



# MANAGEMENT-INTENSIVE GRAZING

## What is it and could it work for you?

*By Dallas Mount*

Management-intensive grazing may be just the ticket if you have productive pasture land and want to raise forage for grazing animals.

In a traditional grazing program, livestock are turned out on pastures and then removed when forage has been depleted.

Uneven grazing, such as overgrazing of individual plants close to water or in favorite grazing spots, and undergrazing of other parts of a pasture can sometimes occur. If this occurs often over time, desirable grasses can decrease in number and vigor, and weeds and other

undesirable vegetation can increase.

To avoid this, some landowners use a pasture rotation system with short grazing periods followed by intervals of rest. This involves moving animals from one pasture to the next as forage is depleted. However, management-intensive grazing (MiG) takes this concept even further using smaller pastures and moving animals to fresh pasture more often, perhaps even daily.

### **What are the Benefits of MiG?**

Why invest the time and infrastructure necessary to move livestock daily?

- Increased harvest efficiency of forage
- Improved health and vigor of pasture land
- More even distribution of manure (better nutrient distribution and no cost in dealing with manure)
- More rapid decomposition of manure
- Plants fertilized more evenly
- Less reliance on harvested feeds (purchased or homegrown)

Most of these benefits stem from a manager being better able to control the impact of grazing on the plants. When carried out well, MiG

causes livestock to have less time to be choosy, which causes them to graze a pasture more uniformly and therefore reduce the negative effects of only preferred plants being grazed.

MiG provides adequate rest and recovery periods between grazing that allow desirable plants to fully recover and thrive. Many adopting MiG find they can extend the grazing season longer into winter and reduce or eliminate the need for harvested feed.

### Where is MiG Practical?

MiG makes the most economic sense in productive pastures or on irrigated or sub-irrigated ground. MiG can be a cost- and time-saving option compared to putting up hay, and hay meadows make great pastures for MiG.

Permanent, high-tensile electric fence is usually about half the cost of traditional barb-wire fencing. Reels with the poly-wire used for temporary electric fences are approximately \$100 for a ¼ mile, and plastic step-in posts cost approximately \$2.50 each

### Getting Mig-ed

University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service hosted a three-day Management-Intensive Grazing School in July 2011. More than 30 folks interested in grazing participated. Plans are being made to repeat the school in the spring or summer of 2012. Watch for details in early 2012.

Using MiG in low-productivity sites will likely not be economical due to the infrastructure costs of water and fencing but may be justified by other needs, such as reclamation or weed control on these sites.

### Water Development

Livestock watering points usually limit most MiG system designs. If using MiG on productive

pasture, the cost of developing multiple livestock watering points can often be justified by the increase in pasture vigor. Surface pipelines and portable tanks can be a low-cost solution for use in the frost-free season.

### Fencing

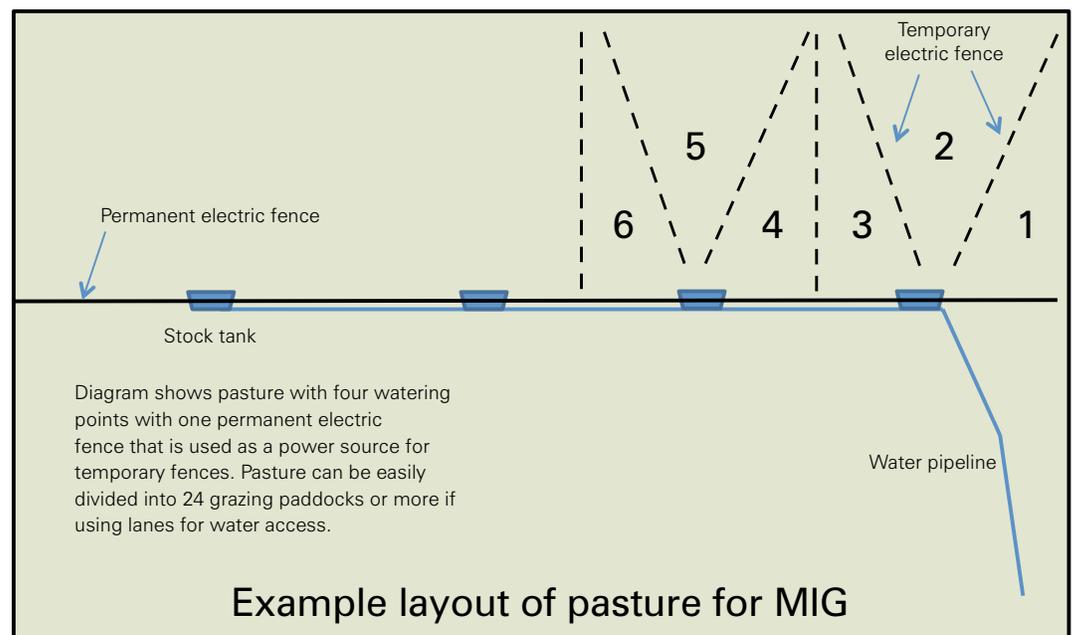
Experienced practitioners insist on using correct, high-quality fencing materials. Nothing causes frustration faster or makes someone give up MiG quicker than trying to get by with inferior materials. Most MiG systems use a combination of permanent and temporary electric fence. The permanent fence usually connects to a fence energizer and carries the charge to where the temporary electric fence will originate. Reels filled with polywire (a sort of bailing twine braided with electrical conductors)



*Installing a temporary fence to create a new paddock can take 20 to 40 minutes depending upon the length of the fence to be built.*

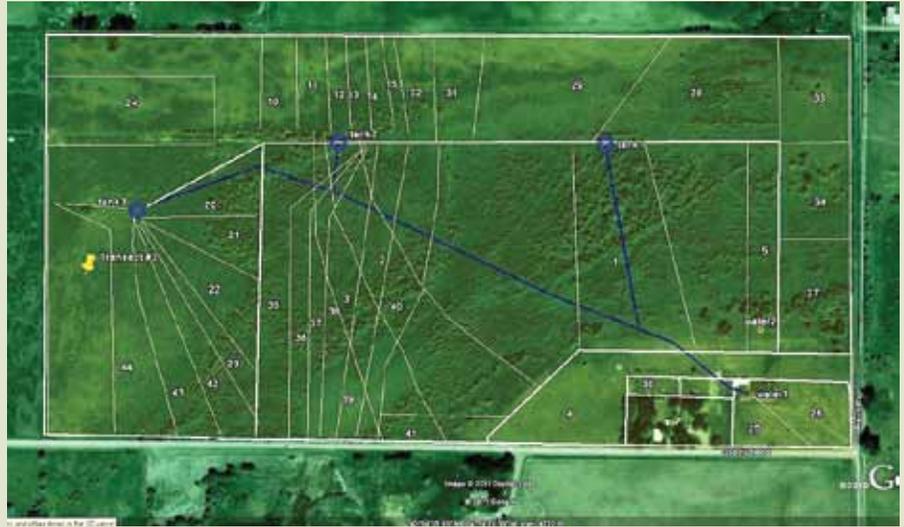
### How to tell if a pasture is overgrazed?

See this article by Mount to recognize overgrazing: go to [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com), click on the Resources link on the left-hand side of the page, then Forage/Pastures/Grazing, then "Recognizing overgrazing ..."



## Real-life example using MiG

The land featured in the Barnyards and Backyards Property Improvement Project near Wheatland is 80 acres of sub-irrigated pasture under a management-intensive grazing system. The map at right shows how the pasture has been subdivided during the grazing season from April through July. This past summer, 58 head of bred heifers grazed the pasture and were rotated to fresh pasture every one to five days. Pictures show improvements in the grass cover in an area near a place livestock would frequent before MiG. The pasture experienced approximately a two-fold increase in forage productivity,



fewer weed problems, and a much more healthy and vigorous stand of grasses and other plants. Construction of the next paddock using the temporary electric fencing takes approximately 20 to 40

minutes depending on the length of fence to be built. More information on this property can be found on the Barnyards and Backyards Property Improvement Facebook page.

and plastic step-in posts are the primary tools for building temporary grazing paddocks (see diagram page 14).

### Resources

MiG books are available for those interested in learning more, including: *Management-intensive*

*Grazing* by Jim Gerrish, *Kick the Hay Habit* by Jim Gerrish, visit the Barnyards & Backyards Property Improvement Page on Facebook, or contact a local cooperative extension or conservation district office to find out who in your area is practicing MiG. Visit their place!

See this article on portable fencing: go to [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com), click on the Resources link on the left-hand side of the page, then Forage/Pasture/Grazing, then "Portable fencing ..."



*Rotational grazing can improve grass cover as shown in these photographs of the same location. Before rotational grazing (left) and after (right).*

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