

Benefits of Rotational Grazing

By Paul Beck
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Contributed

There is a quote in the 1922 USDA Yearbook of Agriculture I like to refer to... "The cheapest of all feed is pasture because it furnishes a balanced ration at a low cost and the cow does her own harvesting... but, in comparatively few cases is the fullest possible use made of pasture." There is currently a lot of interest in improved grazing management, this is nothing new as the quote above indicates, and has certainly been the case for the last 30 years that I have been involved in grazing management.

Rotational grazing provides plants within pastures rest from repeated defoliation by grazers by separating the entire pasture unit into several paddocks. Paddocks are grazed in turn and livestock are moved on to the next paddock and grazing is prohibited on the most recent paddock until the next grazing event in the cycle. These systems can be as simple with weekly rotations or complex with daily rotations. My preference is to have at least 4 paddocks with 7-day grazing event and 21-day rest for each grazing cycle, to get many of the benefits from rotational grazing; but I have worked with producers that have 30 paddocks and rotate large herds of over 200 cows daily.

Cattle grazing a single pasture at a moderate stocking rate have the advantage of being able to select their diet from every plant from the entire grazing area. This can lead to improved performance, because diet quality, protein, and digestible energy can be maximized by the grazing animal since there are few limits to their diet selection. When we split pastures into multiple paddocks we limit access to preferred areas, plant species, or plants; which will limit intake, selectivity, and performance... That is until the most desired plants in continuously grazed pastures are over utilized and die out of the stand. Recent research was conducted looking at the impact of grazing management (continuous vs rotational grazing) on stand counts of alfalfa interseeded into bermudagrass, and after 3 years alfalfa was 25% of the stand in rotationally grazed pastures but only 10% in continuous pastures.

It is often said that continuous grazing can lead to pastures that are overgrazed, yet underutilized. Continuous grazing leads to poor utilization of forage, fertilization and land resources, estimated utilization of forage in continuous grazing is 25 to 35%. Rotational grazing increases grazing efficiency to 65% in well managed controlled grazing rotations. This is why it is

often said that stocking rates can be doubled with rotational grazing. Another grazing experiment looked at continuous or rotational grazing of spring calving cows on bermudagrass pastures. Continuous grazed pastures were stocked at a moderate stocking rate, while rotationally grazed pastures were stocked at either a moderate or at double the moderate stocking rate. Pregnancy rates were not impacted by grazing management or the increased stocking rate, but cows lost more weight and body condition with high stocking rates in rotational grazing. Calf weaning weights were greatest with continuous grazing and were reduced by 20 pounds in moderately stocked rotationally grazed pastures. Doubling the stocking rate with rotational grazing reduced weaning weights by 38 pounds compared to continuous grazing, but increased total weaning weight per acre by 185%. Additionally, hay requirements were reduced by 60 to 80% with rotational grazing.

There are costs associated with rotational grazing such as fencing, development of water resources, and possibility of reduced animal performance, but there are also many advantages. Increased forage utilization but with improved retention of desired forage species, potential increased total productivity of the ranch, reduced drought risk among many others. But, one producer told me his favorite benefit of rotational grazing is that when he goes to check cattle, he only has to look on 1/8th of the place and most of the time the cattle come find him to put them on fresh grass.

Dr Beck discusses continuous vs rotational grazing during a Rancher's Thursday Lunchtime Series from June 26, 2020. OSU Extension: Continuous vs. High Intensity Rotational Grazing - YouTube



SHOWTIME: This year's Missouri State Fair is a celebration of youth, community and statehood. The fair will recognize the bicentennial of Missouri's statehood with displays and events throughout the fairgrounds.

Celebrate Missouri at state fair

Ag Matters: Bicentennial events honor the past, while competition bolsters the future of ag.

By Chris Chinn, Director
Missouri Department of Agriculture
Contributed

Each year, August is a special time of celebration for thousands of Missourians. People come from all corners of the state to Sedalia for the Missouri State Fair, the state's agriculture showcase.

For those of us in the industry, August is the state fair and has become as much a part of our calendar as the first day of school or Christmas Day. This year, the month of August means even more, as the Show-Me State celebrates its bicentennial.

On Aug. 10, Missouri will officially turn 200 years old. Celebrations are planned all across Missouri that day, and the days leading up to it. The state Capitol grounds in Jefferson City will play host to a full day of activities on this "Statehood Day." Communities are holding ice cream socials and special readings at their local libraries. Many locations are bringing the bicentennial celebration to their annual festival.

The agriculture community will celebrate throughout the entire 12 days of the fair, with this year's theme "Our Missouri Celebration." State fair staff and Bicentennial Commission members have worked with a variety of groups and building superintendents to recognize Missouri's special birthday.

Events at the fair

Visit the Women's Building, the unofficial "home" of bicentennial activities on the fairgrounds. At this historic building, you will find a beautiful quilt with one block representing each of Missouri's 114 counties.

Another feature is the Bicentennial Time Capsule. Hosted by the State Historical Society of Missouri, the time capsule will hold items representing our past and our present, with words of wisdom for those Missourians who open it on Missouri's 225th birthday in 2046.

The 4-H Building boasts its own new quilt, featuring blocks made by 4-H members

from across the state. The blocks celebrate the rich agriculture and 4-H history in those home areas.

Over in the Agriculture Building, our Missouri Grown team is celebrating the history of Missouri agriculture at its AgVenture area. Each year, AgVenture teaches Missouri's youth about agriculture and how our food is grown.

This year, fairgoers will see how Missouri's agriculture has changed. We will show you photographs of the Kansas City Stockyards in its prime and the Bootheel region when it was still under water. You can see a miniature history of farm equipment and watch videos showing the diversity of agriculture, the No. 1 economic driver in our state.

Come together to celebrate

The Missouri State Fair is the culmination of months, even years, of work. It could mean bringing a prized heifer or ewe lamb, raised on your farm, to the livestock show — or a pumpkin weighing hundreds of pounds that you have pampered all summer and just might be the largest one there.

For so many 4-H and FFA students, the Missouri State Fair means a cake project or perhaps a hay trailer built from scratch at the high school FFA department.

The state fair means seeing friends we haven't seen since last year, or 2019 for many of us. Catching up with friends is always one of my favorite parts of the fair. It always means funnel cakes, ice cream and delicious food on a stick. It means visiting the Agriculture Building to see the winners of the ham and bacon contests, and walking the cattle barns.

But it also means celebrating the hard work and dedication of hundreds of Missouri's next generation of farmers and ranchers. I challenge you to go watch a class in the Swine Pavilion. Go see a first-time exhibitor walk her market lamb into the ring. Find a project in the 4-H Building entered by a student from your county.

Our Missouri Celebration Indeed!

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