

Cover Crop Grazing Partnerships

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Using cattle to graze cover crops may be one way to offset some of the costs, but planning, pricing and finding a tenant may be challenging. Many cover crops are planted after wheat harvest, seed corn harvest or even soybean harvest, so there is often early fall and early spring growth available for grazing, even if this isn't your initial goal.

In order to successfully establish and grow cover crops in a corn-soybean rotation, it takes planning and preparation months to years in advance. If you are just now thinking about doing this, you are probably too late.

Grazing Partnerships

If you don't own your own cattle, the big question is what to charge for the grazing of your cover crops. There is not a one-size-fits-all price, but there are multiple considerations to get you to a comfortable number. Grazing cover crops is very different than grazing corn stalks, so many of those agreements and price points may not work.

If you want to have a partnership for growing and grazing cover crops (and yes, it is definitely a partnership), here are several considerations to be agreed upon before making the deal:

- How, when and what types of cover crops will be planted, as well as terminated?
- Who will pay for the cost of seed, planting/drilling, fertilizer and

termination?

- Are there Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds available and who gets those?
- Who is responsible for fence, water, salt/mineral and daily care during the grazing period?
- Is the goal for fall or spring grazing?
- When is the start date, how long are cattle to be on the field and when is the target end date?
- What is the appropriate stocking rate?
- How much ground cover should be left after grazing?
- Real time decisions: What if forage needs to be mechanically harvested? What if weather prevents grazing (too dry or too wet), who makes the call and who pays for what?

You also want to consider how growing or grazing cover crops may alter your insurance coverage for the following cash crop or liability for the livestock. There are many more considerations, such as herbicide programs, cattle supplements, etc., which need to be dealt with by the appropriate party.

Lease Considerations

When considering a pricing arrangement, it can be done multiple ways. Pricing can be based on a per-head-per-month basis or on a per-acre basis. In both cases, considerations need to be made regarding what to do if the cover crops do not grow or if weather conditions limit grazing. Another option is to pay on the amount of weight gained, if using growing cattle.

If the cropland owner is new to growing cover crops, it may make sense for the cattle owner to pay for all or most of the cost of the cover crops and the establishment, with rights to graze in return.

According to the 2017 Iowa State Custom Farming Survey, the cost of custom drilling small grains is about \$15-\$20 per acre. Obviously, costs could vary considerably, especially if using your own equipment. The cost of seed would vary based on species and quantity, and you may also want to consider cost of fertilizer when determining total costs.

If the cropland owner is already growing cover crops, it probably makes the most sense for the cropland owner to continue paying for these expenses and simply make an agreement based on a per-head-per-month lease or a per acre lease. Both parties will still want to have a conversation on type of cover crop species grown and the grazing plan, since this will directly impact the cattle owner as well.

Regardless of the arrangement, pricing should take into account the costs and returns to both parties (although

many returns on cover crops are unknown or unrealized for years), time commitment and risk for losses. It is also very important to consider the cost of other potential forage sources for the cattle, i.e. the "competition" for cover crop grazing.

In many cases, cover crop grazing may be during the transition of pasture grazing, cornstalk grazing or confined feeding, so one number may not be the answer, especially since forage value/quality may be much different.

Crop Residue Exchange Website

A new site is now available for people who are looking for crop residues to purchase or graze, or if you have crop residue for sale or looking for someone to graze. The site is titled "Crop Residue Exchange" and can be found at <https://cropresidueexchange.unl.edu>

After establishing a log-in account, farmers can list cropland available for grazing by drawing out the plot of land available using an interactive map and entering in basic information about the type of residue, fencing situation, water availability, and dates available. They also provide their preferred contact information.

Livestock producers can log in and search the database for cropland available for grazing within radius of a given location of interest.

Source: Jay Parsons, Associate Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Floodwater and Stormwater

continued from page 1

tested for potential contaminants prior to resuming using the water.

Stormwater runoff, unlike floods, can be more easily and consistently managed to protect drinking water wells. A good practice is to take a moment to watch how stormwater runoff flows away from a home or across a driveway or yard during and immediately after rains. If it is running into the vicinity of a well or is accumulating near the well it needs to be redirected to prevent it from entering the area.



Photo: Jan Hyngstrom

Private water well caps and casings should be checked regularly for cracks which could introduce contaminants.

Some easy and largely cost-effective methods to better manage or redirect runoff include:

- Changing the length or direction of your downspouts.
- Installing a rain barrel to collect rainwater for reuse.
- Using gravel, pavers or rock for walkways instead of concrete.
- Adding mulch or different types of grasses or landscaping can help slow, retain or redirect stormwater runoff.

Pollutants available for runoff to

"grab" and carry with can be reduced by:

- Applying pesticides or fertilizers according to label directions and not within 24-hours of forecasted rain.
- Preventing oils or other automotive fluids from being dumped on the ground.
- Sweeping grass clippings and other yard wastes off paved surfaces and away from runoff routes.
- Removing pet waste from the yard.

Preventing potential impact from stormwater runoff also includes inspecting the well regularly to identify any cracks in the cap or casing. If runoff has pooled near the well over time or if any cracks are noticed, a water quality test should be performed to ensure the water is free of potentially harmful contaminants.

Flood Insurance

Flooding is the most common natural disaster in the U.S. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has determined even 1-inch of floodwater can cause over \$20,000 in damage. Structures within the 100-year floodplain are at the highest risk for flood damage.

Any structure such as a home or business which falls within the 100-year floodplain, and is being purchased or built with a federally backed loan from any financial institution, is required to have flood insurance.

The City of Lincoln Watershed Management program has an interactive floodplain map, information on flood insurance and other resources at www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/pworks/watershed/flood

New Hazardous Materials Collection Center Open



The City of Lincoln recently opened a new Hazardous Materials Collection Center at 5101 N. 48th Street. The permanent facility for the disposal of hazardous materials will serve Lincoln and Lancaster County residents as well as qualifying small businesses, such as home-based operations, nonprofits, churches, and others who produce less than 220 pounds of hazardous waste per month.

The Hazardous Materials Collection Center will accept household hazardous waste by appointment only on the first Wednesday and the third Saturday of each month. The first collection date will be Wednesday, Oct. 4. Residents can schedule appointments at <http://lincoln.ne.gov> (keyword: household) or by calling 402-441-8021. Residents will be asked to identify the types and amounts of waste they plan to bring. Small businesses can call 402-441-8002 to see if they qualify for disposal services.

With the opening of the new facility, fewer household hazardous waste mobile collection events will be offered. The new Hazardous Materials Collection Center will accept the same materials collected at the mobile events:

- Adhesives
- Bleach cleaners
- Brake fluid
- Compact bulbs (CFLs)

- Drain/oven cleaners
- Flea/tick products
- Fluorescent tubes
- Furniture stripper
- Glues
- Grease removers
- Herbicides
- Insecticides
- Insect sprays
- Lighter fluid
- Mercury thermometers
- Mercury thermostats
- Mixed gasoline
- Mothballs
- Oil-based paint
- Oil-based stains
- Old gasoline
- Paint thinner
- Pesticides
- Pool chemicals
- Power steering fluid
- Small capacitors
- Small propane cylinders
- Solvent-based polishes
- Spot removers
- Torch fuel
- Transmission fluid
- Turpentine
- Upholstery cleaners
- Wood preservatives

The Hazardous Materials Collection Center does not accept latex paint, motor oil, fertilizers, gas grill cylinders, medicines and pharmaceutical waste, electronics and batteries.