



BMP FACT SHEET

Rotational Grazing

RDAR's dedicated OFCAF team works with producers to increase the adoption of Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) across farms in Alberta.

About Rotational Grazing

Rotational grazing is a strategic livestock management system where you confine animals to small areas (paddocks) for a short period before moving them to a fresh pasture. This allows the previously grazed area a sufficient period of rest and recovery.

Unlike continuous grazing, which can lead to overgrazing in preferred areas and underutilization in others, rotational grazing manages both the animal and the forage to achieve:

- **Deeper Root Systems:** Rest periods allow forage plants to fully recover and develop deeper, healthier root systems, improving drought resilience.
- **Uniform Forage Use:** High stock density ensures all plants in the paddock are grazed relatively evenly, promoting uniform regrowth.
- **Enhanced Soil Health and Carbon:** The managed rest/graze cycle, combined with uniform manure/urine distribution, builds soil organic matter, leading to greater carbon sequestration and a healthier soil ecosystem.

Adopting or expanding rotational grazing is one of the most impactful investments a livestock producer can make, driving success both economically and environmentally.

Increased Farm Profitability

- **Extended Grazing Season:** A healthier pasture can be grazed for longer, reducing your reliance on expensive stored feed (hay, silage) over the winter.
- **Increased Forage Production:** Better recovery leads to greater total grass growth (carrying capacity) on the same acreage. More pounds of beef (or milk) per acre.
- **OFCAF Funding:** The program offsets a portion of the initial costs of fencing and water infrastructure, helping reduce your financial risk in adopting this BMP.

Enhanced Environmental Stewardship

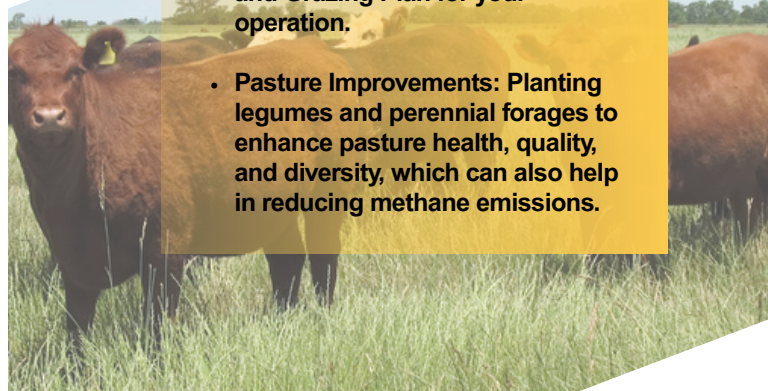
- **Superior Soil Health:** Increased root mass and plant diversity build soil organic carbon (SOC), making your farm more resilient to climate variability (droughts and floods).
- **Protected Water Quality:** Strategic movement of livestock away from stream banks and dugouts, supported by distributed watering systems, protects riparian areas and keeps water clean.
- **Biodiversity Boost:** Rested paddocks provide better habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife, supporting the overall ecology of your land.



How OFCAF Can Help

OFCAF offers cost-share funding (up to 85% reimbursement on eligible costs) to help you adopt or enhance your rotational grazing systems. Eligible activities include:

- **Fencing:** Installing interior cross-fences (temporary or permanent) to divide large pastures into smaller paddocks.
- **Water Infrastructure:** Installing new water system infrastructure (e.g., portable or permanent water troughs, pumps, and waterlines) to ensure uniform water access in all paddocks, which is critical for effective rotational grazing.
- **Agronomic Services:** Funding for a Professional Agrologist (PAG.) or Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) to develop a custom BMP Action Plan and Grazing Plan for your operation.
- **Pasture Improvements:** Planting legumes and perennial forages to enhance pasture health, quality, and diversity, which can also help in reducing methane emissions.



Four Principles of Grazing Management

Effective rotational grazing requires careful planning. Successful systems rely on four management principles:

1. Balance Forage Supply with Livestock Demand

- **Know Your Carrying Capacity:** Use forage tests and estimated production to determine the appropriate Stocking Rate for your pasture. Overstocking shortens rest periods and degrades the pasture.
- **Measure Residual Forage:** Do not graze below the target residual height (the amount of forage left behind). This ensures the plant has enough leaf area to photosynthesize quickly and recover.

2. Ensure Growing Season Rest

- **Adjust Recovery Time:** The most crucial element. Recovery periods must be adjusted based on the time of year, weather, and plant growth rate. Forages need longer rest during dry periods or cooler temperatures.
- **Use the “Take Half, Leave Half” Rule:** A good general guideline is to graze about half the standing forage and leave the rest for plant recovery and soil protection.

3. Avoid Vulnerable Periods

- **Monitor Soil Moisture:** Avoid grazing when soils are saturated or muddy (e.g., during spring thaw or heavy rains) to prevent trampling damage and soil compaction, which inhibits root growth.
- **Manage Fall/Winter Grazing:** If planning extended grazing (e.g., bale grazing or strip grazing standing forage), ensure your grazing plan minimizes soil disturbance and provides adequate nutrition.

4. Plan Animal Distribution

- **Access to Water:** Water is the single most important factor for even grazing. Installing a reliable, accessible water system across all paddocks is essential for encouraging cattle to move away from sensitive riparian areas and ensuring uniform pasture use.
- **Strategic Cross-Fencing:** Use temporary electric fencing to create small paddocks and control the density and duration of grazing. Higher density for a shorter time leads to better manure distribution and even grazing.



Resources & Support

Information on RDAR's OFCAF program can be found here:

<https://rdar.ca/funding-opportunities/ofcaf>



A comprehensive set of RDAR OFCAF application resources are also available:
<https://rdar.ca/funding-opportunities/resources>



Direct support is also available by email:
ofcaf.bmp@rdar.ca

Or, by telephone: 1-877-503-5955

RDAR provides producers with support and resources to make OFCAF applications easy to navigate and understand.

Rotational Grazing, powered by RDAR's OFCAF program, allows you to transform your pasture from a place where you simply feed livestock into a biological engine that actively builds soil health and drives long-term profitability.