

Grazing Cover Crops on the Dukart Ranch

Welcome to the NDSU Beef Cattle and Forage Field Day. On behalf of myself and my wife Angie we welcome you to the Dukart Ranch. We operate a diversified Cow calf operation that consists of a herd of commercial cows and we also operate a Purebred herd of Angus and Red Angus cows and sell long aged bulls in November. Along with the cattle we also incorporate a much diversified cropping system that consists of wheat, corn, oats, barley, sunflowers, peas, winter triticale and cover crops.

Beginning in 2008 we started using cover crops. We started by using winter triticale and hairy vetch and seeding cover crop into the stand after haying. Then through lots of trial and air we have slowly modified the mixes that we have used and the timing of seeding the mixes. We have used the cover crops for grazing, hay and let some stand. Granted that every year is never the same we have come away with a better understanding of what to do or not to do.

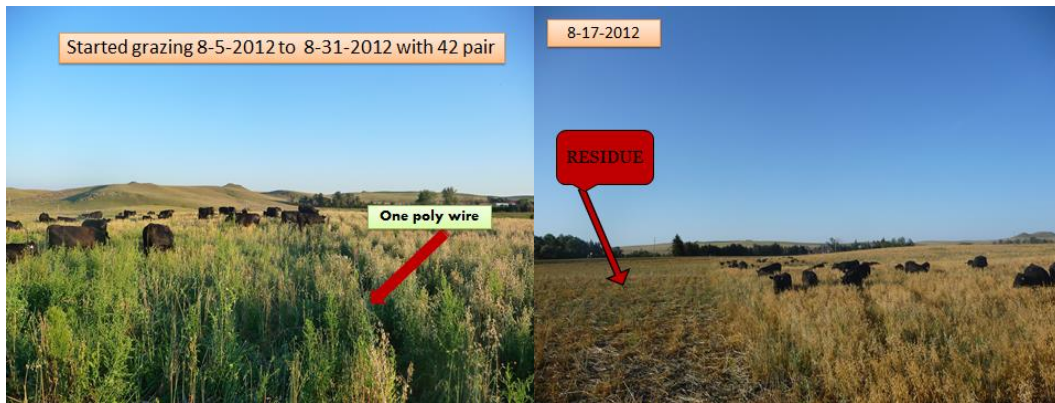
In 2012 we started being a cooperator with DREC in a SARE Project. Our part of the project was to take our cattle and graze cover crops on a portion of our operation. Then take the information and present it to groups like we are today.

This project started with a 32 acre field that was grain corn in 2011 that was fall grazed. We seeded a 11 way cover crop mix that consisted of Oats (10#), Cowpeas (6#), Lentils (4#), Forage peas (4#), Crimson clover (1#), Pearl Millet(2#), Sudan(2 #), BMR Grazing corn (3#), Nitro radish(.5#), Purple top turnip(.5#), Rapeseed (1#) plus 2# of wildflowers. This mix was seeded on May 7 2012. Conditions were very dry. Emergence was fair with plenty of bare spots along with maybe a lot of corn residue on top that did not allow the drill to place the seed correctly. Did finally get some moisture on it in early June and that was the last moisture we had till late July.

On August 5th we ran a single poly wire across the field fencing off about a $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 acre of the cover crop. We turned in 42 cow calf pairs into the standing forage and allowed them to eat all the forage and then moved them to another $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 acre the next day. Did this till August 31st. We got 26 grazing days out of the field with around 3.1 ton of forage per acre available. The forage was very dry and mature due to the drought conditions. When we would turn the cows into a new paddock they would eat the tops of the oats first then would browse around and find some turnips to eat and anything that maybe had a green stem or leaf then come back and forage on what was left. One thing we found interesting was how they would strip the leaves off of the weedy plants that where in the field, a lot of times all that was standing was the stalk of the weed.

Some of the cost's associated with it where seeding at \$12.00 per acre, Seed cost of \$28.00 per acre, Fertilizer at \$32.00 per acre it was 100 # of Urea, one application of roundup for burn down (\$10.50).

Once we finished grazing we then went in and seeded a mix on winter triticale, hairy vetch and clovers on October 8, 2012. Ground was very dry did have some emergence was hoping for a nice snow cover which we did not have. This spring it did come up very spotty and we had a very healthy crop of weeds and volunteer cover crop seed coming also. We grazed a set of 40 cow calf pair on there for a week and with all the moisture we had this spring we need a dryer piece of ground to seed corn and we the planted corn in there on June 10th and did not fertilize. We will probably graze the corn this year with weaned steers or heifers.



This year's cover crop grazing project will consist of a 42 acre field that will have a mix of a warmer season varieties. The field was going to be field corn but with the excess moisture and the field being in poor seeding conditions we decided to switch it to a cover crop field instead. We seeded the field of cover on June 16th 2013 at a rate of 30 lb. per acre with a cost of \$35.00 per acre. We did have to apply 2 rounds of burn down. We also applied 100# of urea thinking this field was going to be corn. The mix was made up of Cowpea (3#), Soybean (3#), Common vetch (3#), Crimson Clover (1#), Berseem Clover (1#), BMR Grazing corn (3#), Sorghum Sudan (4#), Pearl millet (2#), Proso Millet (2#), Nitro radish (1#), Winfred turnip (1#), Sunflower (1#), and Buckwheat (1#).

The cover crops will be striped grazed using again this year using either pairs or dry cows.



The left picture shows 30 days of growth on a nitro radish and the right picture shows 30 days of growth of the whole field.

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