PLANNED GRAZING

FACT SHEET

Planned grazing allows livestock managers to deal with the complexity of raising livestock whilst regenerating land and ensuring animal health and welfare, alongside enterprise profitability. Planned grazing helps ensure that livestock are in the right place, at the right time and for the right reasons.

What is planned grazing?

Planned grazing is a more labour-intensive step up from rotational grazing. Livestock are kept in relatively high densities, being moved through a series of small paddocks on the farm in quick succession. This limits the ability of livestock to eat out preferred plants, maintaining pasture diversity.

The hooves, urine and dung disturb and fertilise the soil without degrading it. The disadvantage of greater labour required to frequently move stock is offset by the greatly reduced cost of inputs like fertiliser and herbicide, and the labour involved in administering them.

First championed in degraded arid areas with little remaining vegetation, it appears to be applicable in areas like the Bellinger Shire as well.

Implementation

The grazing is planned on a chart using a map of the land to be grazed and feed budgets. The plan is flexible and constantly monitored and adjusted at the earliest possible indication of potential problems, for example if low rainfall requires fast paddock rotation, which will require earlier sale of at least some of the herd.

Factors influencing the grazing plan

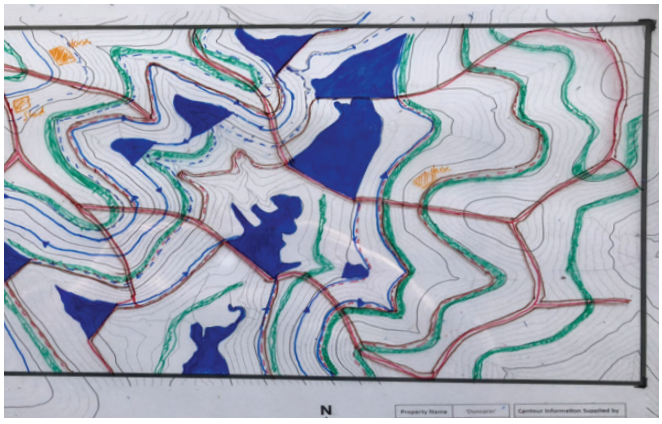
Because there are so many elements to managing livestock, decisions are taken based on numerous factors that consider the big picture outcomes for the manager, soil, plants, livestock and wildlife.

Each of the components influencing the grazing plan are recorded on a grazing chart, e.g.

- Breeding dates
- Weaning dates
- Selling dates
- Expected fire season
- Gully repair requirements
- Availability of labour to manage the livestock (school holidays, harvesting etc)
- Crop residue trampling requirements
- Annual leave
- Paddocks that potentially flood
- Water quantity, quality and distribution
- Forage quantity and quality (feed budgeting)
- Requirements of native animals for native pasture or seed

Paddock Mapping

Land is subdivided into paddocks to enable planning and control how the livestock is moved. These paddocks are first planned on a map and then demarcated by fences, usually a combination of temporary and permanent. Pasture composition and quantity in each paddock is measured to give an estimate of how many days the herd should be left within it.



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Bellinger Landcare Inc.

Planning for grazing and recovery periods

Once the paddocks have been created and assessed, a plan is drawn up of the proposed rotations through the coming season.

Whilst planning, these questions are asked.

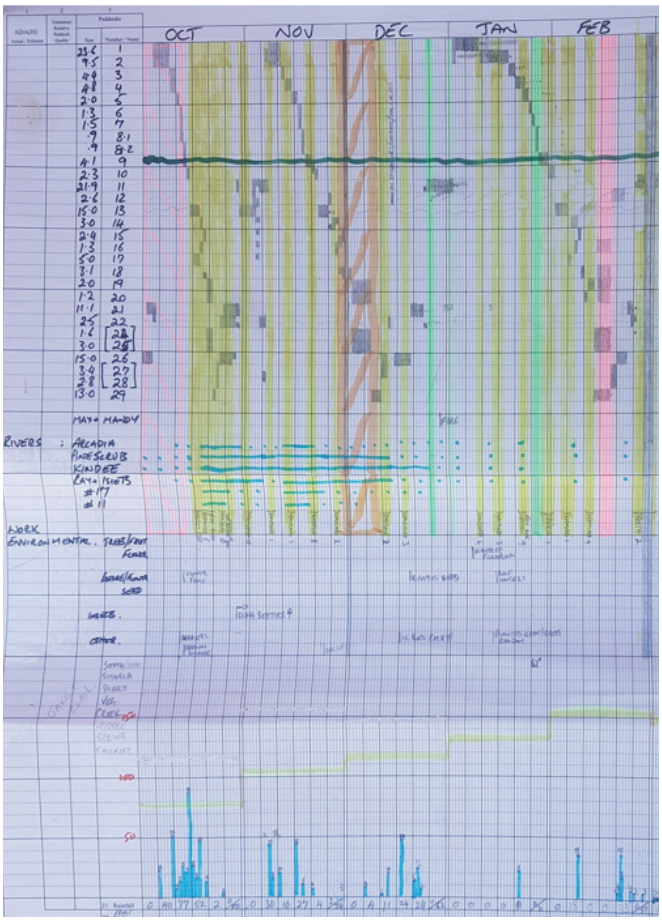
- How much forage will an average hectare of land within each paddock have to supply?
- How long can each paddock be grazed?
- How long will paddocks need resting- in both the fast and slow growth times of year?
- What is the most convenient paddock sequence in terms of stock movement?
- Which paddock is best to stock just before transport? Or while off-farm during holidays?
- Are there areas within paddocks needing more (or less) disturbance to maintain healthy grassland, reduce weeds or woody vegetation, or prevent soil erosion?

During implementation the plan is constantly revised in the light of external variables, so that rotations can be adapted, or stock sold in anticipation of reducing pasture quality before pastures are degraded.

Benefits of planned grazing

Planned grazing enables the long-term regeneration of pasture, with benefits emerging within a few seasons:

- The longer recovery periods of paddocks prevents overgrazing.
- Using livestock to fertilise paddocks reduces the cost of synthetic fertilisers.
- The reduction or removal of synthetic fertilisers allows soil life to recover, improving structure and water retention.
- Animals managed in this way help keep soils covered with litter and green plants, reducing the potential for erosion and loss of soil life.
- Using animals to disturb soils in a closely monitored and controlled way reduces the need for machinery and fossil-fuels.
- Fluctuations in available labour, including the owners, can be anticipated and incorporated into the plan.
- Short term trampling of dead grasses forces them into contact with the soil, into which microorganism can incorporate them, instead of either leaving the paddock with long, non-nutritious (rank) stems, or releasing the carbon into the atmosphere during slow in-situ decay.



Rotation Plan

This fact sheet was produced as part of Landcare's *Building the Bellingen Shire Regenerative Farming Network* project, with support from the Federal Government's *Future Drought Fund.*

For more information visit bellingerlandcare.org.au

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Future Drought Fund