

Mob Grazing, High Density Grazing, Management-intensive Grazing: What's the Difference?

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Before we can answer that question we need to review some basic fundamentals of successful grazing management. Four goals of any sustainable grazing management strategy should be: 1) Meet the nutritional needs of livestock from standing pasture as many days as possible; 2) Optimize pasture yield, quality and persistence; 3) Maintain or enhance the natural resource base; 4) Integrate the appropriate technology and knowledge into a practical and profitable system that fits your available resources and meets your objectives. We will use these goals to compare and contrast these 2 grazing management techniques. Both techniques should be considered tools in the grazer's toolbox. No one tool is perfect for every job. Each has a place and can be successful if monitored and managed properly.

Management-intensive Grazing

Management-intensive grazing has been defined as “a goal driven approach to managing grassland resources for long term sustainability, characterized by balancing animal demand with forage supply throughout the growing season and allocating available forage based on animal requirements.” (Gerrish, et al 1999) Typically management-intensive grazing strives for grazing periods shorter than 5 days with rest periods of 20 – 40 days depending on plant growth rates. The idea is to keep plants in

phase 2 or actively growing (vegetative to early reproductive). In order to accomplish this, multiple paddocks are needed. Depending on how short the grazing period is paddock numbers could range from 8 to 80 with stock densities ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 pounds per acre. Sufficient residual heights are managed during the grazing period to maintain growing points; leave enough leaf area for good photosynthesis and to keep the roots actively growing; and provide adequate bite size for the grazing animal. Rest periods are scheduled to allow leaves to regrow and replenish carbohydrates; provide adequate bite size for grazing livestock; and provide quality forage needed by the livestock. Typically, appropriate turn in height is somewhere between 6 – 10” tall for most introduced cool season grass/legume pastures. During any one grazing event about 50 – 60% of the top growth is removed for a residual height of 3 – 4”. This strategy tries to balance forage quantity and availability based on the needs of the livestock and maintain a healthy plant community. It is what I call the “middle of the road” approach. Maintaining some flexibility is the key to making this strategy work.

Mob or High Density Grazing

Mob grazing is defined as “grazing by relatively large numbers of animals at a high stock density for a short period of

time.” (Allen, etal 1991) This strategy was first introduced into the U. S. by Allan Savory in the mid 1980’s and is carried on by Holistic Management International, Inc. and organization founded by Savory. The goal is to use the impact of high stock density to improve the land. Stock densities used vary from 100,000 to 500,000+ pounds per acre. Grazing periods are 1 day or less based on site, time and management objectives. Rest periods tend to be longer than with conventional management-intensive grazing ranging from 30 days to 180 days. The longer rest periods are based on the premise that the plants will be more fully rested and have a deeper root system. Paddock numbers are more variable and infinite. Typically forage is allocated by using temporary fencing in strips to achieve the desired stock density. The goal is to remove 60 – 70% of the topgrowth and trample the rest onto the soil surface. It is the increased amount of litter left on the soil surface, pruning of deeper root system through grazing and increased concentration of manure that should help increase organic matter and feed the micro-organisms in the soil. Generally, there are 2 different modes of mode grazing employed depending on the manager’s objective: landscape mode and animal performance mode. The landscape mode uses the highest level of stock density to create an effect on the landscape – remove undesirable species, remove over mature forage, provide greater hoof action to trample more residue. The most valuable tool for the landscape mode is the dry bred

cow because of the lower nutritional requirements at that physiological stage. These animals also tend to be less selective in their diets, especially in high stock densities. When in the animal performance mode, the stock densities are lower to allow the grazing animals to be a little more selective in their intake due to their higher nutrient requirements. Some of the possible problems with mob grazing are: 1)it is going to require more intensive monitoring and management; 2)animal performance may be lower due to lowered forage quality of the more +too long at these densities then you end up with the “scorched earth” effect. Too much was grazed off leaving too much bare ground.

Summary

Both of these grazing management techniques have some benefits. Both are better than unmanaged continuous grazing. We have to realize that anytime we push the system too far to one side or the other there are tradeoffs. To be effective, both must be monitored closely and managed intensively. The higher the density the more intensive the monitoring and management needs to be. There are conditions under which either of these or both would be the grazing prescription of choice. The table below summarizes my comparison of Management-intensive Grazing and Mob or High Density Grazing. These opinions are mine and based on observations working with many producers employing these strategies over the state of Missouri.

Grazing Method	Diversity	Persistence	Forage Quality	Utilization	Animal Performance	Gain/AC	Wildlife	Soil Health
MiG	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mob	++	+	-	++	-	++	+	++