Cover Crop Grazing

Jim Church
University of Idaho Extension
Cover Crop Grazing Project

Cattle & Grazing Goals:

1. Evaluate potential of grazing cover crops with cattle.

2. Evaluate cattle performance.

3. Analyze economics.
Cattle Grazing
North Idaho Dryland

- Abundant early forage
- Forage quality and quantity declines
- Need better forage in late summer/early fall
Cover Crop Grazing - Methods

• Two producer cooperators worked on project starting in 2013.

• Year 1 – (2013) 17 acres – small plots - paddocks, 22 head mixed cattle
Grazing

• Year 2 – (2014) 46 acres and 10 acres – 2 sites - Cow calf pairs & replacement heifers

• Year 3 – (2015) 217 acres – 2 sites/farms
Year 2: 2014

• Both cooperators seeded fields for a total of 56 acres.

• 6 way seed mix was used: forage oats, forage radish, forage turnips, spring peas, spring canola and spring triticale.
Cover Crop Grazing

2014 Drew Leitch Field
• 46 acres planted early May

• 46 cow/calf pairs turned out late June

• Estimated pounds of forage needed per day = 2000 pounds. 50 pounds as fed per pair per day.
2014 Leitch Farm Cover Crop Grazing

- Est. prod./ acre = 4 tons
- 50% utilization = 2 tons of forage available per acre
- Rec. paddock size = 2 acres
- Duration = 4 days per request of Mr. Leitch
2014 Leitch Farm Cover Crops

- 23 paddocks
- Grazing time 92 days
- Approx. 1/3 of field swathed and baled for hay.
- Approx. 1/3 of field swathed and windrow grazed.
2014 Leitch Farm

Results:

• Estimated gross income was $600 per acre in pounds of beef produced per acre.

• Net income approx. $300 per acre
2014 Leitch Farm

Results cont:

• No till seeded winter wheat into field in late October.
• Yield = one of his best fields in 2015.
• Only problem = triticale carried over and volunteered in wheat field.
Year 2: 2014 Thompson Farm Cover Crop Grazing

- 10 acres planted early June.
- Cattle turned out mid July.
- Fresh Quality test = 19.2% CP
  58.5% TDN
Thompson Farm Cover Crops

• Part of the field was swath and baled.
• Small paddocks used.
• Cattle moved daily.
• Cattle gained over 2 pounds per day.
2014 Thompson Farm Cover Crops

- Estimated net return from grazing cover crops = $300 per acre
- Baled forage fed later tested high in nitrates. Not at a toxic level but high.
Year 3: 2015 Leitch Farm

- 150 acres planted with six way species, early May
- 75 head of spayed heifers and 105 head of cows & calves grazed 50 acres for 65 days.
2015 Leitch Farm

- 75 spayed heifer grazed for 65 days.
- ADG was 1.7
- Grazed on a per pound of gain basis.
- $$ at least $0.50 per pound of gain or higher.
2015 Leitch Farm

- Paddock grazed and windrow grazed 50 acres for 65 days.
- Yrlg. Heifers removed.
- 105 cows & calves grazed the windrows & bales on total 150 acres as of Nov. 1\textsuperscript{st}.
2015 Leitch Farm
2015 Thompson Farm

- Seeded a 67 acre field – May 4\textsuperscript{th}
- June 23\textsuperscript{rd} – turned in 22 head – yearling heifers & bull
- Paddock grazed
- July 17\textsuperscript{th} – cut 10 acres of hay = 12 tons
2015 Thompson Farm

- July 22-25<sup>th</sup> – swathed remainder of field into windrows.
- Windrows grazed
- Aug. 15 – Added 28 cow calf pairs
- Sept. 1 – Moved herd to CRP
2015 Thompson Farm
2015 Thompson Farm
Cover Crop Grazing
Planting Specifics

Seeding rate = 65 lbs total – even out species by weight.

Estimated seed cost = $30/acre

Fertilizer = 100 lbs of 16-20-0

Fencing = depending on type of fence
Considerations

1. Water source
2. Increase in labor to move fences
3. Availability of cattle/livestock
4. Haying equipment
5. Market for forage
Questions