



Pastures Planned Grazing Systems

Pasture Management: Planned Grazing Systems

What

A planned grazing system is a method of managing a pasture so that it is grazed and then rested in a planned sequence.

Why

Livestock are selective in the plants that they graze. They tend to repeatedly graze the desirable plants and leave the less desired plants. This is because the tender, regrowing leaves of the grazed plants are more attractive and often more nutritious. This cycle weakens the more desirable plants and allows unwanted plants to thrive and multiply.

Grazing and resting plants in pastures in a planned sequence gives the desirable plants a chance to regrow, compete, and multiply, thus steadily increasing the amount of high quality plants available per acre.

This improved pasture condition increases livestock production per acre, conserves water and contributes towards improved water quality, reduces erosion, and improves the habitat for wildlife. By resting pastures, any overgrazed areas can become more productive.

How

By combining livestock from several pastures into one herd and grazing just one pasture at a time, there is a tendency for the animals to disperse and improve the grazing distribution and forage utilization over the whole pasture.

Kinds of systems

Planned grazing systems vary somewhat from unit to unit. The design of the system varies because of the type of livestock, the mixture of pasture types, the topography, and the objectives of the operator for pasture improvement.

Some of the most common grazing systems are:

Basic Rotational Grazing - Rotating the herd through at least 4 paddocks in sequence, which allows the forage in 3 of the paddocks to be regrowing at any given time. Movement through the paddocks is controlled by the growth rate of the forage. Animals are moved to a new paddock when the most important plant species in the currently grazed paddock is grazed to its proper stubble height.

Strip grazing - Creating paddocks with moveable "front" and "following" fences. The front fence is moved every grazing period (usually 1 day), allowing the animals one period's ration of fresh forage. The following fence keeps the animals off of the recently grazed strips, which then have a chance to regrow. This system provides very uniform forage utilization and a constant supply of fresh, palatable forage, but it is very management-intensive.



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First and Second Grazers - This system allows the portion of the herd with the highest energy requirements (such as cows with young calves) to have first chance at the highest-quality feed. These “first grazers” have first access to a fresh paddock. As soon as they have grazed off the highest-quality, leafy portion of the plants, they are moved to the next paddock. The “second grazers” (animals with lower requirements) then are moved into the first paddock, and stay there until the desired stubble height of the key plant species is reached. At that time they are moved to the next paddock in the rotation.

Forward Creep Grazing - This system is similar to that of First and Second Grazers, except that the first group in this case is composed of calves or lambs. A barrier is set up between two paddocks which allows the smaller animals access to a fresh paddock while the larger animals are confined in the current paddock until the desired stubble height of the key plant species there is reached. All animals are then moved to the fresher paddock, where the system is set up again. This system maximizes the gain on young animals.

The Best Kind of System

The best kind of system, or systems, for you will depend on several factors, including present pasture and corral layout, available water supplies, economics, pasture condition, kinds and classes of livestock, long-range goals for pasture improvement, and the time available to supervise the operation. The point is, a pasture greatly benefits from any of the graze-rest sequences provided in properly managed planned grazing systems.

Where to Get Help

For more information on pasture plants and management, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service. SCS personnel provide technical assistance to landowners and operators through local conservation districts.

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