

Rotational Grazing

What

Rotational grazing is a grass-based livestock feeding system in which animals are rotated from pasture to pasture. Also known as “management intensive grazing” this practice allows livestock to graze one portion of pasture or a paddock for a certain length of time, while allowing other portions to recover before being grazed again. This system provides for the health of the forage plants as well as the animals.



Temporary fencing (net or single/double strand poly-wire) is a common way to quickly and easily rotate livestock on pasture.

through them should all be considered works in progress. They should be adjusted as needed to respond to animal impacts on them, weather events, changes in the farm schedule, or changes in the farmer’s goals. It’s best for farmers to research paddock size per animal unit.

Very few pastures need to be completely renovated to provide nutritious and abundant forage for grazing animals, though a diversity of forage species is best. In fact, the introduction of a rotational system is likely to greatly improve pasture quality. A soil test will indicate the best type of forage to use, and whether the pasture needs liming or if macro- or micro-nutrients are lacking. Nitrogen-fixing legumes should be part of the pasture mix.

Plant growth characteristics are the foundation on which the rotational grazing plan rests. In general, in the Northeast, a pasture should be grazed no longer than three days. After that time, plants begin to regrow. Permitting animals to graze that tender growth will, over time, reduce plant diversity and cover and cause soil erosion. It’s important to have a designated area for drought periods if necessary to protect regrowth in fields.

Fencing will be needed for the pasture perimeter and for the paddocks. Permanent fencing is usually used for

the perimeter, and temporary fencing for the subdivided paddocks. The type of fence chosen will depend on the animal. Horses, for example, may need post and board fences on the perimeter and electric polyrope on the interior. Dairy cows adapt well to high tensile electric on the perimeter and electric polywire on the interior. All fences must be well-grounded and provided with good lightning protection.

Drinking water may be provided in moveable tubs or carried by wagon to the sites. Water pipes, whether seasonal or installed under the fence line or along a lane, are another option. Watering devices should be located, and paddocks shaped, with an understanding of animal behaviors.

Costs

The estimated costs for applying Rotational Grazing is from \$35 to more than \$90 per acre per year, for fencing and labor.

Why

Rotational grazing can improve farm sustainability by protecting and promoting soil health. It is a cost-effective way to maximize animal exposure to a nutritious food source while promoting a vigorous mix of perennial grasses, legumes, and forbs. It can enhance profits by reducing the need for off-farm inputs such as feed, fertilizer, and fuel. This system of grazing also promotes a more even distribution of animal waste across the landscape.

How

Rotational grazing is suited to a number of farm animals, including poultry, pigs, dairy and beef cattle, horses, goats, and sheep. The kind of animal the farm raises, their behaviors, and their weights are among the many factors to be considered in laying out the paddocks. Paddock arrangement, shape, and size; watering facilities in them; and the movement of animals

Associated and Complimentary Practices

- Animal Trails and Laneways
- Alternative Water Sources
- Nutrient Management
- Livestock Exclusion

Benefits

