

Tips & Tools for more intensive rotational grazing

Farmers implemented intensive rotational grazing as part of their grazing strategy toolkit by:

- Creating bigger mobs of stock of the same class
- Reducing paddock sizes and fencing to land class
- Developing rotation plans of paddocks of similar pasture types for different stock classes for each season
- Improving pasture stock assessment and feed budgeting skills



Introducing more intensive rotational grazing gives plants more rest between grazing to:

- encourage more winter pasture growth and allow more stock to be carried in winter
- reduce uneven grazing and over-grazed stock camps
- encourage the persistence of perennial pastures
- allow the clover content of the pasture to be managed

Since 2010 Holbrook Landcare Network has run a series of programs supporting farmers to implement more productive grazing systems. The aim of the projects was to reduce the barriers to adopting grazing systems that would optimize stock and pasture performance.

“What do I have to do to achieve my livestock targets” is a question all farmers implicitly ask daily. And the answer will vary! It is different for different farms and farmer aspirations, seasons, timing of the break. In fact, after a reasonable rainfall the answer to the question will be different from the day before.

Different grazing strategies can be used to achieve livestock targets. Grazing management is dynamic and must change with the situation and season. For example, in the wet years of 2010-11 a number of farmers used set stocking to increase stock performance as stock were not growing when rotated into rank paddocks.

Farmers involved in the HLN Rotational Grazing project, made the following comments:

“We now have better perennial pastures and found various solutions to barriers we felt existed.”

“It is still a bit early to assess if pasture densities and health have improved but it has certainly improved stock handling and pasture utilisation.”

“Stock handling has improved and I have fewer mobs to check.”

“I have better pasture and stock awareness and am better able to determine stock needs and feed budget.”

“I have improved production and also improved the native areas of the farm.”

“Being involved in good active groups is always beneficial. Surround yourself with smart active and positive farmers and you always get a result.”



Creating bigger mob sizes

Creating bigger mobs and being able to graze paddocks effectively will increase pasture use and give pastures more rest before the next grazing. This means more feed will grow. Some of the things that need to be considered with larger mob sizes are; access to yards (lane ways and gate ways), yard holding capacity, stock water supply and the difficulty of moving large mobs.

There are costs and benefits to all these changes. Some of the benefits include, reduced labor with improved yards and ability to treat or draft a large mob at the same time, and reduced time checking different mobs in different paddocks. Whether the benefits will outweigh the costs is sometimes difficult to determine, but making changes slowly and finding out how it worked for other will reduce the risk of failure.

Improving pasture and stock assessment and feed budgeting skills

Pasture and stock assessment skills are important. Knowledge of how stock will perform on pasture of a particular quality and quantity will inform the development of rotation plans that work. Likewise, feed budgets will assist timing of stock movements in and out of paddocks to achieve animal and pasture targets.

Developing rotation plans of paddocks of similar pasture types for different stock classes for each season

Developing rotation plans involves some analysis of pasture types, the area and number of paddocks and the needs of different classes of stock in different seasons. It is also important that stock are able to be easily moved from paddock to paddock. The EverGraze Feed Budget and Rotation Planner is an excellent support tool to help with this. However, it is also a matter of trial and error. It is difficult to get the rotations right initially but given time, and as skills build farmers are able to develop rotations where all the stock have their needs met, pasture growth is optimal and pasture persistence is maintained.

Reducing paddock sizes and fencing to land class

Reducing paddock sizes is another option, and can complement increasing mob sizes. This is costly but it may reduce the need for other infrastructure costs. Furthermore, if paddocks are subdivided according to land class there will be added benefits of increased utilization and pasture persistence by reducing overgrazing in one part of the paddock and undergrazing in another part of the paddock.

Useful websites, tools and articles

Websites

EverGraze regional information soils, pastures, research, demonstrations and case studies

<http://www.evergraze.com.au/south-west-slopes-nsw-north-east-vic-and-south-west-vic-upper/>

Feed budgeting and tactical management

<http://www.evergraze.com.au/library-content/feed-budgeting-and-tactical-management/>

Assessing feed quality and quantity

<http://www.feedonofferlibrary.com/feed-on-offer/>

Interactive tools and spreadsheets

EverGraze Feed Budget and Rotation Planner

<http://www.evergraze.com.au/library-content/evergraze-tools-calculators/>

EverGraze Pasture Improvement Calculator

<http://www.evergraze.com.au/library-content/evergraze-tools-calculators/>

The five easy steps program - helps determine your phosphorus needs

<http://www.mla.com.au/News-and-resources/Tools-and-calculators/Phosphorus-tool>

Paddock Apps

Farm Apps Pty Ltd was founded in May 2011 by Managing Director Jock Graham to create smart phone apps for the farming market that increase farming efficiency.

<http://www.farmapps.com.au/f-track-live-new>



Visit the MLA website for further
'Tips & Tools' factsheets.
<http://www.mla.com.au>