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Transcription of Grazing cover crops, episode 16

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

00;00;16;05 - 00;00;41;16
Unknown
Welcome to Pasture to Profit. My name is Scott Stinnett, CSU extension specialist in Kit Carson County, and again joined me by my colleague Travis Taylor, extension specialist for the Golden Plains area out of the Wray, Colorado office. And today we're going to talk about grazing cover crops for cattle. And with us is my office colleague, Ron Meyer, agronomist extraordinaire for CSU extension.

00;00;41;19 - 00;01;08;19
Unknown
If you if you're in the agronomy field, you've probably heard of Ron. He gets on everything from AG to all sorts of other podcasts and other interviews throughout the nation. So he's well known, well respected. Glad to have him here today. So we're going to start off. Travis. We're going to start off and let Ron as our guest, tell us what are the agronomic advantages to having cover crops on a crop field or maybe even on a managed pasture?

00;01;08;21 - 00;01;34;00
Unknown
Hey. Thanks, Scott. Good to be with you. So. Yeah. So I'm a plant scientist, and so I know nothing about animals, but I we have done some work and research on farm research with cover crops. We've looked at both dry land and irrigated. And so we'll talk about mostly the dry land today. And so there are a lot of advantages agronomic to putting a cover crop out there.

00;01;34;00 - 00;01;58;21
Unknown
There is also a few disadvantages too. We'll talk about that. But some of the advantages of a cover crop are, you know, you can reduce your water and wind erosion potential on those acres. So you get them covered up going into winter. And and the so not only are they less prone to wind erosion, water erosion, but if you get a cover and if it's got a little height to it, you can catch some winter snow as well.

00;01;58;26 - 00;02;17;17
Unknown
So that means moisture, more moisture into the soil. And as a result of that, that's money in the bank to a dry land farmer. So some of the advantages we've found, you know, we looked at broad leaves and grasses, the grasses for the most part, produced a little bit more forage versus the broad leaves we looked at.

00;02;17;17 - 00;02;45;20
Unknown
So, you know, that's important. You get a little better cover. But from a tonnage perspective, we raised anywhere from 500 pounds per acre up to 2,000 pounds per acre. So depending on the site, the moisture, which cover species you're using, things like that. And then we measured percent cover going into the winter. And we can achieve nearly 100% cover with the right conditions and the right plants.

00;02;45;20 - 00;03;17;19
Unknown
So which plants work best? We like the grasses, so anything with oats in it tend to produce more forage and cover quicker. But we also put oats together with some other crops. We used oats and peas. That was one of my favorites. And so from a forage standpoint, that had the highest protein and the highest forage production. And in addition to that, some of the other grasses that worked included millet and, sorghum sedan, things like that.

00;03;17;20 - 00;03;41;22
Unknown
But so they're all pretty good choices. Oats tend to do just work best. Now there's some issues with oats and that one of those is nitrates. So from a a cow producer, if you're grazing oats you've got to be careful about nitrates. And so oats is an accumulator. We did find that out as well. Now most of our plots have low nitrate issues just because we're coming back after crop.

00;03;41;22 - 00;04;06;04
Unknown
So the nitrogen was already used. But yeah. So from a forage perspective. You know, you can raise 500 to 1500 pounds of forage per acre and to a cow calf man or a cattle person that actually looks pretty good. The cost to doing that for a farmer is you're going to use some soil moisture getting to that point.

00;04;06;06 - 00;04;35;03
Unknown
And in addition to that, you're planting. So there's some seed costs. So, now the benefits. We did see improvements in, in soil conditions. So soil health characteristics improved with a cover crop. They were small and hard to measure, but there was improvement. So organic matter levels increased slightly. Water infiltration rates increased slightly with a cover crop.

00;04;35;03 - 00;05;02;26

Unknown
In fact, we've got some pictures of water ponding after a rain on the fallow side versus infiltrating after a rain on the cover crop side. So there's some positive benefits to soil Health. One issue from an agronomic standpoint is they're small and it's hard to get paid for those right away. So you're using moisture, but you're benefiting the soil.

00;05;02;28 - 00;05;29;04
Unknown
But it's just hard to get paid for that that same year. Over time, it'll pay for itself, but it just takes a long time. So what we found was one of the best ways to make that system, that that system worked, is to graze it or harvest it for forage. So Ron, you you mentioned some different things that you use, but I'm hearing a mixture of grasses and legumes.

00;05;29;08 - 00;05;48;16
Unknown
And for us on the on the livestock side, you know, we jokingly sometimes call ourselves grass farmers. You know, if we don't have the grass, we don't raise them, take care of the grasses, the forage properly. We're not going to raise good cattle. But I mean, what are the advantages to having things like like a lagoon? You said peas.

00;05;48;17 - 00;06;11;14
Unknown
So we're not talking about green English peas that you'd have at the dinner table. We're talking cow peas, mung beans, black eyed peas, things like that. Yeah, yeah. We used forage peas. And so, you know, I don't know that it would make a big difference which pea you chose, but, that the oak P mix produced the most forage and the highest quality forage.

00;06;11;14 - 00;06;35;10
Unknown
So it had a little protein coming in with it as a result. Okay, so turn it back now, Travis, you with the livestock side of this? So with all these things on cover crops, how is a cover crop out on a stubblefield or a managed pasture or dry land area? How's that advantageous, then, to the cattlemen? Well, I think it becomes very advantageous.

00;06;35;10 - 00;06;55;19
Unknown
And I think it helps offset some of what Ron saying. We see an expense that we're putting out in this dry land area, and we need some way to recoup some of that expense. So I think it's very advantageous, particularly when we can graze those at a time of year where we may not be needing to add extra supplementation.

00;06;55;19 - 00;07;20;17
Unknown
In his oat pea rotation, Ron talks about getting a higher level of protein and a higher quality of forage out there, particularly at a time of year when we may be coming in in a later season and we can graze

something that we may not have to add some additional protein supplementation in the forms of tubs or in the forms of cake.

00;07;20;17 - 00;07;49;03
Unknown
We can do that in a natural setting. I think if you're talking with a farmer that owns livestock, this becomes a very simple thing for them to be able to fence and provide what they need to, to graze that cover crop. If you're working with a farmer, you have to definitely from the livestock side, remember that that farmer is really trying to cover up his soil.

00;07;49;05 - 00;08;00;05
Unknown
And we're going to definitely want to be very, oh, as I would say, cognitively.

00;08;00;07 - 00;08;21;03
Unknown
Asking that farmer to make sure that we're not taking too much of the cover off the top of his soil. So you have to monitor it a little bit closer, because there have their purpose for that cover crop, and we're being able to take some of that cover crop off as an extra cash value for them to recuperate some of the costs of having that cover.

00;08;21;04 - 00;08;54;26
Unknown
And there's a fine line there between overgrazing and under grazing, a cover crop. And I think we're still in eastern Colorado looking for that fine balance on what that is. So, yes, it's highly advantageous to provide a high quality forage at a different time of year for livestock grazing, and particularly cattle in eastern Colorado, since we've kind of gotten both sides of it, you know, I mean, I grew up obviously mentioned multiple times in Oklahoma.

00;08;54;26 - 00;09;20;28
Unknown
And so our our state song goes right back to an old play, Oklahoma the musical. And in there it's, there's a little song about why can't the cowboy and the farmer get along. And so I'm going to come to that point by saying, how can a crop producer and a cattle producer come together and, you know, if you're used to being exclusive, how can you work together to make these things advantageous to each other?

00;09;21;04 - 00;09;45;08
Unknown
What's your elevator speech to your neighbor of, hey, let's let's work together on this. So, Ron, I'll start with you. Yeah. So, you know, from a, a producer standpoint, if you don't have cattle, but you, you want some soil health benefits and soil erosion protection that cover crop fits. But there's a cost to that. And so maybe a little rent.

00;09;45;11 - 00;10;03;04
Unknown

And it wouldn't have to be much. But the other piece to that is sooner or later that farmer will want the cover crop to be terminated. There's two ways to do that. You can spray it and kill it. There's an expense there. Or turn a cow out on it and have the the cow graze down. Terminate that crop.

00;10;03;04 - 00;10;47;24
Unknown
Now you don't want to over graze, like Travis said, because you still want some cover out there. But cow would actually eliminate the expense of a chemical application to stop growth. Travis. The cattlemen's perspective how what advantages could you come to the crop producer with? Well, particularly depending on what time of the year it is, we we can look at grazing that thing, and we're not going to necessarily take the nutrients, whether that be phosphorus or potassium or those kind of things are going to be returned back through the cow and recycled to maybe a little easier, a little more easily broke down nutrient back to the soil.

00;10;47;24 - 00;11;30;01
Unknown
When we talk about cover and manure. There I think the other thing that is kind of a myth, particularly if we're grazing towards that time we want to terminate those things, is the fact that we have compaction to the soil. And we've kind of shown through some different studies that we're not necessarily compacting it as well. I will say probably the hardest part to do when we start talking about the farmer and the rancher getting together is timing these things and being able to have the accessibility to get on and off of a field at the right time.

00;11;30;02 - 00;11;54;20
Unknown
So it does require a little bit of conversation and planning to be able to utilize these things in a manner that benefits them both. And that's probably one of the biggest concerns when we're bringing in outside cattle to an operation, to be able to allow them to graze it appropriately and then be able to get them off in the time that we need to.

00;11;54;22 - 00;12;18;11
Unknown
Advantages to both. You know, we'll kind of just some them up here at the end on the agronomic side I mean help helping build soils holding erosion down and maintaining, some soil moisture, which you give up a little bit on the backside of the disadvantages. Yeah. You've got a growing crop out there as a cover crop. That's not necessarily a cash crop for the cattle.

00;12;18;11 - 00;12;39;28
Unknown
And though obviously we've got a forage and especially most of these cover crops, we're going to put them out a lot of them during the winter time. You've got a possibility of grazing something maybe early spring, maybe early fall to help, you know, just remove that for the crop

producer. So the producer then doesn't have to hire the sprayer to come out there and spray everything out.

00;12;39;29 - 00;12;59;14
Unknown
Maybe the cows can just eat it out. So a lot of things that are advantages to both. If you are a cattleman who does have cropland, you might think about talking yourself into it. But if you're the cattleman or the singular crop producer, you know, talking to your neighbors, seeing if you can work out something to both of your advantages.

00;12;59;14 - 00;13;26;02
Unknown
So any last thoughts from either one of you on on the situation of cover crops and grazing those. Hey Travis, I'm going to step in here. So you mentioned a compaction and and I'll address that because that's one question I get from producers considering grazing while I can pack my soils. And Scott actually shared that University of Nebraska article with us and it showed compaction was not much of an issue.

00;13;26;08 - 00;13;54;14
Unknown
There is compaction that does take place around the water tank where they congregate, but for the most part, that University in Nebraska data set suggested that yields actually increased across the field and did not decrease. And so I think that's important for a farmer to understand that. I think when we look at soil health and the soil health principles, adding livestock to it does have an advantage to soil health because we're taking some nutrients.

00;13;54;14 - 00;14;29;02
Unknown
And like I said earlier, transfixing those into something that's maybe even more readily available, depending on how we stock those different fields. So I think there are some definite advantages of looking at adding livestock back to your farming program. Particularly when we talk about maybe cutting those nutrients off and putting them up in something like a baled forage or a silage, where we're actually taking those nutrients off the field and through cattle.

00;14;29;04 - 00;15;09;01
Unknown
We are taking some of that, but we're definitely recycling a lot of that and putting it back where it belongs in that soil. Well, great conversation today, gentlemen. On cover crops and grazing those cover crops. If you have any questions or comments or suggestions for our Pasture to Profit podcast, you can reach me. Scott is here at the Kit Carson County office in Burlington, Colorado at (719)346-5571, as well as Ron Meyer, agronomist, like I said, agronomist extraordinaire here in the office at the same phone number again, (719)346-5571 but not to be left out.

00;15;09;03 - 00;15;35;15
Unknown

Travis Taylor and the Golden Plains area office in Wray, Colorado, can be reached at. Travis. Yeah, my number is (970)332-4151. And if you have any other comments or questions about this podcast or suggestions for another, please catch up with us at one of those two numbers and we will see you next time on the Pasture to Profit podcast.

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