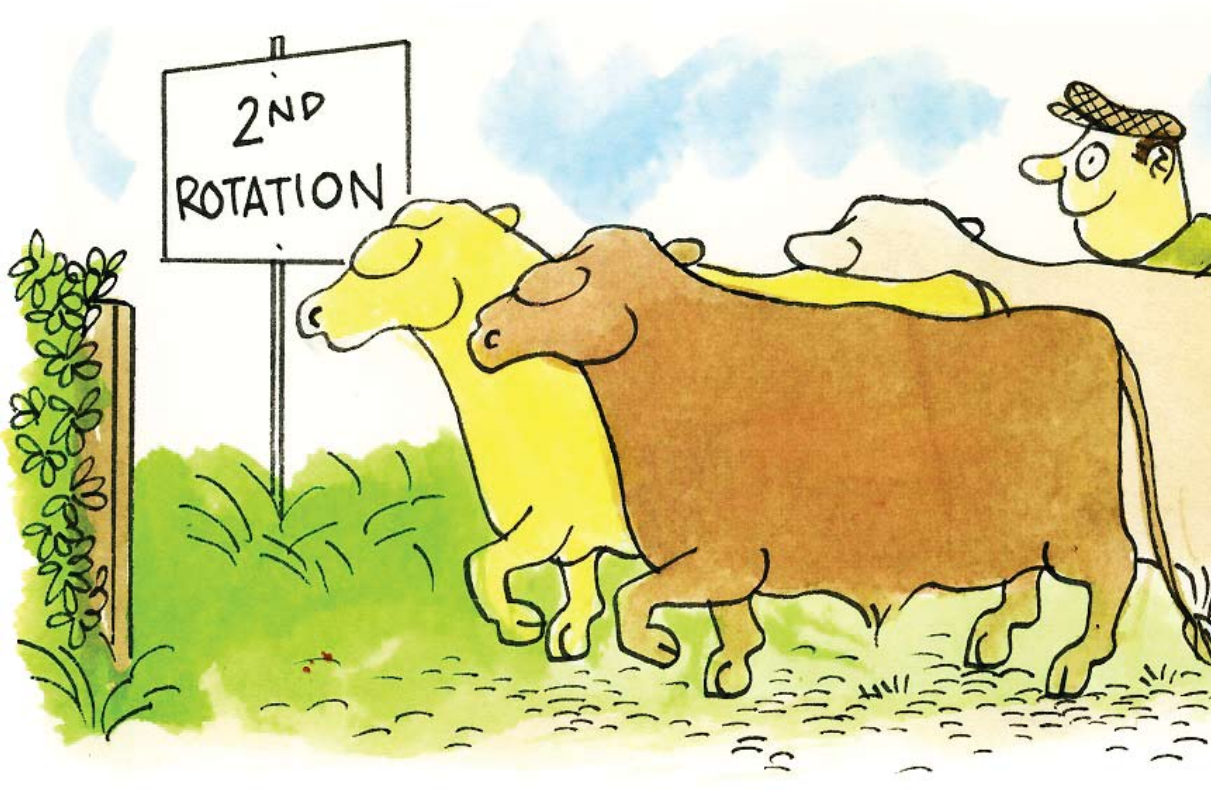
Spring rotation planner



The spring rotation planner is a tool that divides the area of your farm into weekly portions and takes the guesswork out of planning the first grazing rotation.

The only data you need to use is the date you want to turn out your animals and the date when you think you are growing enough grass to supply all the grass you need (i.e. supply = demand; Magic Day).

The spring rotation planner will not tell you if you are feeding the cattle enough grass — you will have to gauge that by walking through your paddocks or fields and assessing either visually or by measuring if you have enough grass. The spring rotation planner is a simple and effective tool to ensure that:

- Sufficient grass is grazed early enough to allow time for re-growth for the second rotation.
- Ensure that grass does not run out before the start of the second rotation. A wedge-shaped supply of grass is created, ensuring a continuous supply during the second rotation.

The simple rule is:

DRY FARMS
↘Turnout mid-February
↘40% of farm grazed by 17 March

Turnout in main grazing season

= 40% =60%

	DRY FARM	HEAVY FARM
15 February		
22 February		
1 March		
8 March		
15 March		
22 March		
29 March		
5 April		
12 April		
19 April		

↘100% of farm grazed by 10 April

HEAVY FARMS
↘Turnout early/mid-March
↘40% of farm grazed by 31 March
↘100% of farm grazed by 20 April

The table above shows the difference between a dry farm (turnout date of 15 February) and a heavy farm (turnout date of 8 March). For a dry farm, 40% is grazed within five weeks and the remaining 60% grazed in three weeks.

In a wetter farm, this changes to 40% grazed in three weeks and the remaining 60% in four weeks.

In practical terms, this means that priority animals are turned out first. This may only be a small group of animals (e.g. weanling bulls) but, as time progresses, more animals can be turned out.

All animals should be turned out by the time 40% of the farm is grazed to get 60% of the farm grazed off in three weeks.

Spring rotation planner

DOs	DON'Ts
Graze sufficient grass early enough to allow for re-growth for 2nd rotation	Start grazing a heavier farm too early
Ensure grass does not run out before the start of the second grazing	Forget to supplement feed or reduce stocking rate when grass is in short supply
Stick to the allocated areas in the spring rotation planner	Turn out all animals before 40% of the farm is grazed

Example of a 20ha farm where turnout date is 22 February and the first rotation ends 10 April

Table 1: Area available for grazing each week during the spring
Farm size = 20ha

	40%	100%
Turnout	Date 40% of farm is grazed	Date first rotation ends (100% grazed)
Feb 22	17 March	10 April
Number of days	Days from grazing start to 40% date	Days from 40% date to start of second rotation
	24 **(a)** [22 Feb - 17 Mar]	24 **(c)** [17 Mar - 10 Apr]
Hectares to be grazed	0.4 X total area	0.6 X total area
	= 8 **(b)** [0.4 x 20ha]	= 12 **(d)** [0.6 x 20ha]
ha/wk	(b÷a) x 7	(d÷c) x 7
	= 2.33	= 3.5

Table 2: Spring grazing planner showing weekly targets (from Table 1)

Week ending	Grazing area per week	Grazing area in total	Actual area grazed week end
20 Feb to 1 March	2.3	2.3	2.25
1 March to 7 March	2.3	4.6	4.65
7 March to 14 March	2.3	6.9	6.85
14 March to 21 March	3.5	10.5	10.4
21 March to 28 March	3.5	14.0	13.9
28 March to 5 April	3.5	17.5	18
5 April to 10 April*	2.5	20.0	20.5

*Second rotation is starting in 5 days. Measure farm cover weekly similar to previous weeks. Continue to fill in actual area.

Below is a blank copy of the spring rotation planner that can be copied, filled in and used each year

Table 1: Planner to calculate area available for grazing each week in spring

Farm size =

	40%	100%
Turnout date	Date 40% is grazed	Date first rotation ends (100% grazed)
Number of days	Days from start to 40% date	Days from 40% date to start of second rotation
	(a)	**(c)**
Hectares to be grazed	0.4 X total area	0.6 X total area
	= **(b)**	= **(d)**
Hectares/ wk	(b÷a) x 7	(d÷c) x 7
	=	=

Table 2: Spring grazing planner showing weekly targets (from Table 1)

Week ending	Grazing area per week	Grazing area in total	Actual area grazed week end

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

On/off grazing has been successfully used on 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 (feed is restricted when indoors). 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. This minimises soil damage but ensures that grass is being well utilised.

Wet weather management

DOs	DON'Ts
Have a flexible attitude	Don't let animals poach paddocks excessively
Strip grazing can be used in smaller paddocks. One section could be used per day.	Give animals a full paddock as grass will be soiled, trampled into the ground and not utilised
Where possible use a back fence (i.e. put a temporary wire behind animals preventing them from grazing or walking on the grazed area)	Do not graze paddocks with high covers (i.e. those with the most grass in them) as they will be grossly under utilised
Where possible practice on/off grazing (i.e. leaving the animals out to graze and then taking them off the pasture again)	Do not let animals walk long distances to water troughs
Have multiple access points into a paddock	
Place water troughs so that they will service several strips or divisions when a strip wire is used