

GRAZING

Electric Netting for Sheep

by Ulf Kintzel

An electric netting is a prefabricated temporary fence with conductive horizontal twines, with built in posts and connecting non-conductive verticals. This mesh of fence is usually 150 to 164 feet long and can be rolled up after taking it down.

There are a number of different electric nettings for sheep on the market.

The three most important practical items that can differ in electric nettings are, in my opinion, height, the material of vertical connections, and the number of spikes per post. The "regular" height is 33 to 36 inches tall while the higher nettings are about 42 inches tall. The material of the verticals is either flexible (strings) or static (struts). The posts can have either single spikes or double spikes.

I use Euro Netz (Euro Net) made in Germany. It is about 36-inches (90 cm) high and about 164 feet (50 m) long with flexible verticals and double

spiked posts. The height is sufficient. Taller nettings are more difficult to keep erected. The flexible verticals allow for faster take down and are easier to roll back up for transportation. Nettings with struts as verticals are more designed as semi-permanent fencing since the struts keep the sections between posts from sagging.

The double spikes allow me to step the post into the ground as opposed to forcing them in by hand, as is necessary for single spiked posts. Using the foot is particularly important when the soil is hard, stony, or semi-frozen. The double spike also keeps the posts more securely in the ground, especially in windy conditions.

The electric netting can be used to subdivide a larger parcel of land that is fenced in permanently, for example, with woven wire. Or it can be used entirely as the perimeter and interior fence. When I use it as interior fence to subdivide a larger parcel I use it like anyone who uses regular twine fencing with plastic or metal posts. In

the summer I like to include shade by including a large tree, several trees or a hedgerow. I also try to think ahead where the next cell will be. This allows me to leave one side of the fence erected when I fence in the new parcel.

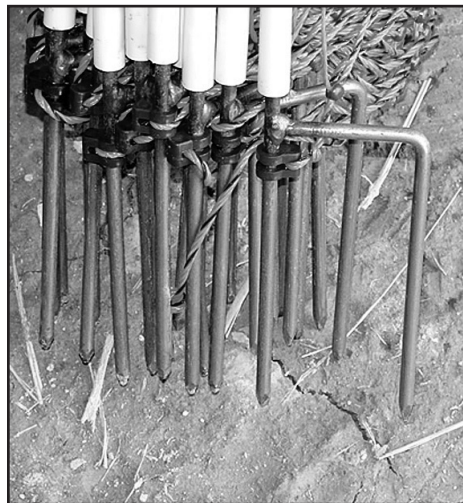
When I use the netting to pasture rented adjacent land, neighboring harvested hayfields or land seeded down temporarily for my sheep, i.e. with cereal rye, I try to shape the cell somewhat rectangular. A square is the ideal since it has the biggest amount of space of any rectangular for the same amount of fence being used. I start at that end of the field that suits me, which is often the one next to an access road. When I rotate the flock and put up the nettings for the next parcel I usually leave one side of the old cell standing.

The time that my sheep spend in one of these cells of pasture varies greatly. It can be anywhere between one day and a week. If I use a neighbor's harvested hay field in the fall or winter I often enlarge the current cell after two to three days rather than building entirely new. That is often simpler and I also don't have to move the water tank and the water troughs so often.

Sometimes limit of shade in the summer is a concern and the existing shade trees are included in the original cell and I enlarge that original parcel after a few days. When putting up the nettings it is very important to have the sections put up as tight as possible by stretching it as much as possible. Loose sections of fence are likely to become a death trap for sheep. They can hang themselves that way. Also, I use a spike attached to a string or rope on each corner post in order to increase tension in the fence.

The source of energy is a decisive factor when it comes to the reliability of the fence. I use Gallagher energizers that are designed for sheep fencing. The standard energizer I have has 2.6 Joules. Energizers that store less than that are often not sufficient for 15 to 20 nettings or for high weed load on fewer nettings. The Gallagher B260 is my long time favorite. It is handy and it is powerful.

Of course, the energizer won't work to its capacity when the grounding isn't deep enough or the soil isn't moist enough. I use a marine battery to power the energizer. Marine batteries are designed to be run down entirely and then re-



Double spikes make it much easier to push the posts into hard ground.



Netting comes in rolls 150 to 164 feet long and 33 to 42 inches high.

charged again. In dry conditions I like to use a bucket that leaks lightly at the bottom, fill it with water and set it next to the ground rod. The water will slowly drench the soil around the ground rod without running off.

It pays to have as many nettings as possible. More is better. I like to have about 20 to 25 rolls of netting that are less than 5 years old. I usually get about five years of reliable use out of the nettings. Some producers claim their average use is about ten years, but I find that nettings lose conductivity past 5 years of age. Including the older nettings remaining from previous years I have more than 35 rolls at any time. That is easier said than done since it is indeed a major expense for my farm.

I buy my nettings from my native Germany. These days one roll cost me about \$105 including shipping. The shipping part is currently about \$25. The price depends on the current exchange rate USD versus Euro. I used to be able to buy these nettings for less than \$80, shipping included, when the dollar was worth more and most of the financial world laughed at the Euro. Yet, the current price is still competitive to any domestic netting with only single spiked posts.

Having a good number of electric nettings allows me to style the pasture the way I want it to be, following natural borders such as the edge of a field, a tree line, a forest line, the property line and so forth. When I used to have fewer nettings due to financial limits I had to subdivide more than actually necessary, creating unnecessary labor.

Despite the greater cost in comparison to twine, I find electric nettings the safer choice for sheep. Electric nettings are more effective when it comes to keeping lambs, sheep, and guard dogs in and predators such as coyotes and black bears out. The peace of mind that comes from knowing your sheep are safe when you hear the coyotes howling at night is priceless.

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Electric netting makes a good interior fence to subdivide pastures for rotational grazing of sheep. Photos by Ulf Kintzel

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