

Land Use Transformation of Philippine Grasslands

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ABSTRACT

The problem on land conversion has become a serious issue for the government to deal with. For the last 30 years area for grazing was drastically reduced. Most pasture lands are converted to agricultural domains and in some cases cancelled pasture areas has been a regular niche for illegal occupants. The government should take a closer look at this problem and propose a solution in reviving a piece of land that was once before a grazing area. With the burgeoning population it is but proper to devise a plan in saving or preventing the total conversion of these areas devoted for grazing animals.

INTRODUCTION

The two major classifications of land in the Philippines are the alienable and disposable (A & D) and the forest lands, both of which are considered lands of public domain, A & D lands refer to those which have been declared but not needed for forest purposes. Forest lands are areas in the public domain that have been classified for forest use such as public forest, permanent forests or forest reserves, timberlands, game refuge and bird sanctuaries, and areas which are not yet declared A & D.

Of the country's total land area, forest land has the highest share with 53.5% as of 1996. Agricultural land has about 33%, while those used for inland fisheries, settlements and open land

account for 2, 0.44 and 0.04%, respectively. Mining and quarrying has the least with only 0.03 percent. At present, grazing on forestlands for livestock production is found on steep 18 to 50 % slope.

Grassland areas

The Philippines has 1.5 M ha of grassland areas, part of which is leased by the government to qualified individuals or corporation for grazing purposes. Extensive areas are found in the provinces of South Cotabato, North Cotabato and Bukidnon in Mindanao; in Cagayan and Isabela in Luzon and the island provinces of Mindoro Occidental and Masbate.

Grazing areas getting smaller

Table 1 shows the area of grasslands covered by Forest Land Razing Lease Agreements and Permits under the administration and supervision of the government's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) from 1970 to 2000. Areas under lease have larger area with lease agreement having a duration of 25 year renewable for another 25 years. Areas under grazing permits is smaller with agreements of only 5 years. Grazing permits was gradually phased out by the government.

The number of leasees and the area for grazing had been drastically reduced for the last 30 years (Table 1). Since 1971, the number of leasees and areas under the Forest Land Grazing Lease Agreements (FLGLA) has gone down to 8.9 and 9.3 percent, respectively. From an area of about 1.3 M ha , what is left is only 120 thousand ha. In the 60's , SOCSARGEN

(South Cotabato, Sarangani and General Santos) area had 40 thousand ha of pasture lease areas with 55 leaseholders, now it is down to 26 thousand ha with only 22 leaseholders (Montemayor 1999). At present, he agrees with the stocking density of 0.25 au/ha, which means you need 4 ha per head of cattle. In the 1950's, he said that stocking density was over 1 au/ha, but now it is down to only 0.4 which is true in their experience. This could be attributed to land degradation and decreasing precipitation in the area through the years. In the 66's the annual rainfall in the area was 168 cm, in 1979 it was down to 112 cm and at present it is only 86 cm.

Cancelled pasture lease areas

In 1999, cancelled pasture lease areas (PLAs) cover 337 thousand hectares. Various reasons are given as to why PLAs have been cancelled (Rivera 1999). These include the incidence of drought that results to low productivity, unstable

Table 1. Forest land grazing lease agreements and permits, 1970–2000 ('000 ha)

Year	Lease		Permit		Total	
	Number	Area (ha)	Number	Area (ha)	Number	Area (ha)
1971	1,907	943	2,710	342	4,617	1,285
1975	1,812	805	1,826	154	3,638	959
1980	2,009	882	305	41	2,314	923
1985	1,051	461	33	5	1,084	466
1990	1,014	405	63	9	1,077	414
1995	714	252	8	5	722	257
2000	412	120	-	-	412	120

Source: FMB, DENR

peace and other condition, cattle rustling, and non-compliance with the rules and regulations as stipulated in the lease agreement. Concerned government agencies though are yet unable to give any action on many of the cancelled PLAs, and leaseholders continue occupying the area without having to pay for the lease. It is estimated that the government could have earned approximately PhP5.05 M to PhP 6 to 7 M per year in revenues using the PhP15 to PhP20/ ha/yr fees currently paid by leaseholders. In some cases, squatters of illegal occupants have increased in numbers in some of these cancelled PLAs.

Ranches closing up

There are a lot of problems faced by the

ranchers. Examples of specific cases were enumerated by Montmeyer (1999) and summarized in Table 2. One of the mistakes of the pasture leaseholders were planting corn, food crops or fruit trees. Once this happens, the given area becomes agricultural and once a group of farmers petitioned for the land, it is converted into agricultural land and then subjected to land reform. In some instances, people settled in the pasture land, cultivate the land and more often are given preferential treatment to have the right over a given piece of land, at the expense of the leaseholders. Montemayor (1999) further stated that in the 1990s, it was the province of Masbate which had the most number of pasture leaseholders. From his evaluation, it was because of

Table 2. Problems encountered and land conversion in some ranches.

Name of Ranch	Address/Province	Problems Encountered/ Land Conversion
Ayala-Zobel Ranch	Bukidnon	Planted to sugarcane
Darong Ranch	Davao del Sur	Portion of land planted to coconut, area distributed to agrarian reform beneficiaries
Eagle Ranch	Davao del Sur	Portion of land planted to corps and fruit trees, area distributed to agrarian reform beneficiaries
Valbueco Ranch	Davao	Encountered financial problems
Valbueco Ranch	Bukidnon	Cattle herd reduced, planted corn and area distributed to agrarian reform beneficiaries
Fortich Ranch	Bukidnon	Area reduced
Ansa Farms	South Cotabato	Peace and order, area occupied by squatters
Sarangani Cattle Co.	South Cotabato	Diversfied with banana and pomelo and area being subjected to agrarian reform

the political system in the province, where all the businessmen and those in the political arena were ranchers. Maybe, ranchers in Masbate pay more attention to their ranches compared to their counterparts in other provinces. It has been observed that resident ranchers are less prone to problems on squatting.

Crop cultivation encroaching other land uses

Crop production has encroached the grasslands, forest lands, and plantation areas, indicating that more areas are being diverted to production of food crops. More residues from crop production are being produced and with population pressure, smallholder livestock production will continue and further dominate commercial livestock production. Based on the 1987 crop production and harvest data, it was estimated that about 16 m tons of crop residues from the major food crops, such as rice, corn, peanuts, sweet potato, cassava, sugarcane and pineapple could support 4 M animal units (Moog 1990).

Estimates in 1996 showed that 24.9 M of crop residues were available that could support 6.7 M animal units.

The trend

With the Philippine population of over 70 M increasing at an annual rate of 2.3 percent, the demand for land for housing,

settlement and more so for food production. The development and expansion of the ruminant production will be more dependent on improved and efficient utilization of crop residues and farm by products.

Net land area for grazing will continue to decline. Conflicting land use policies will aggravate it. Alternative use of grasslands should not only address the social concerns for the people who has settled in these areas, but also the sound environmental benefits of the various approaches in the utilization of lands.

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