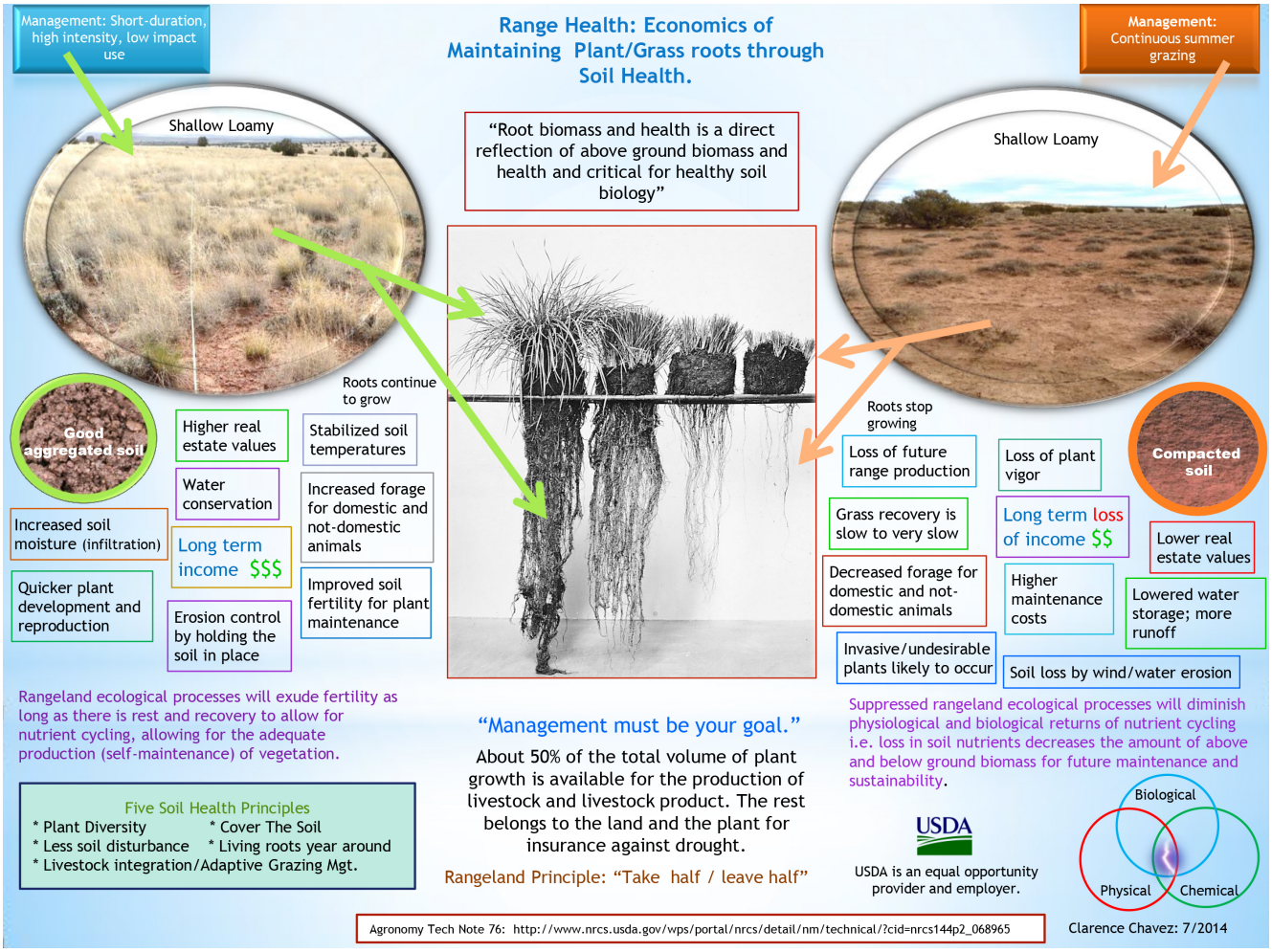
Reading a Pasture

The goal in wise pasture management is to optimize animal and plant productivity without harming the soil, water, and air quality. Regularly assessing the state of your pasture helps you make important decisions. Certainly, if you notice your animals are doing poorly or their forage has declined while unwanted weeds have invaded, you'll want to make some changes. But you should also be on the lookout for visible soil loss, increased runoff, and impaired water quality as those indicate significant problems that could affect your pasture's productivity as time goes on. Soil testing at least once every three years will help you make the best decisions. Assess your pasture's condition before adding livestock, at peak forage supply periods, at low forage supply periods, when plant stress appears, and near the end of the grazing season to decide when to remove livestock. In a rotational grazing system, check often enough to make sure your animals are being moved through the rotation at an appropriate stocking rate and at appropriate intervals based on current conditions. During slow growth periods, the grass needs longer rest periods to recover.



The Center for
REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE
AND RESILIENT SYSTEMS
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

Pasture Condition Indicators

- Percentage of desirable plants
- Percentage of legumes
- Live plant cover
- Plant residue and litter as soil cover
- Plant diversity and vigor
- Livestock concentration areas
- Uniformity of animal use
- Visible erosion
- Visible soil qualities (compaction, color, presence of earthworms, etc.)

Soil Quality Indicators

- Aggregate stability
- Compaction
- Water Infiltration
- Organic matter
- Physical and biological crusts
- Soil biota
- Soil pH
- Salinization
- Water or wind erosion

National Pasture Condition Scoring Guide and Score Sheet

An invaluable tool from the USDA NRCS that walks you through assessing a pasture in a systematic way.
https://bit.ly/2UiCrsh

Web Soil Survey

Web access to relevant soil and related information for more than 95% of the counties in the U.S. to help you make wise land use and management decisions.
https://bit.ly/3haqBIt

Assessing the Pasture Soil Resource

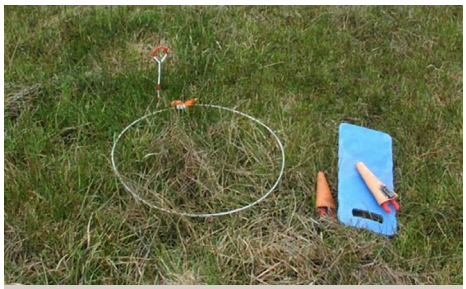
Methods to determine biological activity of pasture soils and tips on improving the usefulness of typical soil and plant samples.
https://bit.ly/3xvq3U4

Stand Evaluation

How to assess pasture species composition, productivity (yield and quality), and make decisions about renovation or re-seeding.
https://bit.ly/3wOjDQ1

Using a Grazing Stick for Pasture Management

How to use a grazing stick to determine forage stand yield and decide how to allocate forage.
https://bit.ly/3efXAuo



Clip and Weigh Forage Yield Calculator

This calculator will provide dry matter yield values for forage sampled in pounds per acre and pounds per acre per day.
https://bit.ly/3qqD2ny

Learn More About Reading a Pasture at The Center for Regenerative Agriculture and Resilient Systems
https://bit.ly/3xTbMk1