



Image of Springham Farm
by Mairi Eyres



Glossary of Livestock Farming

This glossary is organised by **topic**. You can skip to a topic by clicking on one of the buttons below. You can also search for a word by holding Ctrl then pressing F, on your keyboard (or Cmd F on an Apple keyboard).

Please note that some definitions can vary depending on the context, but the aim of this glossary is to give an overview of livestock farming terms and concepts.

Animal Terminology and Animal Health

Anthelmintics	Anthelmintics are a group of antiparasitic drugs that treat parasitic worm infections in livestock.
At Foot	A term to describe a young lamb or calf who is being kept with their mother as they have not yet been weaned. For example "a calf at foot".
Bull	A word to describe male adult cattle, used for breeding.
Calving	A cow giving birth to a calf. The calving "season" or "window" refers to the period of time where all the pregnant cows are due to give birth.
Culling	Removing livestock from a group, usually through killing, for the purpose of protecting the health, safety and productivity of the herd or flock. Culling an animal or group of animals could be due to several reasons such as disease, poor performance or reproductive health, behavioural difficulties or economic reasons. Culling can also be used to mean removal by sale, in that they are 'culled' from the group but not slaughtered.
Dry	Female animals (usually ewes or cows) that are not lactating. May be resting between lactation cycles or not yet bred.
Faecal Egg Counting	Faecal Egg Counting (FEC) is a method for counting worm eggs in a dung sample under the microscope, and is done to monitor the worm burden in livestock.
Fat / Finished	Animals that are ready for slaughter, having reached the desired weight and fat cover. Usually sold directly to the abattoir or meat processor.
Finishing	The stage where livestock are managed to reach the desired weight and quality before being slaughtered. For example, it could be said that a herd of cattle is being "finished" on grass.
Flying Flock	A flock of sheep which graze across different sites. They are commonly brought onto land for conservation purposes, or onto arable land.
Heifer	A female cow who has not yet borne a calf.
Lambing	A sheep giving birth to a lamb. The lambing "season" or "window" refers to the period of time where all the pregnant sheep are due to give birth.
Maiden	Young female animals that haven't yet bred or calved/lambled.

Rumen	The first, and largest stomach compartment of a ruminant. It is full of microbes which help to break down and ferment ingested feed. A large amount of feed can be stored in the rumen.
Ruminant	A type of hoofed, herbivore mammal such as cattle, sheep, goats and bison with a unique digestive system suited to breaking down fibrous material.
Steer	The word used to describe male cattle who have been castrated.
Store Animals	Young animals that are not yet finished for slaughter and are being grown on. Often bought or sold to be grazed or fed until they reach slaughter weight.
Suckler Herd	A herd raised for beef production. The phrase comes from the way that calves are kept with the herd to suckle from their mother.
Tup	A word used to describe a male ram, used for breeding. The word "tupping" is used to describe mating sheep to produce lambs.
Weaning	The transitioning of calves, lambs and kids from their mother's milk to a solid diet.

Grazing Systems

Adaptive Multi Paddock Grazing	Livestock management practice that uses mobile fencing systems to move animals strategically around the grazing platform. It allows for shorter periods of grazing and provides the land time to recover after grazing, and rather than being prescriptive, it enables adaptation and flexibility in response to planned outcomes and/or conditions (e.g. weather, soil, animal life stage).
Cell Grazing	A grazing technique that involves confining animals to small areas of a field, called cells, and then moving them to new pastures on a regular basis. Movement is generally determined by providing a daily feed allocation with target entry covers (amount of plant matter available when entering an area) and exit residuals (amount of plant matter left after grazing)
Conservation Grazing	The use of livestock to restore and maintain natural habitats, such as grasslands, wetlands, and woodlands. Often determined by 'stocking rate' and seasonality. Generally under continuous grazing conditions for a period of time.
Continuous Grazing	Allowing animals to graze from one pasture without pasture rest and plant regrowth period, same as set-stocking.
Forward Grazing	Allowing young animals access to fresh pasture, usually under an electric fence, to enable them to selectively graze.

Grazing Platform	The area of the farm that has been allocated for livestock grazing.
Holistic Planned Grazing	Grazing management as determined through the Holistic Management Framework. A planning process for dealing simply with the great complexity livestock managers face daily in integrating livestock production with crop, wildlife and forest production while working to ensure continued land regeneration, animal health and welfare, and profitability.
Hub and Spoke	A way of managing grazing paddocks, where water access offers the 'hub' with fences creating the paddock 'spokes' which allow grazing to occur around the water source.
Leader/Follower	Where a priority group has access to graze selectively and are then followed by another group/livestock class.
Mixed Grazing	When two or more stock classes graze together. Body size and grazing differences between animal species (e.g. cattle and sheep) are reflected in differences in their selected diet and foraging behaviour, which can bring about opportunities for complementary pasture use.
Mob Grazing	A grazing technique that involves groups ('mobs') of animals being allocated areas of grazing at a relatively high stocking density, and then being moved to new areas on a regular basis. Movement is generally determined by providing a daily feed allocation with target entry covers (amount of plant matter available when entering an area) and exit residuals (amount of plant matter left after grazing) or a level of trampling. Some recommendations have been to graze a third, leave a third and trample a third. Rest periods usually over at least 30 days, often much longer.
Rotational Grazing	Small field sizes (or paddocks) combined with frequent stock movements to increase grass utilisation and provide a rest for the grass. Often characterised by a 3 day grazing period followed by a 21 day rest period.
Set Stocking / Continuous Grazing	Allowing animals to graze from one pasture without pasture rest and plant regrowth period, same as continuous grazing. (As this type of grazing does not allow for rest periods, it is not seen as a regenerative approach)
Strip Grazing	The front fence is moved to provide an allocation of new feed, however there is no back fence. During the growing season (typically May & June) this is not advisable due to the risk of overgrazing. This type of grazing is sometimes seen on dairy farms or with forage crops. It enables high pasture utilisation.
Techno Grazing	A method of cell grazing, which allows the accurate allocation of grazed pasture to large numbers of animals, which are moved regularly – usually every day or every other day. Reflects the use of electric fencing as a technology to enable this system.

Livestock Grazing Terms

Bale Grazing	The feeding of bales at pasture. These are fed either rolled out or on end, but usually without a ring feeder. Can be undertaken with hay, haylage or silage.
Compaction	When soil particles are pressed together, reducing the amount of space between them. This reduces the soil capacity for holding air, water and carbon.
Deferred Grazing	Grass that is not cut or grazed from the summer, and is made available for grazing over the winter/dormant period. Also referred to as 'standing hay' or 'foggage'
Outwintering	Livestock being managed outdoors during the winter/dormant season.
Overgrazing	Grazing plants before they have fully recovered.
Poaching / Pugging	The physical breakdown of soil structure caused by animals or vehicles. It can occur when livestock trample wet ground, especially around areas of high activity like gateways, drinking troughs, and feeders.
Recovery Period	The amount of time it takes for a plant to recover fully after being cut or grazed. This changes throughout the year and depends on conditions. Rest enables recovery.
Rest Period	The amount of time between grazings/cuttings which can enable time for recovery, if the rest period is matched to recovery period.
Sacrificial Paddock	A paddock that is not managed for optimal soil health but instead offers the ability to carry animals during challenging periods, such as over a part of the winter, or during lambing/calving for ease of animal management. As such, the soil and plants are "sacrificed" in order to meet other goals such as ease of access or reducing the impact elsewhere.
Stocking Density	The number of animals in a particular grazing area in a specific period of time i.e. lsu/ha/day (livestock unit/hectare/day).
Stock Class	A way of categorising animals based on their production stage, physiological status, or purpose within the farming system. This helps farmers, advisors, and markets understand the animal's current role, needs, and value. Some common livestock classes in ruminant systems (like cattle and sheep) include store, fat, in-calf/in-lamb, maiden, dry.
Stocking Rate	The number of animals across the grazing platform for the whole year.
Trampling	The action of livestock to push over and step on plants, usually those that have grown taller, as part of their impact when grazing.

Environmental Key Terms

Agroecology	Agroecology defines an agri-food system that reflects inherent complexity whilst seeking to encompass productivity, environmental issues and social justice. Agroecology draws on knowledge of the ecosystem, and involves working with natural processes to enable and enhance multiple ecological functions, productivity and social outcomes.
Agroforestry	The integration of trees and shrubs into farming systems, which can support biodiversity and better soil health.
Biodiversity	The variety of life on Earth, in all its forms, from genes and bacteria to entire ecosystems such as forests or coral reefs.
Holistic Management	A systems-thinking approach to managing resources that considers the social, environmental, and economic complexities of a situation.
Permaculture	A philosophy and design method that aims to create sustainable ways of living by working with nature, rather than against it.
Regenerative Agriculture	A farming approach that works with nature to restore and improve the land, soil, water, and biodiversity. Aligned with a set of principles that minimise soil disturbance, keep the soil covered, maintain living roots in the soil, maximising above and below ground diversity and integrating livestock into arable systems.
Sustainability	The ability to exist and develop without depleting natural resources or harming the environment. A concept that assumes resources are finite and should be used carefully to ensure that future generations have enough.
Systems - Thinking Approach	Considering the whole system and how it works as one, rather than focusing on just the individual parts. In farming, this relates closely to holistic management.

Pasture and Plants

Arable Farming	The growing of crops such as wheat and barley. An arable crop “rotation” refers to a plan of planting different crops in the same land over sequential years. Integrating livestock into the arable rotation can help benefit soil health and weed control.
Cover Crops	Plants grown to cover soil and improve the health of an agroecosystem, rather than for harvest.
Forage Crops	Plants grown to be eaten by grazing livestock or harvested for feed. They can include grasses, legumes, forbs, and grain crops.

Herbal Leys	Temporary grasslands made up of a mix of grasses, legumes, and herbs.
Hay	Grass, legumes or other herbaceous plants that have been cut and dried to be stored, usually as bales, for use as animal feed. The difference between haylage and hay is that, whilst the conservation of hay relies on the removal of moisture and is typically over 85% dry matter.
Haylege	Similar to hay, but left to wilt for a shorter period of time in the field before being baled and wrapped in several layers of plastic. The conservation of haylage relies on the exclusion of oxygen which prevents mould growth. Haylage is typically between 50 and 70% dry matter.
Meadow	Land that is covered or mostly covered with grass and often wildflowers, often used to make hay.
Monoculture	Growing only one crop in a particular area. This lessens biodiversity, because the lack of plant variety leads to less food and shelter for insects and animals.
Native Species	A species of plant or animal which occurs naturally in the given area, without the intervention of humans.
Pasture	Grasses, legumes, forbs, herbs and other plants growing in fields.
Permanent Pasture	Permanent pasture is land that is used to grow grasses, legumes, herbs, and wildflowers for at least five years in a row. It is not part of a crop rotation and can be grown using bought in seed or naturally allowed to establish.
Residual Leaf Material	The leaves left over after grazing. Leaving plenty of residual leaf material helps to protect the soil and its microbes. It supports healthy root systems which in turn increase water infiltration and retention. It also helps the plant maintain its ability to photosynthesise, allowing the plants to recover faster.
Silage	Animal feed made up of cut pasture which has been cut and then stored in airtight conditions, where it ferments. It is usually stored in a clamp or in wrapped bales. It is different to hay as it is not dried first.
Species Rich Grassland	A grassy habitat with a high diversity of wildflowers and grasses. It's a habitat of high nature conservation interest, having more than 15 plant species per square meter and more than 30% cover of wildflowers and sedges. It is usually unimproved or semi-natural and has not been ploughed or re-seeded in recent times.
Sward	A term used to describe grass growing, usually in a descriptive sense (e.g., a dense sward, a low sward, tussocky sward etc).

Soil Health and Biology

Aggregate	A naturally formed assembly of silt, sand, clay, organic matter, root hairs, micro-organisms and their secretions and the pores between them.								
Degradation (of soil)	Where soil quality declines and becomes less able to support plants, insects and animals.								
Erosion (of soil)	A type of soil degradation where the topsoil and/or important nutrients are lost due to poor land management or issues such as strong winds or water.								
Exudates (of plants)	Plant exudates are fluids emitted through the roots, consisting of substances like sugars, amino acids, organic acids and vitamins.								
Fertility (of soil)	Healthy, or fertile soil is able to support plant growth through providing nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.								
Microorganisms / Microbes	Microorganisms (also known as microbes) such as bacteria, fungi, protozoa and nematodes effect on nutrient cycles and carbon sequestration. These can be broken down into: <table> <tr> <td>Bacteria</td><td>Break down nutrients and release them to roots</td></tr> <tr> <td>Fungi</td><td>Help make nutrients available to plants</td></tr> <tr> <td>Protozoa</td><td>Large microbes which help with soil fertility and help regulate bacteria</td></tr> <tr> <td>Nematodes</td><td>Microscopic worms which can secrete nutrients to the plant (some beneficial, some predatory)</td></tr> </table>	Bacteria	Break down nutrients and release them to roots	Fungi	Help make nutrients available to plants	Protozoa	Large microbes which help with soil fertility and help regulate bacteria	Nematodes	Microscopic worms which can secrete nutrients to the plant (some beneficial, some predatory)
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Mineral material (in soil)	One of the basic components of soil, including matter such as clay and silt.								
Mulching	A process where the topsoil is covered with a material such as sawdust or straw to help protect it from very hot or cold weather, or to help lessen compaction from livestock grazing. It can also increase soil nutrients and reduce soil erosion.								
Organic material (in soil)	Another of the basic components of soil, including decaying plant roots, leaves, mulch and animal manure.								
Rhizosphere	A narrow region immediately next to the roots. It is full of bacteria that feed and decompose the exudates (sugars and proteins) released by the plant.								
Topsoil	The upper layer of soil where most of the biological activity occurs. When healthy, it is rich in important nutrients such as nitrogen, potassium, magnesium and phosphorus, and it is full of microbes, microorganisms and organic matter.								

Water, Carbon and Nutrients

Carbon Cycle	The carbon cycle is the process by which carbon moves between the atmosphere, plants, animals, soils, and oceans.
Carbon Sequestration	The process of removing carbon dioxide (CO ₂) from the atmosphere and storing it.
Ecosystem	An environment where animals, plants and microbes along with the landscape and the weather are all interacting and working together.
Nutrient Cycle	Nutrients (such as nitrogen, phosphorus and magnesium) are taken up by plants and animals and then transferred back to the environment via manure, death and decomposition.
Water Cycle	Water is consistently being cycled between bodies of water (lakes, oceans etc), the atmosphere, and the ground through four stages of Evaporation (water vapour), Convection (becoming clouds), Precipitation (rain, snow, hail) and Collection (gathering in bodies of water).
Water Infiltration	The rate at which water is able to be absorbed into soil. Healthy soil will allow water to drain quickly and easily.



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