

TALKING WITH YOUR LANDLORD:

ROTATIONAL GRAZING

There are many landowners looking for young, innovative farmers who are promoting a sound conservation ethic as they look at the future care of their land. Gaining conservation, communication and financial skills will help Emerging Farmers stand out in the community and create a competitive advantage for building relationships with future landlords. This publication series lays the initial roadmap to help develop those skills and provide resources for continued growth.

WHAT IS ROTATIONAL GRAZING?

Rotational grazing subdivides a pasture into smaller areas called paddocks. This allows one portion of the pasture to be grazed while the remainder is allowed to 'rest'. By resting the paddocks, the plants are allowed to renew their energy reserves, deepen their root systems and give long-term maximum production.

THE DOLLARS AND SENSE OF ROTATIONAL GRAZING

Compared to confinement dairy systems, graziers average about \$200 more per cow net farm income (Wisconsin Center for Dairy Profitability). Beef, sheep and dairy heifer operations in the same study were shown to reduce costs and increase profits with rotational grazing systems. Start-up and maintenance costs are less for grazing compared to confinement systems.

ROTATIONAL GRAZING BENEFITS



**DECREASED
BARNYARD
RUNOFF**



**TIME SAVINGS THROUGH
REDUCED NEED TO MAKE
HAY OR HAUL MANURE**



**IMPROVED
WATER QUALITY**



**INCREASED
WILDLIFE HABITAT**



**REDUCED
SOIL EROSION**



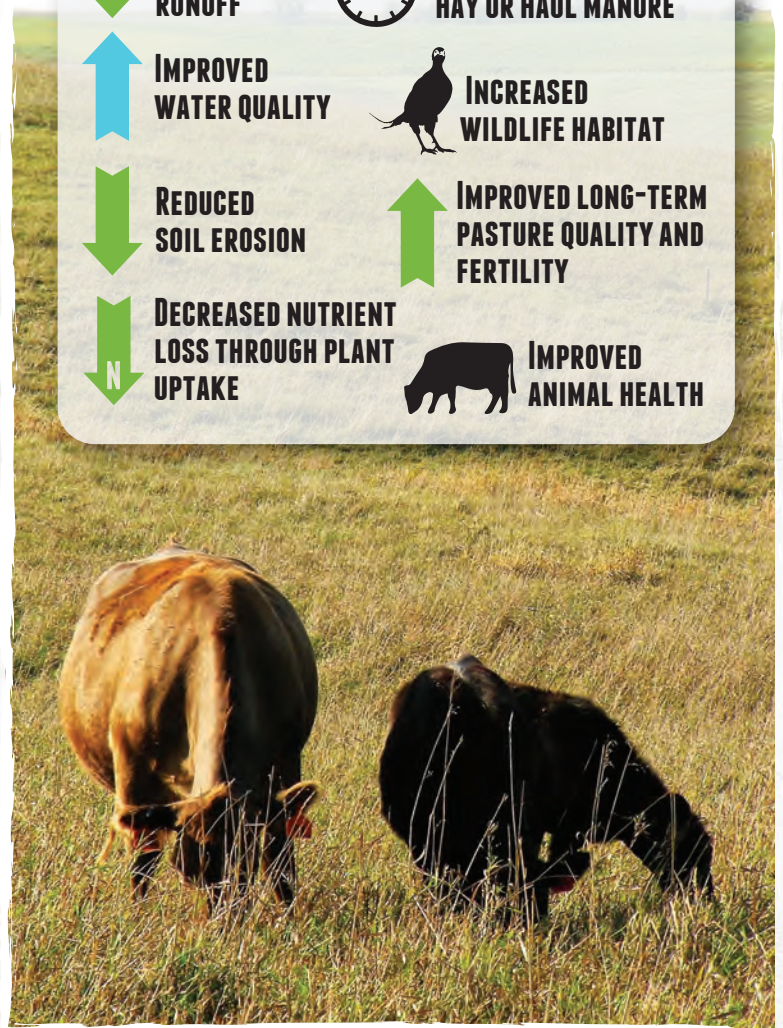
**IMPROVED LONG-TERM
PASTURE QUALITY AND
FERTILITY**



**DECREASED NUTRIENT
LOSS THROUGH PLANT
UPTAKE**



**IMPROVED
ANIMAL HEALTH**



To minimize the risk of adopting a new practice, there may be opportunities to receive costshare from state and federal agencies. Contact your local NRCS office to see if your farm qualifies.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- ✓ **Find a system that's manageable for you.**
Start with a 5-6 paddock system and move the cattle once a week. That gives each paddock a 30 day rest period before the cattle return. Infrastructure considerations for this system include fencing, water lines, tank/watering system, and mineral feeder.
- ✓ **Try to maximize flexibility in the system!**
Planning up front for the desired infrastructure, combined with active on-the-ground management, yields a robust rotational grazing system with many benefits to the operation, wildlife, soil and water.
- ✓ **Be aware of herbicide residuals.**
Always read and follow label directions. Be aware of grazing restrictions — some herbicides have up to an 18 month residual.
- ✓ **Add cover crops for a spring food source.**
Seed cereal rye on your row crop acres in the fall for spring grazing. Let the rye grow big enough (at least 6") for good root structure to balance out compaction from the livestock.
- ✓ **Scale up when you're ready.**
Each initial paddock can be divided in half, resulting in a 10-12 paddock system, in which the cattle are moved every 4 days.

START SMALL

It is important to recognize that it takes time to learn new management techniques. Consider using the practice on a smaller portion of the land and increasing each year, to learn new management skills to incorporate other practices successfully. Working with your landlord to gather information about the practice and addressing any concerns early will help smooth the transition to the new practice and minimize conflicts.

Your local NRCS staff and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach field specialists are available to meet with you and your landlords to help answer questions, provide resources and technical assistance.



For more information on rotational grazing: Pastures for Profit: A Guide to Rotational Grazing (University of Wisconsin Extension & University of Minnesota Extension Service)

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1097378.pdf

For more information on grazing cover crops: Spring Grazing Cover Crops and Grazing Cover Crops to Avoid Soil Compaction <https://www.iowalearningfarms.org/content/cover-crop-resources>



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