Pasture management

Management is the key to healthy, productive pastures. Controlled, rotational, or management-intensive grazing has increased forage production for many producers.

The skilful use of livestock to harvest forages leads to improved soil fertility, a diverse, dense and useful pasture ecology, and an extended grazing season. Fertile soil and productive pastures, in turn, support healthy animals.

The vast majority of a cow's diet consists of hay or grazing. In their natural state, cows wander and graze for most of the day. It is unnatural for them to be confined to a paddock. The best thing for your cow's physical and mental health is to provide her with plenty of pasture.

At times cows tend to overgraze, which weaken and kill pasture plants and allows weeds to take hold. Do not let the cow overgraze the land. If you do, the grass will no longer grow and overgrazed pastures may never recover. Resting a pasture is key to pasture management and maintaining its productivity. Allowing the pasture to recover for three or four weeks helps keep the pasture in good condition.

Pastures require water to be productive and this is particularly important during the recovery period.

The grazing area should be divided into three (or more) equal size pastures. Portable electric fencing provides an efficient and economic way to partition your pasture. To allow for re-growth, leave about one third of the grass uneaten at any given time. Graze one pasture area down to about 5cm, and then move the cows to the next pasture.

While the pasture recuperates, keep it short, so that all plants are at an equal height, and receive the same fertiliser and water. Rotating pasture lots is a very good way to use small acreage pasture space to the fullest potential. Over-supplementing your cow with hay and grain will not prevent your horse from overgrazing.

The grass need not be lush, in fact, extremely lush grass can upset the stomach of some cows. Ideally it should be weed free and hardy enough to withstand hoof traffic.

What makes pasture productive?

Proper soil health and fertility will ensure a good growth environment for pasture species, both forage and legume.

Manure can help to improve and maintain soil fertility by providing needed nutrients and organic matter. These nutrients will help promote growth of grasses and legumes, while organic matter from manure will help to provide soil structure, protection against erosion and

improve natural soil fertility. Choosing the appropriate grass and legume species will also help to optimise forage management and pasture growth.

Pasture rotation is practiced in order to optimise plant growth and utilisation by grazing vegetation at the proper heights and allowing for proper rest and re-growth. Activities such as brush hogging or clipping, dragging to break up manure clumps, fertilising and over-seeding are also necessary components of pasture management.

Pasture and grazing

Pasture is utilised in many different ways around the world. Some farmers use grazing as the sole source of nutrition, others use grazing only for exercise.

To make the most of grass growth, calving is often seasonally timed so that most cows are in peak production at the time of greatest grass growth.

During spring growth, some of the grass can be conserved as hay or silage and be fed during seasons when there is less grass growth.

Milk from grass

Milk produced from grazing (preferably for dual purpose breeds such as the Fleckvieh and Dairy Swiss) without buffer feeding or concentrates is generally associated with farming in New Zealand, where cows are milked seasonally, but this method is also common in many other countries. It is a milk production system that is regarded as low input.

Production per hectare is more important than production per cow. The production level can vary between 2 000kg and 5 500kg of milk per lactation.

Milk from grass and concentrates

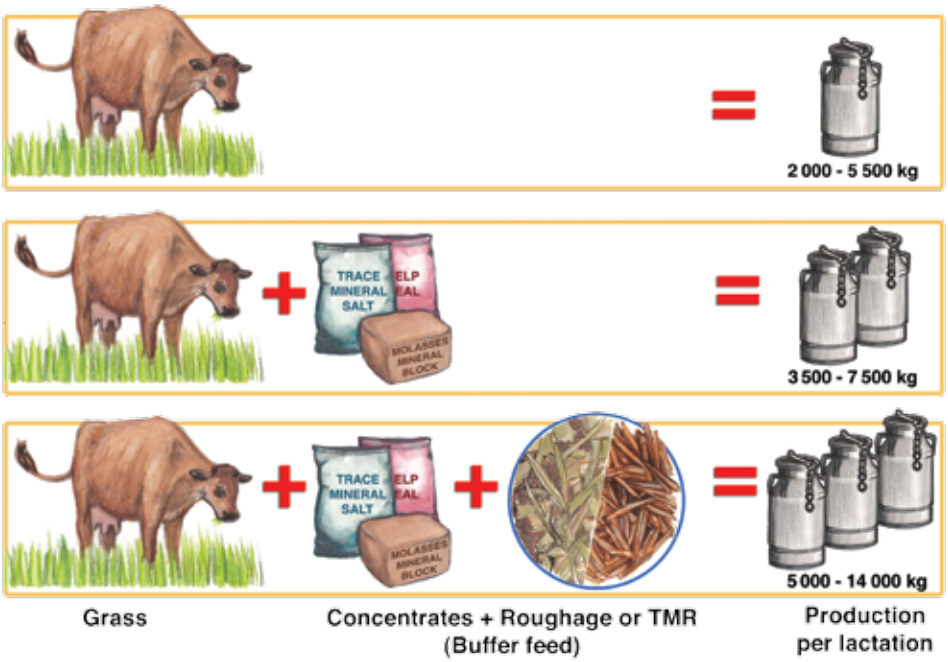
During the grazing period, cows are supplemented with concentrates, usually in the parlour or in the tied-up stall. Depending on the equipment, this can be done according to flat rate or yield.

The production level ranges between 3 500kg and 7 500kg per lactation. With irrigated grass that has been grazed at the optimal stage of maturity, it is possible to reach an even higher production level.

Milk from grass, roughage and concentrates

As the genetic potential of cows improves, grazed grass is not nutritionally dense enough to provide the cow with sufficient nutrition. Many farmers buffer feed with roughages. This can be done by feeding the cows buffer feed along with grass, or by keeping the cows indoors at night or day.

The buffer can be a TMR (totally mixed ration) or roughage and concentrate feed. Give between 300g and 400g of supplements per litre of milk. Always be aware of the cows' condition.



Pasture: grazing methods

- **Only grass:** low input.
- **Grass + concentrates:** provide feed concentrates in the milking parlour.
- **Grass + concentrates + roughage:** cows that produce lots of milk need more food; buffer feed to provide enough nutrition.
- **Buffer feed =** roughage + concentrates; extra feed for high producing cows; less impact on production during drought and wet or cold weather conditions.

Tip: Make hay or silage during spring to feed later.

Weiveld: weidingmetodes

- **Slegs gras:** lae inset.
- **Gras + konsentraat:** gee voerkonsentraat in die melkstal.
- **Gras + konsentraat + ruvoer:** koeie wat baie melk produseer het meer voer nodig; gee buffervoer vir ekstra voedingswaarde.
- **Buffervoer =** ruvoer + konsentraat; ekstra voer vir hoogproduserende koeie; minder impak op produksie gedurende droogte en nat of koue weersomstandighede.

Wenk: Maak hooi of kuilvoer in die lente om later te voer.

Idlelo: izindlela zokuklabisa izinkomo

- **Utshani kuphela:** uma ufuna ukuzipha kancane.
- **Utshani + amabhele:** zinikeze amabhele endaweni yokuzisenga.
- **Utshani + amabhele + nokudla okumahhadla:** izinkomo ezikhiqiza ubisi oluningi zidinga ukudla okuningi; ziphe ukudla esibayeni ukuze zibe nomsoco owanele.
- **Ukuzipha ukudla esibayeni =** ukudla okumahhadla + namabhele; ukudla okwengeziwe kwezinkomo ezikhiqiza kakhulu; kunomthelela omncane ekukhiqizeni phakathi nesomiso nalapho lina nalapho kubanda.

Icebiso: Sika utshani obomile noma ububeke buseluhlaza entwasahlobo ukuze zibudle kamuva.

Idlelo: iindlela zokutyisa ingca

- **Ingca kuphela:** ukunciphisa.
- **Ingca + izandisi mandla:** nika ukutya okunezandisi mandla kwindawo yokusengela.
- **Ingca + izandisi mandla + isintlakantlakiso:** iinkomo eziphuma ubisi oluninzi zifuna ukutya okuninzi; zondle ngamabheyile ukuzinika isondlo esoneleyo.
- **Ukutyisa amabheyile =** isintlakantlakiso + izandisi mandla; ukondla kakhulu iinkomo ezehlisayo; iimpembelelo ezisezantsi kwimveliso ngexa leemeko zemozulu ezinembalela nezimanzi okanye ezibandayo.

Icebo: Yenza ifula okanye ifula yesisele ngexa lasentlakohlaza ukuze utyise kamva.

Makgulo: mekgwa ya ho fudisa

- **Jwang feela:** tlhahiso e nyenyane ya lebese.
- **Jwang + dikhonsentreiti:** di fana ka dikhonsentreiki bakeng sa lebese sebakeng seo ho hangwang ho sona.
- **Jwang + dikhonsentreiki + rafeiji:** dikgomo di hlahisa lebese le le ngata mme di hloka dijo tse eketsehileng; ho di fepela sejelong ho fana ka phepo e lekaneng.
- **Ho di fepela sejelong =** rafeiji + dikhonsentreiki; dijo tse eketsehileng bakeng sa dikgomo tse hlahisang lebese le lengata; tshitiso e fokola haholo tlhahisong ya lebese nakong ya komello maemong a lehodimo a komello le dipula kapa mohatsela.

Lesedi le thusang: Etsa furu nakong ya selemo ho fepa dikgomo hamorao. UM