

News Column

by Greg McClure, KSU-Riley County Extension Agriculture Agent
110 Courthouse Plaza
Manhattan, KS 66502

For Release 01/28/19
Phone: 785/537-6350
Fax: 785/537-6353

Grazing Cover Crops

Cover crop grazers have had a tough fall and winter. Late summer and early fall brought conditions that either made it too dry to get a cover crop established, or too wet to even get a cover crop planted.

If you got your cover crop planted, then it probably looked really good by late fall. But,...how do you graze swampland?

The weather at my house over the past 4 ½ months began with a monsoon in early September — roughly 15 inches of rainfall over three or four days — that kept fields wet most of the month. October brought another inch of rain early in the month, during a time of year when fields don't dry quickly.

Toward the end of October and in early November we had some decent harvest weather, but much of November seemed like January. It was cold!

The weather on Thanksgiving Day, as I recall, was pretty nice. However, the Sunday after Thanksgiving brought us a blizzard that took part of the roof off my half-finished barn,...and created more mud.

More mud. We got another rain the first of December that kept fields muddy for another couple of weeks. A few days before Christmas, and on Christmas Day, the weather was beautiful. Fields were about dry and I was finally able to get around without carrying an extra 10 pounds of mud on each overshoe.

Then it rained another inch the day after Christmas.

Early January brought us another half inch or so of rain, accompanied by November-like temperatures that kept fields muddy. The bottom line being that there weren't a whole lot of good grazing days after the first of September,...if you were concerned about tromping your fields.

Interestingly, research regarding the yield effect on subsequent crops after grazing crop residue in the fall suggests we shouldn't be worrying about compaction caused by cattle. In studies done in Nebraska there was no statistical difference in yield when grazing corn stalks and planting back to either corn or soybeans the following spring.

In those Nebraska studies sometimes the grazed plots out-yielded the ungrazed plots, and sometimes the ungrazed plots produced the higher yield of either corn or soybeans. It should be noted that grazing was completed by February, allowing some time for natural freezing and thawing to heal any damage that might have been done by cattle tracks.

Another point to consider is that animal compaction is usually confined to the top two inches of soil. I'm usually more concerned with getting consistent seed depth and coverage when planting into a rough surface than I am with compaction.

Grazing Cover Crops – February 7

Now that we've established that, in my mind, winter grazing isn't going to hurt crop yields the next summer, I'd like to invite you come and learn about, "Grazing Cover Crops" at our next coffee shop agronomy meeting. Jaymelynn Farney, K-State Research & Extension Southeast Kansas Beef Specialist, will be the featured speaker.

The meeting will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 7 at Nelson's Landing in Leonardville. There is no charge to attend, but we would appreciate reservations made by noon

the day before the meeting.

If you have questions, or want to let us know you're coming, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.