

Rotational Grazing Management Tips

Proper rotational grazing is good for pasture plants, root growth (carbon sequestration), soil health, drought tolerance, biodiversity, manure distribution and it increases pasture carrying capacity and pasture nutritional value.

Incorporating legumes (clovers, trefoil, alfalfa) is important to increase nitrogen fixation and nutritional levels of pastures.

Rotational pasture management will take time to learn and adjustments will be continuous. It will take time and patience to see progress and learn how to manage pastures this way.

Frequent moves to new paddocks and long rests for grazed paddocks are important

The goal is to avoid sheep taking the second bite and over-grazing pastures. Paddock size should provide about 5 days' worth of pasture.

Paddock size calculations can be made using daily dry matter requirements of 3% of bodyweight of sheep and pasture providing 150 to 250 lbs/acre inch of dry matter, depending on health of pasture.

Keep sheep eating vegetative growth. Cattle enter when pasture is 8 to 12 inches tall and exit when pasture is 2 to 4 inches tall

Don't let grasses or legumes go to seed. Should clip or graze before plants go to head.

Rest paddocks at least 20 days in spring and 30 days in summer

Proper grounding of an electric fence is critical. 2 to 3 grounding rods, about ten feet apart and at least 4 feet deep. Keep grounding rods 75 feet from other grounds, waterlines or utilities. Fence should have 2,000 to 5,000 volts.

Sheep need to be trained to avoid touching fence. A training fence in a yard before turn-out can help.

Keep water sources as close to sheep as possible. More than 800 feet from paddock and sheep move as a herd to water. Gates and laneways to water should be designed to allow sheep the most direct route to water. Pipes above ground should be UV-stabilized polyethylene. Conventional PVC can be buried. Full-flow valves are a good idea for larger groups.

Polywire, step-in posts and wire reels are great tools and add flexibility to paddock size and shape.

It will take time and patience to learn tricks about building fences, moving fences, gates and sheep. Sheep will be harder to move until they get trained and learn. Help from a good dog to move sheep is useful.