

# Monitoring & Grazing Management

Conditions on different farms vary enormously, so it is impossible to outline a standard procedure for grazing management. One form of grazing management is the

## Rotational grazing system

In planning and operating rotational grazing, there are four key areas:

### 1. Rest period

Rest period (the regrowth and recovery time between grazing). Rest enables pastures to grow and restore energy reserves before the next grazing. When pasture growth is slow, the rest period needs to be longer. When pasture growth is fast, the rest period can be shorter, but generally not less than three weeks.

### 2. Graze period

Graze period (the animal grazing time (hours or days) before moving to the next paddock). Shorter graze periods are best for consistent animal performance, reduced species selectivity and to prevent animals grazing plant regrowth.

### 3. Grazing intensity

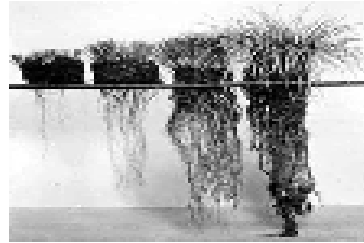
Grazing intensity (the number of animals per hectare in the paddock being grazed). Rotational systems have a high grazing intensity that improves pasture utilisation. However, too much intensity affects animal performance, pasture re-growth and ground cover goals, and makes monitoring more critical to prevent pasture damage.

### 4. Rotation length

Rotation length (the number of days it takes stock to move around all paddocks in the system). Rotation length is determined by the number of paddocks multiplied by the graze period of each. In effect, for high intensity rotational systems with many paddocks, the rotation length and the rest period are very similar. The relative importance of each component depends on the grazing management objectives – maximising animal performance or increasing perennial grass persistence. Rest and graze periods need to be flexible and varied throughout the year, based on changes in pasture growth and livestock requirements.

## 4. Overgrazing

When stock overgraze a paddock, they damage the pasture base. If there is not sufficient rest period for regrowth between grazing, total pasture production can be seriously reduced. Rest periods should be at least three weeks for rapidly growing pasture, and six weeks at other times.



A photo from a Canadian research station showing the root growth of bunchgrass plants.

Continually grazed grasses will leave small root systems; the more pastures are allowed to recover from grazing the larger and stronger the root system.

## Monitor

The inspection of stock during regular movements often results in better animal management and husbandry.

When livestock are moved, monitor pasture to estimate the remaining feed on offer. This provides an indication of under or overgrazing.

It is also recommend that fixed point photographs be taken annually to provide a visual memory. The process is as follows:

1. Standing over one peg, photograph the site looking across the pasture.
2. Take a second photo looking into the plants, about half way on the peg.

## Tips

- Do your recording at the same time each year.
- Take the photos at the same time of day and preferably with the same camera, each year.
- Always take the photographs at the same points facing the same direction.
- Having a recognisable feature such as a tree or a hill etc, improves interpretation.

(This is a guide only. Fixed point photographs are the absolute minimum requirement for monitoring).

Grazing Management:  
Plan, Monitor and Manage



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