

## Instructions and Suggestions for Associate Editors of *Forage and Grazinglands*

**General instructions.** Associate Editors are contacted in advance and invited to review each manuscript prior to its assignment. However, if an Associate Editor (AE) finds that a manuscript that cannot be judged impartially, contains subject matter outside the AEs area of interest, or cannot be reviewed within **3 weeks**, the Technical Editor should be notified immediately..

An AE must not discuss a manuscript with its author. Although it may seem useful to discuss points of difficulty, disagreement, or mutual interest, this practice is prohibited, in part to avoid misleading the author regarding the judgment and recommendations that will be conveyed later by the Technical Editor.

*Forage and Grazinglands*, like the other journals of PMN, uses ScholarOne's Manuscript Central electronic review system. Once accepting an invitation to review a manuscript, the AE should download the manuscript file from AEs Reviewer Center, through the "PDF" or "Original Files" links. To mark the manuscript with specific comments, use the "track changes" feature of a word processing program like Microsoft Word or the commenting tools of Adobe Acrobat. Such comments should correct deficiencies of style, mistakes in grammar and spelling, or to suggest alternative organization and wording. The AE should look for errors that PMN's copy editors (who are not scientists) might miss, such as misspellings of chemical names, improper or outmoded terminology, misspelled scientific names, inappropriate jargon, and redundancies.

AEs should be impartial toward a manuscript and adopt an attitude of helping the author(s) communicate effectively. Comments to the author should be presented dispassionately and abrasive remarks avoided. The comment "Remove discussion from methodology" is more helpful than "Rewrite" "Reorganize" or "This section is confusing."

Effective reviews consist of: (i) a summary evaluation in which the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript and the most basic recommendations for improvement are set forth; (ii) a list (in a separate file or on the manuscript) of comments, recommendations, and suggestions keyed to specific lines or sections; and (iii) a specific recommendation about the acceptability of the manuscript. Specific suggestions or criticism made in the review should refer to the manuscript by page and line number. Minor corrections in diction, style, etc., should be suggested directly in the manuscript text.

Specific recommendations for a manuscript are: "**Accept**" for a manuscript that is acceptable without revision; "**Accept with Revision**" for a manuscript that contains information suitable for publication, but where revision is necessary before acceptance, possibly requiring further review; and "**Reject**" for a manuscript that is not suitable for publication and the data are such that an acceptable manuscript cannot be prepared without additional research, or the manuscript is so poorly written that one cannot judge the scientific merit.

AEs should attach the edited manuscript and/or a review to the manuscript's Score Sheet page at Manuscript Central, and include comments to both the author and Technical Editor in the fields provided on the Score Sheet.

**Subject matter.** The AEs primary responsibility is to evaluate the scientific merit of the report, which should present significant new in-formation relevant to practitioners. AEs unsure that a report is significant, or that its content is sufficiently new, or that it is relevant to practitioners, should convey these reservations to the Technical Editor.

AEs should answer the following questions for each manuscript:

- Does the report contribute significant and sufficient new information about the subject of study?
- Is it appropriate for practitioners?

- Is the approach or experimental design appropriate and the technique adequate?
- Are all parts of the manuscript germane and necessary?
- Are the interpretations and conclusions logical, and have alternative ones been considered? Can the organization be improved?
- Is the style consistent with the journal guidelines and previously published articles?
- Does the author relate his or her findings to previous reports on the same subject?

AEs reading introductions and discussions must be alert for significant omissions and inaccurate or imprecise accounts of the findings or conclusions from previous work and for improperly attributed statements or findings.

**Clarity and conciseness.** Any part of the article not clear to the AE should be brought to the author's attention. Opinions should be distinct from facts. Nonessential or wordy passages should be identified and suggestions made for condensation. In multiple experiments with similar results, means with appropriate statistical analyses should be presented rather than presenting all data. If a manuscript suffers from wordiness, provide examples of condensed passages, and suggest that the author obtain help with this aspect when preparing the revision.

**Tables and illustrations.** Tables and figures should be evaluated for clarity, optimum format and arrangement of information, consistency with text statements, and no duplication of information in the text. If the information in a small table or simple figure could be presented more economically in the text, or if tabular data could more appropriately be presented in a figure, such changes should be suggested. Tables should only contain data that is discussed in the text and not superfluous or redundant data. Computations should be checked if possible. Graphs should be designed and scaled appropriately to show intended results. Photographs should be informative and scaled appropriately for the data presented.

**Literature citations.** Has the author cited only the most pertinent publications? Are all cited references listed? Are all listed references cited? Does the reference list adhere to PMN style? AEs are not asked to check the accuracy of the list, but any errors noticed should be brought to the author's attention.

**Confidentiality.** AEs must protect manuscripts from exploitation and must not cite or use the work in any way before it has been published. AEs may consult other authorities as necessary to assess the merit of all or part of a manuscript, with due consideration for confidentiality.

**Records.** Reviews, AE assignments and review dispositions may be subject to legal subpoena, although it is the policy of the PMN journals not to reveal AE assignments. Therefore, PMN recommends that records of reviews should be maintained for 12 months following the completion of the review, after which the AE's copies and records of the manuscript and review should be deleted or otherwise destroyed.

**Biosecurity issues.** PMN asks AEs to screen potential articles for research that constitutes a misuse of plant pathological, agronomic, or other methods or a potential danger to society from the improper application of knowledge in our fields. Advise the Technical Editor and check the appropriate check-off box on the Score Sheet if, in your opinion, the manuscript under review describes misuses of plant pathological, agronomic, or of information derived from scientific research.