

SIMULATED SHORT DURATION GRAZING

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Rotational grazing of rangelands is not a new idea. However, in recent years interest in intensive, short duration grazing has increased. Properly implemented, this method of grazing has the potential to increase the efficiency of range forage utilization and also improve the efficiency of livestock management and production.

In 1985, a study was initiated to compare the influence of six simulated short duration grazing programs on vegetation dynamics and cattle diets on tallgrass prairie in central Oklahoma. This is a cooperative effort involving members of the Agronomy and Animal Science Departments. The study involves 3 replications of 6 grazing treatments. The treatments are two stocking rates (1.3 and 1.8 times normal) combined with three grazing schedules (2, 3, or 4 rotation cycles during a 5 month grazing season). The pasture layout does not include 6 different grazing cells. Instead, each study pasture represents the fourth pasture in an 8-pasture rotation system. Cattle are grazed and removed from the study pastures in the same way they would enter and leave the pasture in a normal rotation. Each study pasture is grazed for 19 days during the summer. Two-cycle pastures are grazed 6 days initially, rested 63 days then grazed 13 days; 3-cycle pastures are grazed 4 days, rested 34 days, grazed 6 days, rested 51 days then grazed 9 days; 4-cycle pastures are grazed 3 days, rested 24 days, grazed 4 days, rested 31 days, grazed 5 days, rested 41 days then grazed 7 days. Diet samples are being collected throughout each of the grazing periods to determine the effects of length of period and stocking pressure on diet composition. Likewise, standing crop dynamics and defoliation patterns are being monitored as indicators of grazing impacts on the plant community.

It is not possible to develop a strict "recipe" for short duration grazing. However, the information from this study will provide some basis for developing and implementing these intensive grazing systems.

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