

TIMELY INFORMATION

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A Quick Guide to Grazing Methods

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Grazing System – “any integrated combination of animal, plant, and other environmental components and the *grazing method* by which the system is managed to meet specific results or goals”

Grazing Method – “a defined procedure or technique of grazing management designed to achieve a specific objective.

There’s no “one size fits all” method for all farms, each method is farm/situation specific. Several methods may be used on a farm in different pastures or a different time in a given pasture.

Grazing Management – Goals and Objectives:

When grazing management occurs through the implementation of grazing methods within a grazing system a number of goals and objectives can be achieved successfully.

Goals:

1. Improved Grazing Efficiency
2. Reduce Pasture Waste
3. Conserve Surplus Forage (hay, silage)
4. Increased Animal Performance
5. Improved Forage Quality at time of use

Objectives:

1. To manage the pasture and other feed inputs to efficiently produce animal products.
2. To effectively manage *forage quantity* and *quality* over the grazing season, regardless of grazing method utilized.
3. To adjusting livestock stocking rates to improve grazing efficiency and animal production per unit of land

Grazing Efficiency is an Effect of Management

Grazing Method	Estimated Typical Efficiency
Continuous Stocking	30-40%
Slow Rotation (3-4 paddocks)	50-60%
Moderate Rotation (6-8 paddocks)	60-70%
Strip Grazing	70-80%

Grazing Management Good Rules of Thumb:

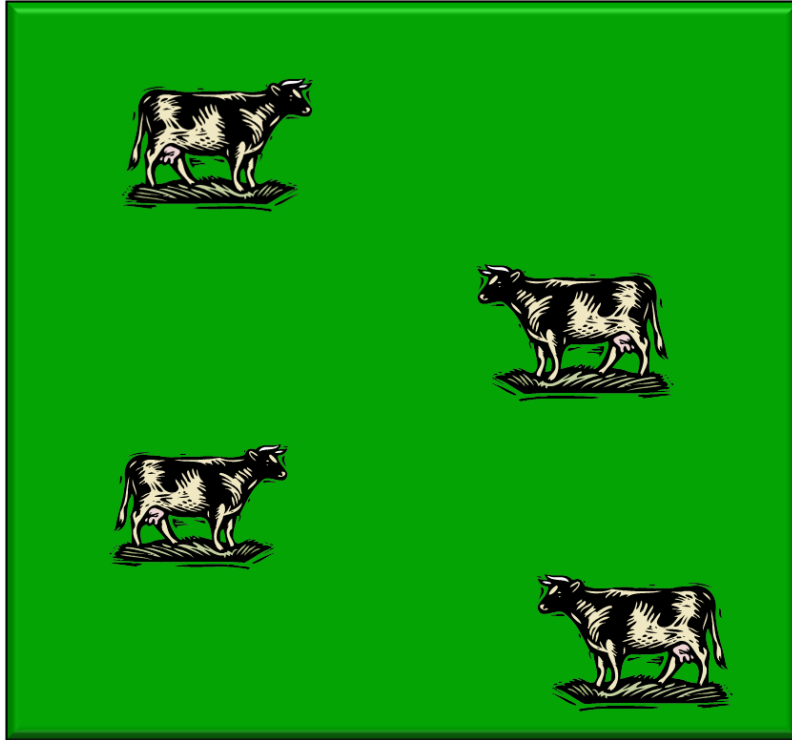
- There is no “one size fits all” grazing method
- Each operation has unique circumstances that weigh into grazing management decisions
- Carefully consider the individual goals and needs of your operation
- All of the systems require management skills and inputs

Match the Grazing Method with:

The Plant, The Animal, and the Producer Needs

To Implement a Successful Grazing System!

Continuous stocking



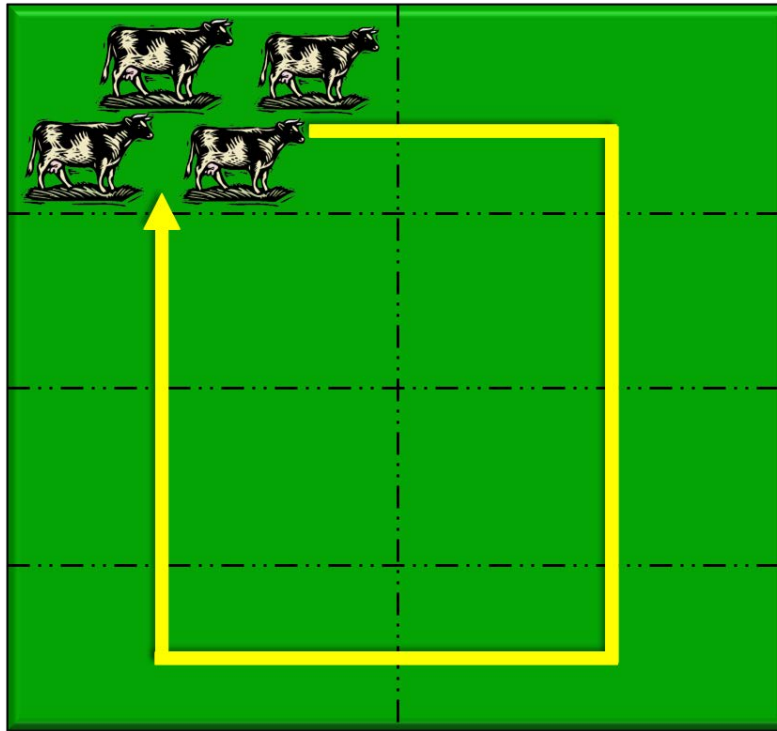
Pros and Cons

- Simple, most commonly used in Alabama
- Animals stocked on single pasture unit for the duration of grazing season.
- Animals are allowed to selectively graze
- Can result in high animal performance of individual animals, but low overall performance of herd
- May to lead to overstocking, overgrazing, and lower forage production
- Least efficient of all grazing methods

Level of Labor: Low

Good Rule of Thumb: A continuously stocked pasture can be just as productive and efficient as any other method provided that available forage is controlled by adjusting stock numbers as needed.

Rotational stocking



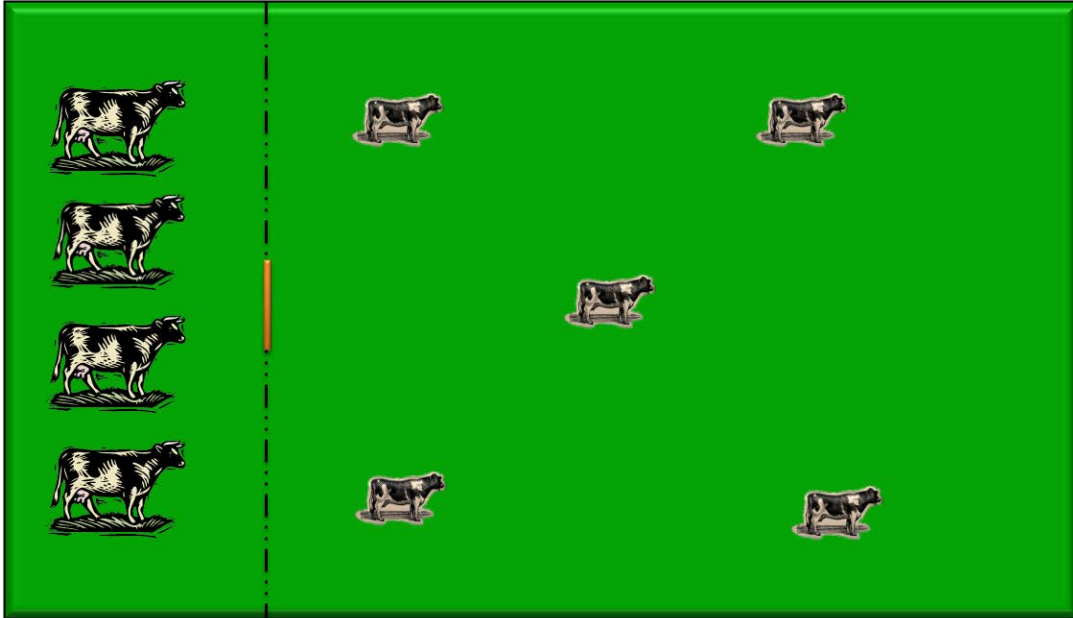
Pros and Cons

- A grazing method in which the grazed area is divided into a given number of smaller paddocks.
- Animals will graze plants to a desired height before “rotating” to a new paddock
- Expected outcome: potential increased uniform utilization of forage species compared to continuous stocking
- Rotations can occur anytime but are typically between 1 and 15 days during active forage growth
- There are no specifications for the number of paddocks required – alternating between 2 paddocks is still rotational stocking.
- Effective rotational stocking involves focusing on forage quality and utilization

Level of Labor: Ranges from low to high depending on the number of paddocks

Good Rule of Thumb: The more paddocks you have, the shorter the grazing period in each particular paddock.

Creep Grazing



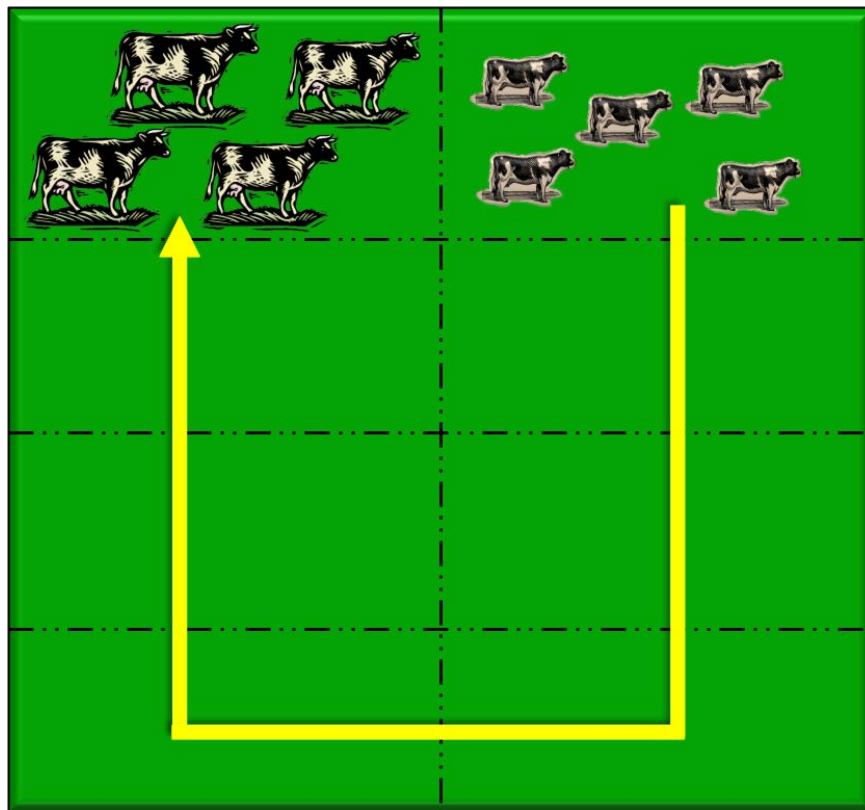
Pros and Cons

- Allows young animals with high nutrient requirements access to higher quality forages first
- Access to these paddocks provided either underneath electric fence or through a creep opening
- Dams maintained on traditional base forages
- Excellent potential to improve weaning weights of calves in Alabama

Level of Labor: Low to Medium

Good Rule of Thumb: When using temporary fencing for rotational stocking, place fence height at level to confine dams.

Leader-Follower/ First-Last Grazing



Pros and Cons

- Herd is sorted into nutrient requirement groups.
- The higher nutrient requirement group (leader/first) is rotated through paddocks before the low nutrient group, allowing them to select high quality forage to meet growth or production needs.
- The follower group then grazes the remaining lower quality forage and rotation off paddock allows for rest and regrowth for continued rotation
- Allows animals which need the highest quality feed (i.e. calves, yearlings, lactating dairy cows, etc.) to have first access to a pasture or feed source

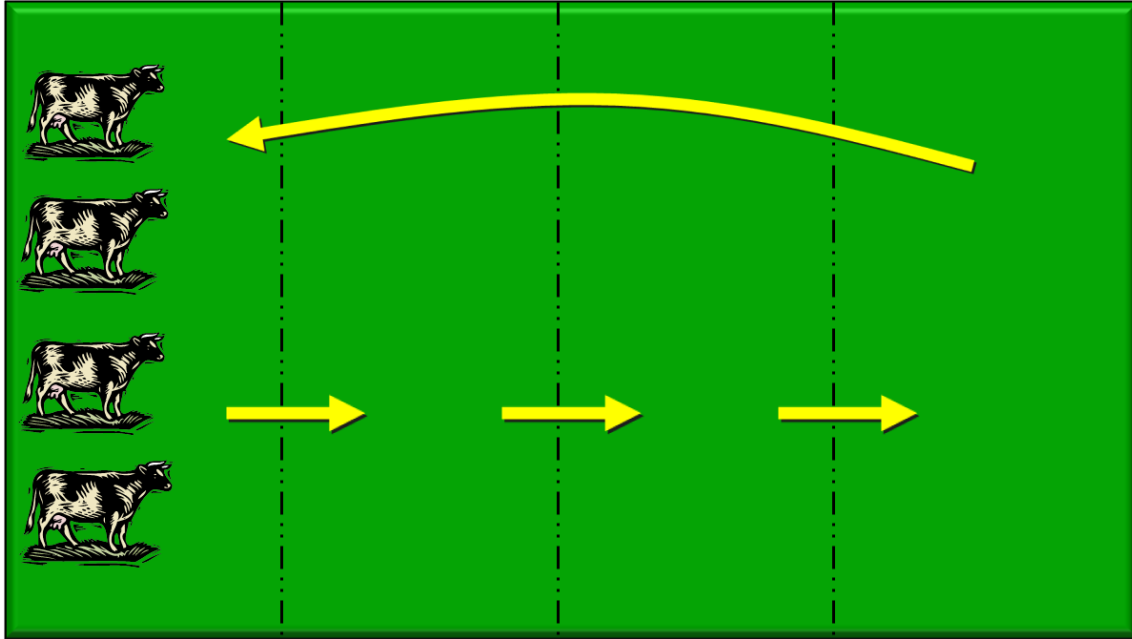
Level of Labor: Medium

Good Rule of Thumb: In Stocker and Dairy Operations.

Stocker: Growing calves grazing in-front of cow/calf pairs.

Dairy: Usually two or three groups (Lactating cows lead, calves and dry cows follow).

Strip Stocking (Strip Grazing)



Pros and Cons

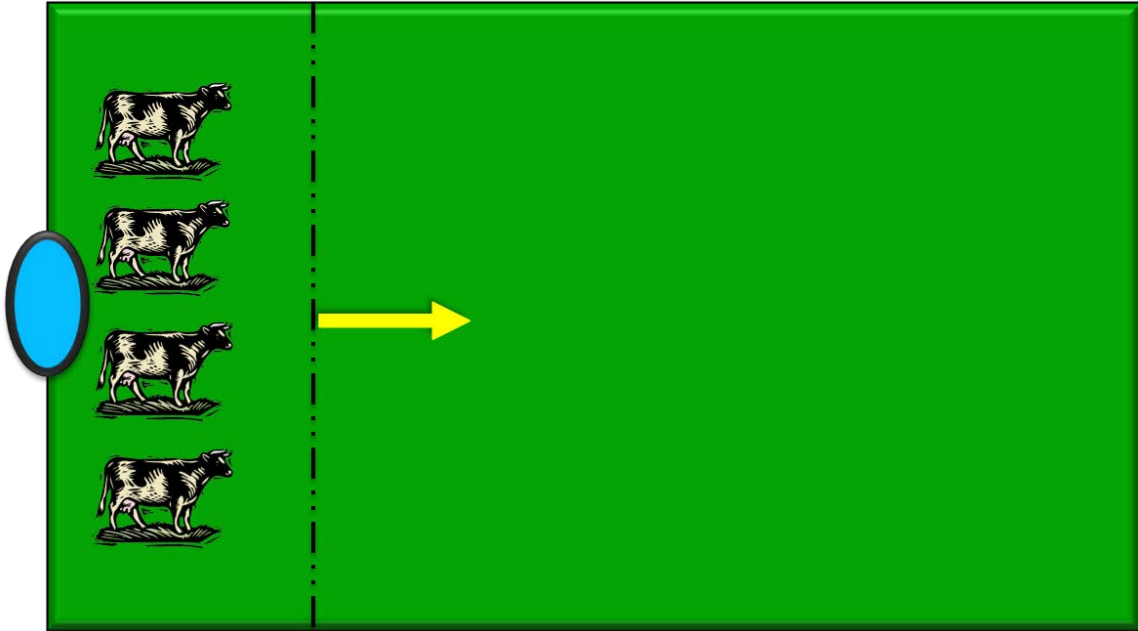
- Self-descriptive form of rotational stocking
- Animals are held in small areas (strips) by a temporary electric fence and normally graze a one or two day forage supply
- Once this area is grazed, the front fence is moved allowing them access to another small area of forage
- Back-wire may or may not be used in this situation to limit access to previously grazed area and allow for regrowth?
- Most efficient grazing method for forage utilization
- With low quality forage average daily gains may be lower due to less selective grazing

Common Forages Used: Annual Grasses

Level of Labor required: Medium to High

Good Rule of Thumb: Once animals are adapted to the system, they may linger at the fence as forage is grazed down...a sign to tell you it's time to move them!

Forward/Frontal Grazing



Pros and Cons

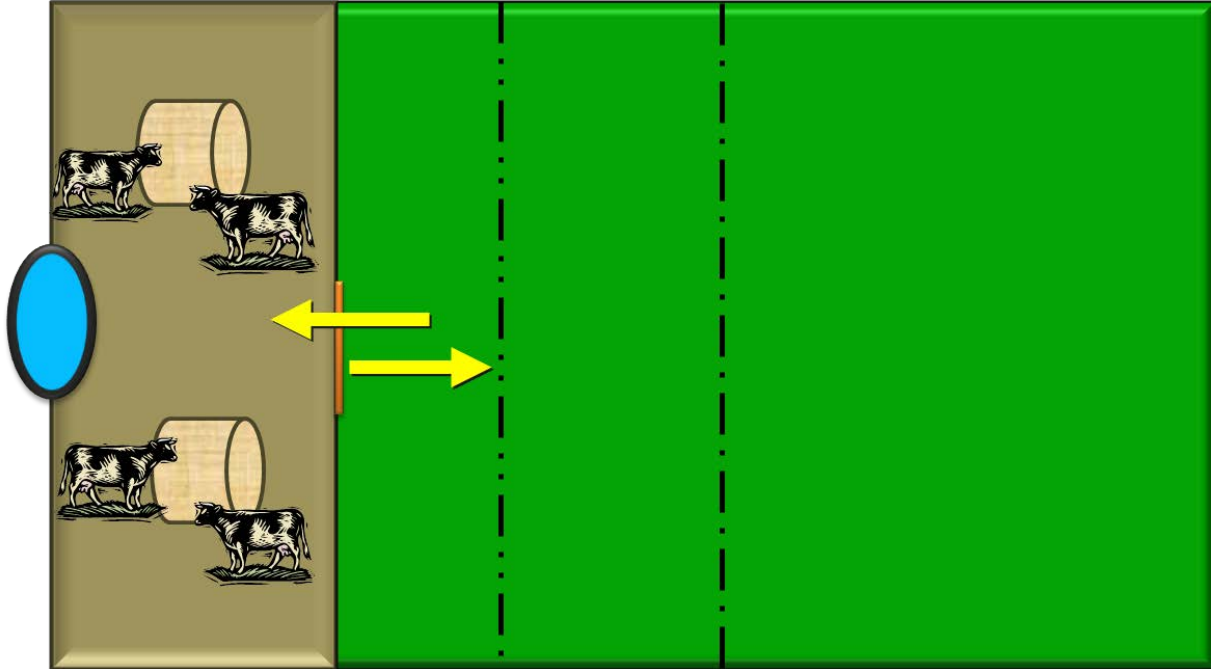
- Most commonly used when stockpiling forage or grazing crop residues
 - Stockpiling: Deferred use of a forage until a later time when available forage is often limited (i.e. Late Fall/Winter)
- Much like “Strip” grazing, except forage is often in a dormant stage therefore no need to limit access to previously grazed area
- Allow access to area closest to available water first, and then move fence away from water as forage is grazed down to a given level
- Typically only allow access to enough forage to sustain the herd for 2 to 3 days

Common Forages Used: Tall Fescue, Bermudagrass

Level of Labor required: Medium

Good Rule of Thumb: Remember to focus on forage quality – accumulated forage that is overly mature is NOT stockpiling – Stockpiling typically occurs 4 to 6 weeks before first anticipated killing frost which induces dormancy of many perennial species.

Limit Grazing



Pros and Cons

- Animals are allowed limited time in a typically higher quality forage paddock, and then removed and returned to a lower quality forage area (pasture and/or hay)
- Typically practiced when animals are grazing a base paddock containing low quality forages (dormant species/low quality hay)
- Animals are allowed periodic access to a high quality (usually higher cost) pasture.
 - Representative of winter or summer annual forages
 - May have greater associated annual costs of establishment and typically higher levels of forage quality than perennial forage options
- This method is extremely effective when animals ‘limit graze’ a pasture for a few hours per day OR on an ‘alternate day’ basis – thus helping the animal to balance nutrient requirements.
- This method sharply increases the efficiency of utilization of high quality forages.

Common Forages Used: Winter Annuals, Summer Annuals

Level of Labor required: High

Good Rule of Thumb: Pull animals out when they begin to loaf or lay down and are no longer actively grazing for higher efficiency.