

# **Electric Fence - The Foundation of a Workable Grazing System**

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Electric fence simplifies the management of an effective and productive grazing system. To be effective your grazing system relies on you controlling where the livestock will be, not the livestock determining where they will be grazing. Electric fence is easy to erect and very effective at controlling livestock. There are a number of important principals that will make your electric fence effective in managing livestock.

Electric fence provides a psychological barrier to the animals. They need to know that it is there and that it hurts. The first step is to train the livestock to the electric fence. This is most effectively done by putting the animals in a relatively small area with electric fence on the inside of a barrier type fence, such as a board or page wire fence. Animals in close proximity to an electric fence that has a good "bite" will quickly learn to respect the electrified wire. After a couple of days in this environment, most, if not all, the animals will realize that touching the wire is not a pleasant experience.

To provide an effective bite the fence must be properly grounded. The shock from the fence is actually the completion of an electrical circuit running from the power unit through the wire, through the animal into the ground and back to the ground rod of the power unit. If the power unit does not have proper grounding this circuit will not be completed. If soil conditions are very dry there is also the risk that the circuit will not be completed. The fencer unit should have three ground rods at least six to eight feet long and made of galvanized steel. These ground rods need to be in moist soil and located at least ten feet apart. The ground wire from the charger unit should be attached with good clamps to make a tight connection. If dry soils are a potential problem consider running at least one ground wire in the fence so that when the animal touches the two wires (live and ground) the circuit is completed and a shock is received.

Avoid electrical shorts along the fence that will reduce the charge. Shorts can be due to a number of different things: poor insulators that don't give full electrical protection, grass or branches on the live wires, or poor connections at any join in the wire.

Electric fence is a psychological barrier so the wire does not need to be tight as a fiddle string. Barrier type fences rely on the physical barrier of the fence to stop the animals. Electric fence relies on the mental aspect of "don't go there". If the animal does try to challenge the fence it is better to have some give in the wire that allows the animal to get through without breaking the wire. Repair will be much easier. One or two wires won't provide enough physical barrier in any situation.

Keeping your electric fence in good repair and animals trained to respect its nasty bite will make pasture management much easier and effective. Livestock trained to electric fence can be rotationally grazed with a single hot wire to divide paddocks, and will respect temporary fences that are easy and quick to build. An easily managed paddock system will make rotational grazing an easy management tool to increase the productivity of your pastureland.