



Getting Started with Mob Grazing

Guideline only, to be read in conjunction with the information presented [here](#).

For those who want the QUICK START read the boxed sections.

The unboxed sections give all the workings - replace the example numbers with your own.

Work out your total 'mob' body weight (BW) eg

1 x bull = 800kg

10 x in-calf cows at 650kg = 6,500kg

10 x 11 month old weanlings at 220kg = 2,200kg

Total herd BW = 9,500kg

Using a 500kg Livestock Unit (LU), this equates to **19LU**

Work out their **daily demand**, this what they need to eat each day in dry matter (DM) intake at 3% x total herd BW 9,500kg = **285kg**

Write down your total **grazing platform**, excluding fields set aside for silage/hay making eg 60 acres, convert to hectares (divide by 2.47) = **24.3ha**

This gives a **Stocking Rate** of 24.3ha/19LU = **1.28LU/ha**

Using a map of your farm, divide your grazing platform into between 30-32* approximately even sized paddocks. (*See note later for those with much lower stocking rates.)

In our example this would give paddock sizes of 2 acres / 0.8ha.

This gives a **Stock Density** in each paddock of 0.8ha/19LU = **23LU/ha**

Access to water is likely your biggest challenge when working out how to split fields into paddocks. In over-coming this problem you must back fence. Mob grazing is not the same as strip grazing, if you do not back fence you are not mob grazing and your stock will go back to **take a 'second bite'** of the sweet regrowth, which is exactly **what you are trying to avoid**.

Consider using a mobile water trough - you can get these from Kiwitech and use quick-fit plasson fittings to connect to a 25mm blue pipe rolled out down the field.

Use electric fencing and a battery or solar-powered energiser to set up your first two paddocks. You only need enough for two paddocks to start with as you can re-use the kit each move from the prior paddock.

When to turn out

If you are very analytical, then you can buy a platemeter and measure grass, but they are expensive, and experienced farmers usually do a very good job of judging grass covers by eye.

If you are running a standard UK grazing operation, where the cattle are brought in over winter and a stocking rate of 1.2LU/ha or more, then aim to turn your stock out when you reach Magic Day, which is when your whole grazing platform is growing each day at a rate equal to your herd's daily demand.

From the above workings, you know what your daily demand is, our example shows 285kg. And our example whole grazing platform is 24.3ha, therefore, to grow 285kg per day, the grass needs to be growing at $285/24.3 = 12\text{kg DM/ha/day}$. (*Note: this figure is farm specific, so do your own workings to find out.*)

That will likely happen sometime in April (maybe sooner for lush lowland farms) but if the idea of measuring grass seems too much of a faff, then a ballpark recommendation is turn your stock out into that first paddock when the grass is between your ankle and mid-shin in height, which is somewhere between the two photos below.

LH photo borderline too short.
(Shows covers ~1,800kg DM/ha).



RH photo turn out before now.
(Shows covers ~3,500kg DM/ha)



Remember, every day after turn out the grass is growing in front of the stock, so each paddock covers will get deeper. Stock will be going into covers as shown in the RH photo mid-way through the first rotation.

If you are using a platemeter turn out covers might be around 2,300kg DM/ha.



At 2,300kg DM/ha, this will mean that in our 0.8ha paddocks we will have around $2,300 \times 0.8 = 1,860$ kg DM. Our daily demand is 285kg, thus, the cattle will eat this much, plus trample a bit, leaving around 1,500kg DM in the paddock, which when converted back to the hectare would be a residual of $1,500 / 0.8 = 1,853$ kg DM/ha. This will likely be the shortest residual all grazing season as the spring growth will build a grass wedge in front of the stock.

Regardless of the size of the paddock, always work out grass covers on a per hectare basis.

If you have a stocking rate of less than 1.2LU/ha then you can bring turnout forward (*and can plan many more than 32 paddocks) as you have more acres per animal to hold them. You can mob graze all year if you have enough land and/or you use bale grazing. See [Rob Havard of Phepson Angus](#).

Graze each of your 30-32 paddocks for a day, be diligent in moving the cattle daily and observe the entry and residual covers. Take photos if this will help a later review of how the season progressed.

Do not be tempted to leave them longer than a day in this first rotation because you see a lot of 'wasted' grass being left behind. Keep them moving fast, while the grass is growing fast. (Review the presentation [here](#) again to understand why this is important.)

By the time you come back to that first paddock the grass should now be at least mid-shin height, if not near the top of your wellies, and you should be able to leave the stock in each paddock for 2 days.

Some paddocks will respond better than others, you may be able to leave stock in some for 3 days, but always ensuring you **take no more than 50% of the leaf area**, you leave enough **residual** (not less than 4 inches) and the grazing period ensures the stock **do not take a second bite**.

Continue moving the stock through your 30-32 paddock system until winter snow/ice/too much rain, stops play.

Monitor, adapt, learn from each move what worked, what didn't, what to do differently next time to make it work in your context and to meet your goals.

For sheep farmers, to facilitate building grass covers many of the large, commercial mob graziers lamb outside in April / May. See [Tim May of Kingsclere Estates](#).