

## Using Cover Crops to Boost Profitability in Your Operation

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In the Robison Farm's years of grazing cattle in central and southern Indiana we utilized grazing corn stalks and some stockpiled tall fescue throughout the winter to reduce feed cost. While this proved beneficial most years we ended up with some added compaction in our corn fields (we did not rotationally graze our stalks). While we continued the practice we also utilized "V-Rippers" to break up compaction problems, thus usually reducing or eliminating the feed cost savings. After many years of raising cattle we sold our cow-calf operation in the early 1980's. I believe that if we knew about cover crops, rotational grazing, fescue endophyte issues, etc... that our farm would have had cattle many more years. Our purpose today is to look most specifically at cover crops and how they can boost profitability in your cattle and farming operation so you choose to keep your cattle –and utilize them as a profit center.

In the late 1990's I read about work done by Ed Ballard from the University of Illinois and how he was doing research using cereal grains and turnips to graze cattle throughout the winter in the fertile plains of central Illinois. In the early 2000's I started working with Ed on his project on multiple farms in Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana. Our goal was simple; graze the cattle every day of the year. By combining work done by Dr. Jim Gerrish (U-Missouri) on rotational grazing and Ed's work we were starting to see many benefits in the profitability for beef farmers while not increasing compaction issues.

Ed and I started working with aerial applicators to fly cover crops into standing corn. While for a number of years there was the thought that this practice only could work in southern areas I started working with farmers in Michigan, Northern Indiana, and Northern Ohio that found great success. In the past two years I now have farmers in central Wisconsin that aerially apply their cover crops into their corn and profitably graze cattle until around Christmas on the growing forage/cover crop while feeding little or no hay or grain.

In this presentation I will investigate past and current experiences of what worked and what did not work in my 15 years of experience in this area of cover cropping and grazing. I will also look at what cover crop species work the best as feed and also their benefits as cover crops. Lastly I will look at the potential benefits on crop yields following cover crops without cattle present.