

ROTATIONAL GRAZING: BENEFITS AND PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES



Why Rotational Grazing?

Rotational grazing is a Beneficial Management Practice (BMP) that ranchers can adopt to improve pasture health, livestock productivity, and environmental sustainability. A successful grazing plan is built on four core principles:

- Balancing forage supply with livestock demand
- Distributing grazing pressure across paddocks
- Allowing planned recovery for plant regeneration
- Avoiding grazing during sensitive periods

By applying these principles, producers can enhance pasture productivity, improve soil health, and support long-term sustainability on their ranches.

Getting Started: Resource Inventory

The first step in developing a grazing management plan is conducting a thorough resource inventory. This includes:

- Mapping your land base
- Identifying fencing and water infrastructure
- Assessing forage availability, quality, and timing

Understanding the types of forage—whether native grasslands, tame pastures, annual seeded forages, or crop residues—is essential, as each has different optimal grazing windows. Water access also plays a critical role in determining grazing timing and paddock layout.

Planning and Implementation

Using your inventory, you can begin to map out a grazing schedule: when, where, and for how long cattle will graze. Paddock systems vary widely depending on land base, forage type, soil conditions, and other variables. Historical grazing patterns can serve as a helpful guide when designing or refining a rotational system.

Transitioning from continuous grazing to a single cross-fenced paddock system can have a significant impact by allowing for planned rest periods. From there, producers can expand to more complex systems based on their operational needs.

Feasibility and Flexibility

Before implementation, it's important to assess the financial feasibility of your plan. Consider:

- Permanent vs. temporary fencing
- Water infrastructure costs
- Long-term maintenance and scalability

Most grazing plans are phased in over several years, adapting as resources become available. Flexibility is key—plans must respond to changing forage conditions and climate variability.

Monitoring and Adaptation

Monitoring is essential to ensure your grazing plan meets its goals. Factors such as seasonal moisture, herd size, and forage availability can all influence outcomes. Keeping detailed records allows for informed adjustments and continuous improvement over time.

Support Through SWEAP

The Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW) offers support through the Saskatchewan Watersheds Environmental Agriculture Program (SWEAP). Professional Agrologists are available to help producers develop rotational grazing plans under the Rotational Grazing BMP. The SWEAP program provides rebates for fencing infrastructure, watering systems, and pasture composition improvements. Funding is provided in part by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Agricultural Climate Solutions – On-Farm Climate Action Fund.