



Grazing for Landowners: Livestock as a Tool for Land Management

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Managed grazing can improve the value and aesthetic of your land, help wildlife thrive, and provide extra forage to livestock

The practice of managed grazing – also referred to through terms such as rotational grazing, prescribed grazing or adaptive grazing management – keeps livestock on the move and never in one place for too long. This differs from continuous grazing, when cattle have access to an entire area for an extended amount of time, not allowing for plants to properly rest. Managing the intensity, frequency, duration and timing of grazing events has the potential to provide a win-win arrangement for both landowners and livestock farmers.

BENEFITS OF MANAGED GRAZING FOR LANDOWNERS

- Grazing stimulates plants to release root exudates, which increase soil biological activity, contributing to improved soil health
- Improved soil health provides resilience to floods and drought
- Grazing amplifies other soil building practices, such as cover crops, increasing the rate at which soil benefits accrue and shortening the time before benefits are realized
- Manage unwanted vegetation with reduced chemicals, fuel and labor
- Mimics nature, which can stimulate beneficial native vegetation growth
- Alters grasslands to provide a variety of nesting, brood-rearing, cover, and foraging habitat for wildlife
- Helps to keep carbon in the soil, which is crucial for climate change mitigation
- Qualification for agriculture tax exemption
- May add an alternative revenue stream



Mobile infrastructure, like this water wagon, polywire fence and step-in posts, move with livestock as they graze different paddocks. Photo courtesy of Joel Gruver.

WHERE TO START

- The simplest way to take advantage of grazing is to work with neighbors who have livestock. If you work with a tenant farmer, ask if they or anyone they work with is interested in grazing.
- Ask your county Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office or Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for suggestions of graziers who support conservation values. Also inquire about grazing plan development and financial assistance available for grazing practices.
- Ask organizations that work with graziers, such as Land Stewardship Project, the Sustainable Farming Association, Practical Farmers of Iowa or local Cattlemen’s Association chapters for suggestions.
- Take a summer drive around your county to see who is grazing and stop to ask if they are interested.
- Alternatively, the Midwest Grazing Exchange website is under development, which will match landowners and row crop farmers with graziers. [Minnesota](#), [Nebraska](#) and [South Dakota](#) have grazing exchange websites.



GRAZING LEASES

Grazing leases can vary considerably. The best practice is to use a written lease, but some farmers and landowners operate under an oral agreement. Written or oral, key points to consider when planning a grazing lease include:

- Stocking limitations and timing
- Liability and insurance
- Responsibility for livestock
- Investment, ownership and maintenance of fence and water infrastructure
- Use of vehicles/ATVs
- Landowner rights and reservations
- Fair rental rates and payments

Example leases can be found on the [Green Lands Blue Waters Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group](#) website and by doing an internet search for 'grazing lease agreements.' Land-grant universities also have lease resources. Landowners and tenants should both seek legal advice if there are questions about what or what not to include in a lease.

Leases can be incredibly flexible. Despite this, many landowners and tenants end up agreeing to boilerplate stipulations that don't work well for either side or don't meet specific needs just because they're hesitant to start the conversation. Opening a line of dialogue can be difficult, especially when it can seem like landowner and tenant speak different languages, but the result is often a better agreement that can lead to a healthier, long-term relationship.

Resources:

- Green Lands Blue Waters
greenlandsbluewaters.org
- Green Lands Blue Waters Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
greenlandsbluewaters.org/midwest-perennial-forage-working-group/
- Practical Farmers of Iowa
practicalfarmers.org/programs/landowners
- Land Stewardship Project
landstewardshipproject.org/conservationleasestoolkit



Credit:

Green Lands Blue Waters, Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group

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