

Pasture is a valuable asset to the livestock farmer. On pasture, animals can feed themselves and spread nutrients (manure) on their own, saving labor. Grass is the cheapest feed out there! Many farmers also enjoy the fact that their animals can live as they were originally intended, exercising natural instinct. However, letting animals have free range over pastures can damage nutrition, decrease productivity, and cause loss in value over time. Instead, managed grazing, particularly rotational management plans, can boost fertility and production.

Under a rotational grazing plan, herds/flocks are moved at regular intervals to different sections, or paddocks, within a field. There are several considerations when it comes to how frequently animals are moved and how large a space they are allowed, topics for another time. Instead, let's look at some of the benefits of rotational grazing for the 21st century farmer:

- It optimizes forage growth rates: Grazing species of plants generally go through multiple phases of growth, with the earliest being the most rapid. By starting and stopping grazing during this period, the window of rapid growth is repeated constantly.
- Improve stocking rate: Over the season, managed rotational grazing will allow you to run more animals per acre than if you let them graze willy-nilly. Numerous studies show an improvement of 20-30% in rate!
- Improved plants: With the "rest" periods afforded to the paddocks that aren't currently being grazed, plants have the opportunity to improve their root systems. Root dieback is often attributed to overgrazing, which can be largely prevented with rotation.
- Better weed suppression: Weeds overtake an area when there is less competition. With a rotation system, your animals may choose to graze weeds in their younger, more tender stages, or if you are using a higher stocking rate/mob grazing, trample them. As previously discussed, rotation leads to healthier forage plants, making them better equipped to contend with weeds.

Rotational grazing is a no-brainer to anyone raising livestock. It saves labor, money, and boosts the health of your farm's natural assets!