

Onto Greener Pastures with Rotational Grazing and Cover Crops



Meet Darren Yanke

Darren Yanke, of Echo-Y Farms, is a longtime advocate for conservation agriculture. He has used cover crops on the farm since 2003, as a way to suppress weeds after winter wheat. Farmers in his watershed know that Darren is the local 'go-to' for cover crop "cocktail" recipes.

"I moved to managed intensive grazing with daily rotations in 2015, mainly to increase stocking rates, but also because it improves soil health and water infiltration," he said, which is beneficial to the dense soils he manages.



The Demonstration Details

Darren wants to demonstrate the soil health benefits of rotational grazing with cover crops and how it can help extend their grazing season into the winter.

Echo-Y Farms will rotationally graze an inter-seeded mix of cover crops along with the



corn and winter wheat residue. The diverse mix (which includes millet, Sudan grass, oats, radish, rapeseed, brassica, sunflower, forage peas, clover varieties plus more) will be planted to maximize forage potential for grazing livestock while maintaining groundcover for weed suppression and soil health.

“Rotational grazing allows for healthier soil and higher stocking rates.”

- DARREN YANKE

The Bottom Line

The environmental benefits of livestock integration are often overlooked, even though it is one of the five principles of soil health. A portion of the field will have exclusion fencing put up and will not be grazed as a control section. Both areas will be sampled for soil health parameters to quantify the difference caused by livestock integration.





PROJECT OVERVIEW

While cover crop acreage is increasing, grazing them is not a common practice. Combining these management options can improve soil health, increase cost efficiency, and reduce nutrient runoff. By providing conservation guidance and motivation to graziers, this education and outreach project led by Sand County Foundation, will demonstrate the value of rotational grazing with cover crops. The goal is to expand cover crop acreage with rotational grazing across the Midwest for a more resilient agricultural system.



DEMONSTRATION APPROACH

Four experienced graziers will demonstrate new methods, share their experiences, and communicate the outcomes, with assistance from Sand County Foundation and the University of Wisconsin. The primary goals are to build awareness and confidence among livestock farmers to rotationally graze cover crops.



FARMER LEADERSHIP

The project's participating graziers are members of the Sauk Soil and Water Improvement Group. SSWG is amongst the growing number of farmer-led groups to receive grant support from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.



Echo-Y Farms

of Sauk County, Wisconsin

HISTORY:

Since 1934, four generations of the Yanke family have been farming the 1,300 acres of rolling hills within the Honey Creek Watershed. In 2005, Darren began farming full time.

FAMILY:

Darren farms with his wife, Shannon, alongside his father, Doug, his mother, Victoria, and his brother, Derek.

CROPS:

They grow 600 acres of corn and soybean, with 200 acres of winter wheat, and 150 acres of alfalfa/grass for forage.

CATTLE:

They graze 200 Holstein heifers, 30 beef cow pairs, and finish 20 beef on some of their 300 acres of perennial pastures. Darren credits the managed intensive grazing system for the herd's good health.

MANAGEMENT:

In 2015, Darren began rotational grazing the cover crop fields after the row crops were harvested as a way to enhance soil health and animal well-being.



FOR MORE PROJECT INFORMATION VISIT:

Sand County Foundation

www.sandcountyfoundation.org/RotationalGrazing