

## Livestock Grazing

One of the biggest challenges in owning a small farm or acreage is determining how many animals, either horses or cattle, your property can support. It is very easy to underestimate the amount of forage your livestock will consume and to overestimate the amount of forage your land can produce.

Overstocking your property can quickly lead to a pasture that closely resembles a golf green. It may look neat and tidy, but high levels of grazing stress the plants and stops root growth, reducing the plant's ability to provide forage in following years.



To ensure that grazing on your property is well-managed, it is beneficial to develop a sustainable forage and feed plan. This involves calculating the forage your animals consume in Animal Unit Months (AUMs), the forage and hay production of your land, and the feed requirements per animals. Staff at the Ministry of Agriculture will be able to assist you with these calculations. By developing a sustainable forage and feed plan, you will be able to determine how best to meet the needs of the animals on your land.

By creating a grazing management plan, you will be able to determine if any of the following steps are necessary:

- ✓ buying additional feed or renting additional pasture
- ✓ taking steps to increase forage production on your land
- ✓ re-thinking or re-designing your pasture-rotation grazing system
- ✓ reducing the number of animals

Grazing animals naturally seek out the most palatable forages in a pasture. If animals are not encouraged to graze elsewhere, those more palatable plants will be continuously grazed while other plants may be under-utilized. Horses in particular are selective "spot" grazers that will overgraze certain areas unless they are restricted from doing so.

Mismanaging grazing on your property can quickly lead to disaster for the native plant community. As a general rule, no more than 50% of the available forage should be removed by grazing. This allows the grass plants to build the strong root systems necessary for the next year's growth.

### Is Your Grazing Management Working?

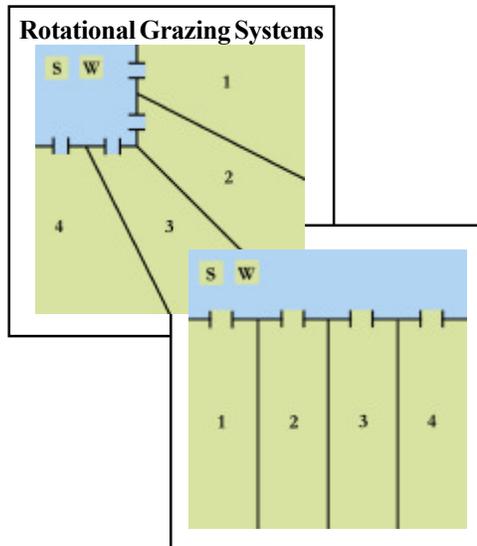
Answer these yes or no questions to discover if your grazing management regime needs to change.

- ✓ Do you graze season long without resting your pasture?
- ✓ Are your animals browsing on trees or shrubs?
- ✓ Do pasture areas contain bare ground or large patches of weeds?
- ✓ Do your animals regularly reach for grass in neighbouring pastures?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you need to develop a new grazing regime that will provide more forage and better health for your animals.

# Managing Your Grazing

Developing a new grazing regime can be a daunting task. One method of ensuring your pastures do not become overgrazed is to develop a rotational grazing system. Rotational grazing involves dividing a single, large pasture into multiple, smaller pastures. Animals are then rotated through the pastures, allowing one pasture to be grazed while the others are rested. A central corral is often added as a hub for water and shelter.



For a rotational grazing system to be most effective, it should contain no less than four pastures and a corral space. The illustrations on this page give some examples of possible pasture layouts.

The flexibility of the rotational system can be increased by using the corral to feed supplementary hay to actively grazing animals. This will increase the duration of grazing for each pasture. The corral space can also be used to contain animals,

such as horses, which only require three to four hours of continuous grazing per day.

Regardless of the system you choose to graze your animals, forage should not be grazed until it is at least 6"-8" high and

animals should be removed when 50% of the forage has been removed. Pastures should not be re-grazed until the forage has regrown to the 6"-8" level.

## Grazing Management Tips

Consider these tips to help you get the most from your pasture.

- ✓ eliminate continuous, long-season grazing and develop a rotational grazing system
- ✓ smaller acreages may only have enough pasture to exercise animals, you may be required to provide feed year-round
- ✓ pasture rotation and grazing management produces more grass, fewer weeds and healthier animals
- ✓ do not graze pastures until the forage is 6"-8" (16-20 cm) high and remove animals once 50% of the forage has been removed
- ✓ become a "manager of grass" rather than a "manager of livestock." Observe the plants in your pasture and how they are impacted by grazing.
- ✓ allow long-term rest periods combined with short, intense periods of grazing to restore pastures in poor condition
- ✓ linking grazing management and water management can make your property healthier and better managed
- ✓ choose a fence type that meets your grazing needs. Remember you are responsible for keeping all of your animals confined on your property.

