What needs to be done?

We are currently implementing a project with the following objectives:

- To estimate the potential impacts of expanded adoption of rotational grazing on farm viability, environmental quality, and rural communities
- To understand the barriers to adoption of rotational grazing
- To create policy and program recommendations, based on the benefits and barriers, to facilitate the expanded adoption of rotational grazing
- To involve a broad-based coalition of stakeholders to help implement policy recommendations

What can you do?

- Show your support for expanded adoption of rotational grazing by joining the coalition of stakeholders, which will:
  - Create appropriate policy recommendations;
  - Advocate for policy change to facilitate the adoption of grazing; and
  - Mobilize citizens concerned with agriculture, the environment, the food system, and rural communities.
- To join send an email to grazing@uvm.edu or call 802-656-0036

For more information or to participate:

Visit our website at

www.uvm.edu/~grazing

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This project is being implemented by Winrock International in conjunction with the University of Vermont.

The project is supported by the National Research Initiative of the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, grant number 2006-55618-01438.

Can rotational grazing improve farm viability, environmental quality, and rural communities in the Northeast?

WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

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The issue

Dairy and livestock farms in the Northeast are arriving at a fork in the road of their future. One path is toward larger, capital-intensive, confinement feeding systems. Another path is toward a lower-input, lower-cost production system that is often based on the use of rotational grazing. However, upon reaching this juncture, an increasing number of farmers are choosing to exit the industry due to a perceived lack of successful options. The loss of these farms and changing structure of the livestock industry is having a profound impact on the Northeast's environment, economy, and rural communities.

A potential solution

The use of well-managed pasture (i.e. rotational grazing) has the potential to increase the financial viability of small- and medium-sized farms by reducing fixed and operating costs of production. Additionally, rotational grazing has the potential to improve environmental quality, animal and food system health, and rural communities. However, rotational grazing continues to be used by a relatively small percentage of northeastern dairy farms.

What is rotational grazing?

Rotational Grazing is an alternative forage production strategy that can be used to reduce livestock production costs. It is a system in which the animals graze one section (paddock) of a larger pasture for a short period of time, often 12 or 24 hours. The primary goal of rotational grazing is to maximize the amount of nutrients available to livestock from pasture forage. By creating a system of paddocks, the animals have access to a sufficient amount of high-quality forage during their stay in any given paddock. The animals are not allowed back in the grazed paddock until it has regrown to the optimal stage for nutrient yield. Rotational grazing can reduce the costs for feed, fuel, fertilizer, and other operating costs. Farms using rotational grazing can also have lower fixed costs (i.e. investment costs).

How does rotational grazing impact farm profitability?

- A study conducted by Cornell University (2000-2003) found that dairy farms using rotational grazing had higher profits per cow than farms using confinement feeding.
- Research by the University of Wisconsin shows that rotational grazing was more profitable, on average, per cow and per unit of milk produced in each year from 1995-2004.
- A 1997 study from Penn State University showed rotational grazing farms in Pennsylvania and Vermont had higher net profits than traditional or confinement operations.
- A University of Maryland study (2001-2005) found that grazing farms had higher profits per cow than confinement feeding farms.

Rotational grazing can also have a positive impact on:

- **Water Quality**
  - Permanent vegetative cover reduces erosion and runoff from fields
  - Can improve the nutrient balance on livestock farms
  - Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides
- **Climate Change**
  - Uses less fuel and produces less carbon emissions
  - Permanent pasture stores carbon in the soil
- **Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity**
  - Permanent pasture provides critical habitat for grassland birds
  - Polyculture of plants promotes healthy soil through worm and microbial activity
- **Animal Health**
  - Healthier feet and legs relative to confinement feeding farms
  - Lower incidence of mastitis
- **Healthy Food System**
  - Reduced need for antibiotic treatments
  - Potential health benefits from grass-fed milk and meat
  - More smaller farms reduces risk of catastrophic disease spread
- **Farm Family Quality of Life**
  - Safer involvement of children in farming operation
  - Reduced labor demands
- **Rural Communities**
  - More viable small farms contribute to rural economies
  - Aesthetic working landscape is important for tourism
  - Healthy environment promotes rural community health