Definitions of managed grazing terms

Grazing Systems

*Managed grazing*—On an ongoing basis, the livestock producer actively matches land capacity and forage growth with animal resources in a way that optimizes animal health, productivity, and long-term resource (soil) health.

*Continuous grazing*—Livestock have free range and access across the entirety of a field or pasture. Animals determine where they want to range and which forages they want to consume. This system is characterized by uneven utilization of land and forage resources.

*Management-intensive grazing (MIG)*—The land resource is divided into separate paddocks. Livestock are rotated, or moved, between paddocks to graze the forage resource periodically over the course of the season, with the intent of keeping plants in a vegetative state so that forage and animal production are maximized.

*Mob grazing or ultra-high stock density grazing*—Temporary fencing is used to bunch animals tightly on a particular piece of land for a short period of time (typically from two to 12 hours), before moving to another location. The animals consume a portion of the forage and trample a significant percentage to the ground, where it contributes to building soil health. Long rest periods allow forage recovery between grazing events.

*Targeted grazing*—Through managed grazing, livestock animals are used as a vegetation management tool, either with the goal of changing the plant community (e.g., converting scrub brush to pasture) or managing specific weed populations.

*Multispecies grazing*—Different species of livestock utilize the same pasture at the same time. Examples include livestock guardian animals with small ruminant flocks, “flerds” that combine small ruminants and large ruminants, and systems where pastured poultry and/or hogs follow in pasture rotation behind ruminant species.

*Grazing plan*—A document that outlines the forage resources and utilization schedule of individual grazing management units on a farm or ranch.

*Planned grazing*—Managing grazing in accordance with a plan that determines when animals will be moved from one pasture division to another, based on stocking density and available forage.

*Rotational grazing*—A grazing system that moves animals from one pasture division to another over the course of time, allowing previously grazed areas to rest and recover before animals are allowed to graze them again.

*Limit grazing*—Giving access to a forage for only a short time and for a specific purpose, such as grazing rye for two hours per day to boost protein and energy in the animal’s feed ration.

*Stockpiling*—Not grazing forage in a particular part of the pasture, in order to save that forage for later use to extend the grazing season.
Bale grazing—A grazing system in which pasture forages are supplemented on the pasture with baled feed, but the baled feed is distributed in such a manner that it guides animal use of the land resource. Bale grazing is also used to build up soil health by adding carbon to the soil through the trampling of significant amounts of hay into the ground.

Livestock

Stocking rate—The number of animals grazing on a unit of land (acre or hectare) for a season.

Stocking density—The number or combined weight of grazing animals per acre or hectare in a pasture unit or subdivision for a set amount of time, also expressed as the animal concentration on the land. For example, 200,000 pounds of cattle per acre.

Stocking intensity—A measure that combines animal concentration with time period by multiplying stocking density by time. This is often expressed in animal unit days per hectare.

Carrying capacity—The number of animals a piece of land will support over the entire grazing season without becoming degraded. The grazing season is defined as the period of using either active or stockpiled pasture. Under the National Organic Program’s pasture rule, the grazing season for certified organic livestock must be at least 120 days per year, during which animals must obtain a minimum of 30% dry matter intake from grazing pasture.

Animal unit month—The amount of feed required to sustain an animal unit (1,000 lb cow and her calf, or metabolic body size equivalent in sheep, steers, etc.) for a month

Ruminant—Grazing animals with four stomachs that bring food back up to continue chewing it. Common examples are cows, sheep, goats.

Non-ruminant or monogastric—Animals with one stomach, including horses and pigs.

Stockers—Spring-purchased calves grazed during the grazing season and sold in fall as feeder cattle.

Feeder cattle—Cattle that are on feed in a feedlot. An example is a spring calf that has been raised on pasture with its dam, is weaned, and is subsequently put in a feedlot.

Yearlings—Grazing animals that are older than one year. This can often be synonymous with stocker cattle, but not always.

Lactating Animals—Grazing animals that are in milk, such beef and dairy cows, ewes, does, and sows.

Dry cows—Non-lactating cows.

Dry ewes—Non-lactating female sheep.

Dry does—Non-lactating female goats.
Plants

*Warm season forages*—These plants produce high quality forage during late spring and summer, when air and soil temperatures are warm. Examples are sudangrass and sorghum-sudangrass hybrids, Switchgrass, Indiangrass, and big bluestem. Warm-season plant growth ceases with the first killing frost. These are also referred to as C4 plants.

*Cool season forages*—These forage plants have their greatest growth during spring, with additional growth in fall, and are dormant during the warmest months. Examples include Kentucky Bluegrass, orchardgrass, reed canarygrass, timothy, smooth bromegrass, tall fescue, and ryegrass. These are also referred to as C3 plants.

*Dormant*—The period during which a plant is alive but not growing, as a result of temperature conditions. Some plants are dormant in warm weather (cool season plants), others are dormant in cool weather (warm season plants); most are dormant during cold weather.

*Vegetative*—A plant is considered to be vegetative when shoots consist predominantly of leaf blades.

*Mature*—Forage that is mature has a higher stem-to-leaf ratio. As a plant matures, plant cell walls accumulate indigestible lignin, lowering the quality of the forage.

*Overgrazed*—Overgrazing occurs when forages are exposed to grazing for an extended period of time, without recovery periods, to the extent that the health of the vegetation is compromised. Overgrazing occurs when plants are regrazed before being allowed to recover fully (through an adequate rest period) from the previous grazing.

*Undergrazed*—Continued underuse that can result in a deterioration of the growth, quality, or species composition of grazed vegetation.

*Growing point*—The point at the top of a grass stem where new stem and leaves originate until the growing point starts to form the grass seedhead.

*Forages*—Plants eaten by grazing livestock.

*Forbs*—Flowering plants that are not grasses or sedges. Some examples include clovers, alfalfa, and milkweed.

*Shrubs*—A multiple-stemmed plant that grows to a height of less than 20 feet.

*Grasses*—Graminoids, monocotyledonous plants with narrow leaves growing from the base.

*Brush*—Woody-stemmed plants.

*Legume*—Plants of the pea or pulse family, many of which are recognized for their ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil.

*Boot stage*—Part of the flowering phase of plant growth, defined as the time when the seedhead emerges from the sheath of the flag leaf.

*Summer slump*—The hottest and driest part of the season, when cool season plant growth slows and may fail to keep pace with grazing demand.
Infrastructure

*Paddock*—A fenced division within a pasture that can be either temporary or permanent.

*Cell*—The smallest grazing unit. Recent grazing literature uses the term paddock instead of cell. To make matters all the more confusing, some grazing professionals refer to cells as large units of pasture.

*Division*—A confined area of pasture that does not allow grazing animals access to other areas.

Management

*Rest*—Time for the forage plants in a previously grazed area to achieve regrowth and fully recover from the previous grazing event.

*Grazing period*—How long animals are grazed on particular paddock.

*Grazing event*—A time period when an animal grazes on a paddock without stopping.

*Rotation*—Moving grazing animals from one area to another, to allow recovery from grazing.

Further Resources

