

Designing a Productive Grazing System

Implementing a rotational grazing system will return good dividends to a grazing operation. By dividing larger pastures and allowing an adequate rest period for the forages landowners gain a tonnage increase as well as an increase in grazing efficiency. Grazing efficiency in a continuously grazed pasture is 20-40%, but by implementing a rotational system where they are moved every four to seven days the efficiency increases to 50-55%. A daily rotation will achieve 60-65% efficiency. An increased forage production and higher grazing efficiency equals a bigger return on investment.

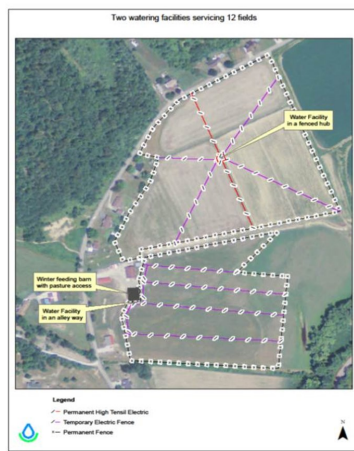
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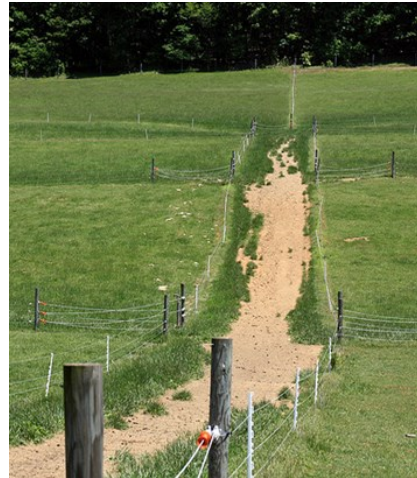
Landowner Considerations

Landowners should consider several factors like terrain, fence type, water availability, shade, labor, number of desired paddocks, etc. before implementing a rotational grazing system. Each farming operations has different challenges to address but there are several things that will prove to be the backbone of a successful system. The foundation of most prescribed grazing systems is based on the availability of water and existing permanent fences. These two factors generally dictate how individual paddocks are arranged as watering facility placement and division fences are totally reliant on them.



Fencing Options

Temporary electric fencing is a good tool that allows landowners to properly size fields for the desired number of grazing days during the slow growth summer. Also, temporary fence can be utilized to develop smaller paddocks during the fast growth periods.



Permanent fence layout requires that you make provisions to move the livestock easily from one set of paddocks to another. The use of alley ways is a good way to do this in a manner that is easy to manage. The alley way can be made with temporary or permanent fence.

When dividing the fields with a permanent fence, attention should be given to cattle creating a trail along the fence line. Trails along slopes can often lead to excessive erosion so fencing across the slope, especially in a drainage way, is recommended.

Watering Tank Selection

Watering tank selection is important especially with the frost free systems that are commonly utilized during winter months. Larger watering tanks are preferable particularly when placed directly in fence rows. A common occurrence is to place a frost free four ball tank in a fence row so there are two balls in each field. Large open top implement tire or pre-cast concrete tanks also work well in this type application but care should be taken if the tank that is installed is to be utilized during winter months as they are subject to freezing.

An added bonus to a rotational grazing system is an improvement to plant health and soil quality. The desired plants stand longer and develop a strong root system. The roots also increase pore space in the soil for better infiltration and water holding capacity.