

GRAZING SYSTEMS

for sheep
and goats

A grazing system is a method of managing how livestock utilize pasture or range land for forage. It involves management of pastures, animals, and fencing. A good grazing system optimizes animal performance, while maintaining or improving the health of the pasture (and soil).



Continuous grazing is when animals have unrestricted access to a pasture for an unlimited time, with minimal or no rest from grazing. It is a one-pasture system. It is simple and low input and animal performance is usually acceptable. If stocking rates are low enough, parasites may not be a problem. Continuous grazing usually results in uneven grazing, reduced forage quality and quantity, and increased weed pressure.

Rotational grazing is when a large pasture is subdivided into smaller pastures (called paddocks) and animals are moved from one paddock to another based on certain criteria. Unlike continuous grazing, pastures are given rest periods which allow the plants to recover (and regrow) and give time for infective worm larvae to die off. The number of paddocks and frequency of moving livestock varies by system. Rotational grazing usually improves pasture quality and soil health and allows for more animals to be stocked on a farm.

Intensive rotational grazing involves moving livestock frequently (at least every 3 to 7 days, sometimes more often) between paddocks. In contrast with simple rotational grazing, it incorporates high stocking rates and short grazing periods. Intensive rotational grazing offers the most advantages to the plants, soil, and animals. Challenges include fencing, water, shade, and management.

A good rotational grazing system can aid in the prevention of **internal parasitism** in sheep and goats but to be effective the animals need to be moved frequently (every 3 to 4 days to prevent ingestion of infective worm larvae) and paddocks need to receive sufficient rest (varies by season and climate; to allow infective worm larvae to die off). On the other hand, rotational grazing can make parasite problems worse if animals are grazed for too long in a paddock or returned to a previously grazed paddock too soon.