

BENEFITS OF GRAZING DAIRY REPLACEMENTS

Improve Animal Health

A study in Minnesota found that average daily gains of at least 2 lbs could be achieved on pasture and was similar to that achieved in confinement. Research has also shown that grazed heifers experience significantly fewer displaced abomasums, dystocia, metritis, ketosis, and difficulty calving, decreasing veterinary costs. Studies in Wisconsin and Minnesota have also found that grazed heifers were similarly if not more successful in their subsequent lactation than animals raised in confinement.

Simplify Nutrient Management

An often overlooked benefit to grazing replacements is better nutrient management. Because the animals will spend a much greater amount of time outdoors, less manure is physically collected. This means that less time and money must be spent managing manure nutrients. Furthermore, if the grazing system is appropriately sized and designed, manure will be relatively evenly deposited across pastures that may be difficult to access with machinery. Being able to fertilize these fields may increase forage yield and quality.



Image credit: Sarah Flack



Image credit: <https://agriculture.newholland.com>

References and Additional Resources:

- ⇒ <https://extension2.missouri.edu/M190>
- ⇒ <https://fsrc.missouri.edu/economics-of-grazing-systems-versus-row-crop-enterprises/>
- ⇒ https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/danecountyag/files/2017/08/25-Dairy-Heifer-Grazing_fact-sheet.pdf
- ⇒ <http://www.midwestforage.org/pdf/197.pdf.pdf>
- ⇒ https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1097378.pdf

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Reduce Feed Costs

Feed costs can account for more than 50% of the total cost of raising a heifer. Studies in MN and WI have found that raising replacements on pasture could reduce costs by **20-30%, or \$0.39 per day** compared to rearing them in confinement. Obviously, grazing costs will vary dramatically depending on the size and design of the system and the grade of materials (i.e. fence posts, wire, etc.) you select. In general, however, it is estimated that the infrastructure (fencing, water, pasture access, etc.) to implement a grazing system costs approximately \$50-\$100 per acre.*

*This estimate only includes the physical water and fencing infrastructure and would be higher if water sources or access lanes need development.

Reduce Labor Costs

A study with farmers grazing heifers in Wisconsin in 2016 found that farmers reduced their time spent managing the heifers by **an hour each day**. Depending on your labor costs, this can add up to a substantial amount over the grazing season. It also frees up labor to attend to other needs on the farm which could make further improvements.



Image credit: Nancy Glazier



Image credit: UVM Extension

Stored forage = \$125/ton
= **\$0.18/pound of dry matter**
Pasture infrastructure = \$75/acre
A pasture yield of 2 tons of dry matter per acre = **\$0.09/pound of dry matter**