

New Entrants to Farming

Mob Grazing

with Beef Cattle



National Advice Hub
 T: 0300 323 0161
 E: advice@fas.scot
 W: www.fas.scot

Mob grazing is a form of rotational grazing; using small paddocks to allocate grass for a set time period and providing a long rest period. With a long rest period (up to 80 days), the grass height upon returning to a paddock is tall (30 to 60cm). This results in greater plant root depth, higher fibre content and increased plant diversity.



Credit: Clem Sandison

See broad comparisons with other grazing methods below. A full comparison with other methods is outlined in 'Farming for a Better Climate; Comparing Grazing methods'

	Grazing interval	Rest period*	Grass height targets		Grass utilisation
			Entry	Exit	
Set stocking	over 1 week	NA	5-8cm		50%
Paddock grazing	0.5 days-1 week	15-30 days	8-10cm	5cm	65-80%
Mob grazing	0.5 days-3 days	40-80 days	30cm+	10-20cm	50%

* Guide during the growing season, this should be flexible according to the growing conditions.



The European Agricultural Fund
 for Rural Development
Europe investing in rural areas



Scottish Government
 Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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'Feed the soil'

The premise of mob grazing is 'feed the soil'. The greater plant roots and trampled plant material results in higher organic matter additions. This means that the soil is better at capturing and storing water and provides better water infiltration during wet weather. In addition, the biology of the soil improves leading to better soil structure and nutrient turnover.



Credit: Clem Sandison

Benefits to the farm business?

- Potential to extend the grazing period or outwinter to reduce winter costs
- Greater grass growth during dry weather will reduce the need to consider back-up options during drought
- Better grass persistency will reduce the reseeding requirement
- Better long-term productivity of the land
- Potential to reduce fertiliser inputs

Costs to the farm business?

- Set-up costs: fencing and water
- Labour for livestock moving



Credit: Clem Sandison

How to mob graze?

1. Increase Grazing Pressure

If transitioning from set stocking to mob grazing, the simplest starting point is to increase grazing pressure by combining multiple fields of cattle or creating smaller fields. Once the grazing pressure is increased, move the stock round more. This simple starting point will help you understand how the system will evolve on your farm.

2. Identify suitable stock groups

One or two bulling groups might be an appropriate for a starting experiment – cows do well on fibrous grass material. Finishing cattle will need to be managed slightly differently to maximise their growth rates – you may decide to move them faster so they can selectively graze the green leave and leave behind more material.

3. Plan paddocks

Under mob grazing, the stocking rate can be 1.5-2 cows and calves/ha depending on the grass growth in your area. Start with your current stocking rate with potential to increase with time. Take the current summer grazing area and divide with electric fencing based on your desired grazing interval and rest period. The ideal is to move them every day as this creates high stocking pressure and gives greater control over the rest period.

For example:

- Group: 70 cows and calves
- Starting area: 50 ha (example current summer grazing block)
- Desired grazing interval: 1 day
- Desired rest period: 80 days
- No. of paddocks: 81
- Paddock size: 0.6ha (50ha ÷ 81 days)



Credit: Clem Sandison

4. Build a grass wedge

Grass growth will be slow to zero during the winter, therefore you need to start planning for the spring in the autumn. Some farmers might apply a small amount of nitrogen in August to help build the grass wedge to start with. The first fields for mob grazing should be closed by the end of August.

Fencing top tips

1. Purchase a good energiser (6 joules recommended)
2. Earth well – wet area, 0.5m rod/joule (i.e. 3m required for 6 joules)
3. One wire, calves will creep graze the next field, but this is beneficial
4. Mains power is best, solar batteries or leisure batteries can work fine

See [FAS New Entrants Rotational Grazing Guide](#) for more on infrastructure.



Credit: Clem Sandison

Water

Supplying water to mob grazed cattle is simpler than you might think; as the field size decreases, cattle behaviour changes – they no longer move to water as a herd. This means that small mobile water troughs can be used with over ground pipes. Alternatively, some use mobile water bowers or invest in underground water piping.

Be flexible and learn as you go.

By getting started, you learn the potential of your land for this grazing method and can adapt, no guide can fully dictate how the method should be applied to your farm.



Credit: Clem Sandison

Hybrid approaches

Deferred grazing

Deferred grazing is where grass is rested from the summer and grazed in the winter. This is a good approach for hill grazing or rough ground that does not support highly productive animals and can sustain winter grazing. It is also a low-cost adaption to rotational grazing when grass gets ahead of the grazing stock.

Alternate mob grazing and rotational grazing

As cattle suit mob grazing better than sheep, to get the soil benefits of mob grazing, some have been alternating mob grazing some of the farm with the cattle one year followed by rotational grazing the area with sheep the following year.

Mob grazing in arable rotations

Mob grazing can help build soil organic matter in arable rotations for the benefit of the crop.

Mob grazing and agroforestry

Some have integrated mob grazing with their agroforestry systems – the regular movements and electric fencing gives greater control of the stock to protect the trees and move the animals strategically.

For more on Mob Grazing

See the Soil Association Mob Grazing Hub [<https://www.soilassociation.org/mobgrazing>] for more guidance and case studies for mob grazing in Scotland.



Credit: Nikki Yoxall