

## Wet Weather Management

The fear of wet weather can stop farmers turning animals out to grass early in spring. February can be a much drier month than March and April. The main criterion for spring grazing is a flexible attitude. Do not be afraid to turn animals out early and bring them back in if soils get too wet.

Any increase in the proportion of grass in the diet will pay dividends.

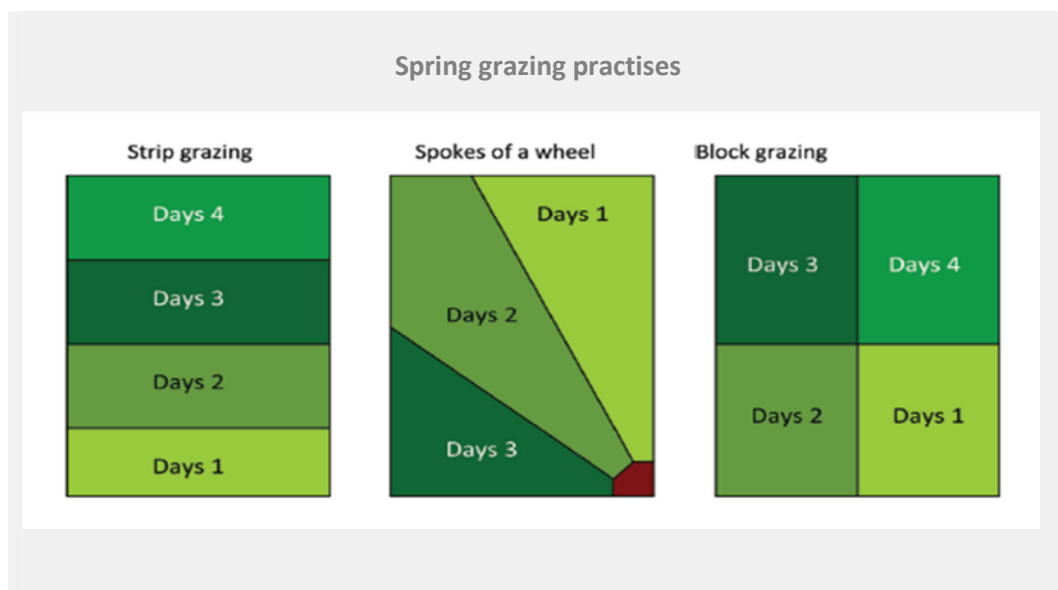
On/off grazing has been successfully used on dairy and beef farms to retain animals at pasture during periods of heavy rainfall. It is also used as a strategy for earlier turnout of animals on heavier soil types.

On/off grazing is where the animals are let out to grass with an appetite. They then graze continuously and are removed from the paddock when finished grazing (when you see animals start to lie down or walk about) and brought back to the shed. It is important

Two three-hour periods ensure that cows achieve the same dry matter intake they would if grazing full-time. Because of this, there is no reduction in milk production or loss of body condition score. The same is true for beef animals. This minimises soil damage but ensures that grass is being well utilised.

On/off grazing takes advantage of the animal's natural grazing pattern, letting them graze when they choose to graze, i.e. after milking. If there is sufficient grass available, there is no need to supplement with silage when they return indoors, as it does not increase dry matter intake or milk production.

Block grazing and back fencing are as important during periods of wet weather in autumn as spring, especially when grazing higher covers (ie greater than 1,800kg DM/ha). The diagram on the next page shows three of the main methods of dividing larger fields into grazing divisions.



## How to manage on/off grazing

1. A flexible attitude – don't allow poaching.
2. Use most sheltered and driest paddocks when grazing in wet weather.
3. Strip grazing or block grazing can be used during wet weather to ensure minimal damage from poaching. Use one section per day to get the most from the grass.
4. Where possible, use a back fence. This will help to protect re-growths and prevent soil damage.
5. On/off grazing can be practised to reduce poaching damage and keep animals at grass for longer.
6. Have multiple access points into a paddock so that grazing animals do not have to use the same entrance. If you don't, create a 4ft to 5ft grass roadway on a fence line to get animals to the back of the paddock.
7. Strategically place water troughs in the paddock, so that they will service several strips or blocks when a strip wire is being used.
8. Graze paddocks with heavy covers from the back of the paddock on the sheltered side.
9. On days of continuous rainfall hold animals in yard until rain has stopped.
10. There are days when it is just too wet to graze, as soon as conditions allow animals should be let back out to pasture.

*Key Fact - Recent research at Moorepark showed that a cow can consume 95% of its daily intake when grazing for two three hour periods.*