

# Restoring Native Perennial Grasses by Changing Grazing Practices in Central Coastal California

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The invasion of exotic annual grasses into California grasslands that were once dominated by perennial bunchgrasses has drastically altered ecological structure and function on millions of acres.

To evaluate the efficacy of a planned grazing program to restore native perennial grasses, we conducted vegetation monitoring at TomKat Ranch in Pescadero, California. TomKat Ranch is a 728 hectare (1,800 acre) with a cow-calf operation (a permanent herd) of approximately 100–150 head.

Beginning in 2008 and continuing until 2011, the ranch employed season-long continuous grazing practices where cattle were allowed to graze large portions of the ranch for several months at a time.

In 2011, the ranch adopted a planned grazing approach which increased cattle density by putting them in small blocks and moving them quickly through subdivided fields.

To monitor changes in grassland plant community, we measured vegetation composition across all fields each July from 2011 to 2013.

From 2011 to 2013, the number of vegetation survey units where native perennial grasses were detected increased from 8% to 80%. The cover of native grasses remained small, but increased in the survey units from 0% in 2011 to 3% in 2013.

We hypothesize that planned grazing promotes perennial grasses by reducing the competitive advantage of invasive annual grasses and providing periods of rest,

especially during plant flowering, that allows for native perennial seed production and increased plant numbers, vigor, and size.

## Main Points

In coastal California, TomKat Ranch switched from continuous to planned grazing.

After just three years of planned grazing, we detected a 72% increase in where perennial grasses occurred.

We recommend grazing managers keep accurate records of their grazing management to facilitate further understanding of the benefits of planned grazing.

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<http://er.uwpress.org/content/32/4/352?etoc>.

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