

## Grazing Strategies

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Sue recently worked with AHDB Beef & Lamb to deliver six workshops on Grazing Strategies – five for producers and one for beef consultants and advisers. Here she discusses some of the key points when considering grazing strategies.

#### Importance of managing grazing to boost profits and livestock performance

Correctly managing ryegrass-rich swards by balancing grass supply with livestock needs helps to boost growth rates, output per ha and farm profits. Other benefits include maintenance of sward quality, prolonged sward life and reduced weed establishment.

Generally, the cost of producing grazed grass is half that of silage and a quarter that of purchased compound per kg dry matter (DM). With returns from livestock enterprises continually being squeezed, providing high-quality grazing for as much of the year as possible is key to improving performance.

#### Rotational Grazing

When using a rotational grazing system, livestock are moved around a number of fields or paddocks. AHDB Beef & Lamb have developed guidelines which can be found in the Better Returns Programme manual [Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns](#), that help producers identify the ideal time that livestock should begin grazing (pre-graze kg DM /ha) and stop grazing (post-graze kg DM /ha).

Changes in the sward are easy to measure and act on. Measuring grass and allocating grazing using the guidelines will help maintain grass quality and improve livestock and sward performance.

When animals should begin grazing varies for different classes of stock and each season. Ideally, stock should begin to graze when a field has reached the target pre-graze kg DM/ha. However, there are times, for example early spring or when setting up a new rotation, when it is acceptable for livestock to enter a field below the pre-graze guideline. This will help create a rotation where each field is in a different stage of growth.

#### Take action to improve grazing

Now is a good time to take action to improve grazing management and the best way to start this is by measuring the sward. Sward sticks are available on request from AHDB Beef & Lamb and are a key tool to provide the information needed to balance grass supply and livestock needs. To measure grass, follow the instructions on the sward stick and take up to 20 measurements per field (kg DM/ ha). Average the pre-graze measurements in order to work out how much grass is in the field in kg DM /ha.



## Use the numbers

Once you know how much grass is in the field there are three simple steps to allocating grazing.

### Step 1: Calculate the grass available for grazing (post-graze guidelines can be found in the grazing strategies manual)

Grass available for grazing (kg DM /ha) is:

(pre-graze measurement – post-graze guideline) x field area (ha)

E.g:

Pre-graze measurement = 2,330 kg DM/ha, post graze guideline = 1,700 kg DM /ha,

Area = 2 ha

The calculation would be: (2,330 -1,700 kg DM/ha) x 2 ha = 1,260 kg DM

### Step 2: Calculate livestock allocations per head

This is based on dry matter allocation as a % of body weight. Finishing cattle require 3% and finishing lambs 4% of body weight, respectively.

⇒ 300 finishing lambs, weight 35 kg, allocation 4% (0.04) of body weight

The calculation would be: 300 x (35 x 0.04) = 420 kg DM per day.

### Step 3: Work out how long the field will last

Divide the grass available for grazing (step1) by daily requirement of group (step 2)

⇒ 1,260 kg DM ÷ 420 kg DM /day = 3 days

In this example the stock should leave the field after three days and move on to another in the rotation. Repeat steps for all fields in the rotation.

## Developing grazing strategies

The principles of measuring grass growth, calculating livestock needs and allocating grazing are the key to balancing grass supply and demand. Learning how to measure and record grass growth and allocate grass for grazing can underpin the development of new, more efficient grazing strategies on any farm and can increase grass utilisation by up to 30%. This in turn provides opportunities such as increasing stock numbers, taking a grass ley out to grow forage crops to fill a “hungry gap” or provide a break crop for a reseed.

Start with one group of stock on a small area of the farm to gain confidence, establish the principles of rotational grazing and learn the practical issues around managing the system such as using an electric fence and providing water.

For more information see the BRP manual [Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns](#)