



## Grass-Fed Beef Initiative Extension Series

Fact Sheet 4 of 11

### Grazing Management: The Key to Raising Grass-Fed Beef

Several factors are involved in successfully growing and finishing cattle on a straight forage diet. Selecting the right cattle and access to high quality forage are two essential factors. Properly managed pastures can provide the abundance of high quality feed needed to successfully raise and finish beef on grass.



*“Good grazing management controls the frequency, intensity, timing and duration of grazing so that plants stay healthy and productive.” (1)*

When pastures are properly grazed an overall increase in pasture productivity and quality can be expected.

A proven way to implement good grazing management is through the adoption of a rotational grazing system. A rotational grazing system uses specific grazing intervals and rest periods based on animal numbers, paddock size and pasture growth.

The length of time cattle graze a paddock is best determined by how quickly the pasture plants regrow following grazing. If cattle are left too long in a given paddock the animals will graze the new growth reducing plant productivity.

To protect the new growth, cattle should not be allowed to graze a given paddock more than 5 to 7 days in spring when pastures are growing rapidly, or 10 to 12 days in mid-summer when pasture regrowth is much slower. This means that paddock size should be set by cattle numbers to ensure the sward is grazed to the correct height in the allotted time.

For native species the exit height should be 5 cm (2 inches), whereas for taller tame species like meadow fescues it should be 10 cm (4 inches).

The main purpose of a rotational grazing system is to give pastures an adequate rest period to allow for plant recovery between grazings. The number of days a pasture should rest between grazings increases as the season progresses. In the spring when pasture growth is most rapid the length of rest can be as little as 12 days. In mid-summer the rest period should be increased to 30 days and longer.

The rest period should always be long enough to ensure adequate regrowth (10-15 cm [4-6 inches] sward height). It should not be so long that it results in a pasture becoming overgrown, reducing forage quality and causing losses in harvested yield by trampling and rejection.

Paddock size is determined by the productivity of the pasture, the number of cattle, and the number of days each paddock will be grazed.





*A good fencing system is a key component of rotational grazing system*

It takes the very best forage to grow and finish cattle. A rotational grazing system allows for more controlled grazing resulting in higher forage yields, higher forage quality and more uniform seasonal production.

#### For more information

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