

Rotational Grazing for a Healthy Reef

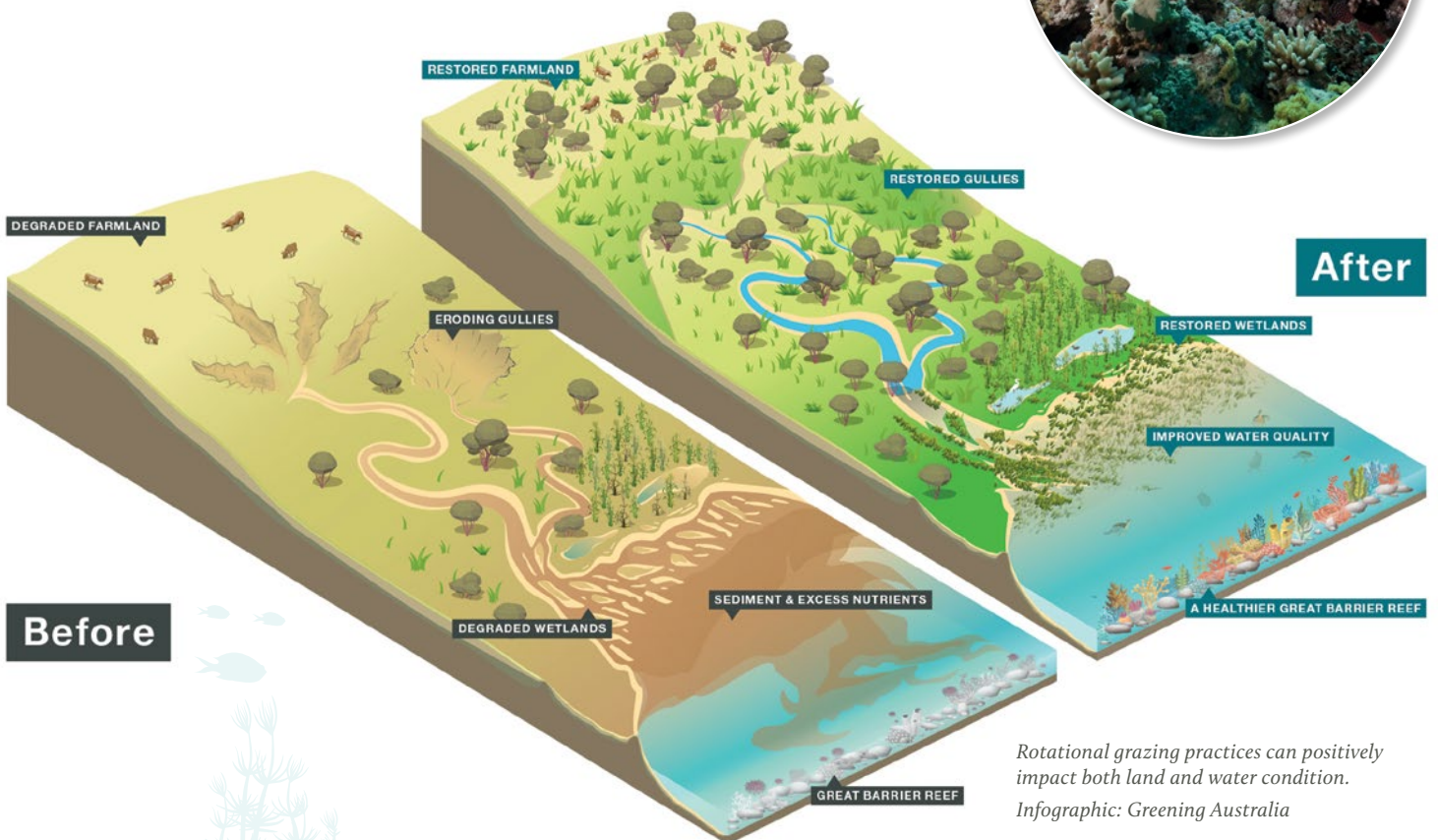
Rotational grazing is a livestock management practice where herds are moved from paddock to paddock allowing pastures to rest and regenerate between grazes.

Seasonal pastures, such as those in the Fitzroy region, go through an annual cycle of growth and dormancy. It is important to take the variation of conditions over these periods into account when managing grazing, so groundcover is maintained throughout the year to support healthy cattle.

Rotational grazing can also ensure pastures remain healthy and resilient with robust root systems holding the soil in place to prevent erosion and improve runoff water quality. Keeping soil on your land and out of the creeks and rivers prevents it from reaching the Great Barrier Reef where it smothers and damages coral and seagrass meadows.

Top right: Aerial drone image of cattle making their way through grassy paddocks

Right: Improving water quality supports the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef



Rotating cattle in the Fitzroy Basin

Understanding your land size and soil type is key to understanding how many cattle you can have on rotation, and how quickly you need to move them through to maintain healthy groundcover. On the Queensland Government's Long Paddock website, landholders can find their FORAGE property report with useful information including soil erodibility (see www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage). The goal is to have your soil covered and bound by grass roots all year round, preventing erosion and improving runoff water quality.

1. What's the value of rotational grazing?

There are many benefits to rotational grazing in the Fitzroy region:

- ✓ It increases the number of stock your land can support.
- ✓ It improves pasture health, biodiversity and water infiltration.
- ✓ It improves the health and weight gain of your stock as they get fresh, bulk pasture regularly.
- ✓ It reduces erosion and sediment runoff, improving water quality going into the Great Barrier Reef.

www.pasture.io/grazing-management/intensive-principles

2. How often do I rotate?

Each property, pasture, soil and cattle type is different, and these factors should be considered when planning your rotational grazing. Rest periods should be long enough to allow pasture recovery and rationed out through the dry season. Pasture grows quicker in wet warm periods, and slower in dry cool periods.

The basic rule for rotational grazing is:

Quicker growth, quicker moves. Slower growth, slower moves.

A good guide is 2 weeks of grazing and 6-8 weeks of non-grazing to allow for pasture recovery in each paddock.

www.agric.wa.gov.au/small-landholders-western-australia/rotational-grazing-small-landholders

3. How big should my paddocks be?

Paddock size is only limited by your imagination. The smaller your paddocks, the quicker your rotation needs to be. This also means its more labour intensive. The larger your paddocks, the slower your rotation can be. Aim for cattle to walk less than 1km for water within each paddock. Additional watering points may be needed to enable this as a good starting point.

4. Cycle your cattle with the seasons

There are growth (wet) and dormant (dry) cycles of pasture in the Fitzroy region. As a result, there should also be cyclical management of herd numbers to ensure pastures remain healthy and ready to respond to rainfall.

Varying herd numbers to match your pasture health will result in a much better pasture response to rain when it comes. In dry, dormant periods herd numbers should be reduced; in wet growth periods, herd numbers can be increased again.

www.rcsaustralia.com.au/rcs-regenerative-grazing-principles/

Read about a rotational grazing project in the Fitzroy region



Top right: Lawson Woodard, Stock Manager at Woorabinda Pastoral Company, inspecting grass growth in the rotational grazing paddocks



Right: Improving pasture and maintaining groundcover helps reduce sediment plumes like this from rivers flowing into the Reef lagoon

