



This newsletter is a joint effort from the following organizations:



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If you would like to receive this newsletter by email please send a request to:
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Small Flock Sheep Grazing Field Day

A Small Flock Sheep Grazing Field Day will be held on Saturday morning, August 10th at 10:00 a.m. This will be an opportunity to see and discuss the benefits of rotational grazing on the small scale. Both those producers grazing only a few animals or those considering starting grazing will receive useful tips.

The twenty-five ewe flock grazing area consists of grass around the building site and driveway. Combinations of temporary and permanent fences are used. With the exception of 2011, there is adequate grass to maintain the flock.



For those beginning a flock, it will be a chance to see remodeled buildings used as a lambing area. The yearly sheep work cycle will also be discussed.

NRCS Grazing Specialist John Zinn and SWCD SE MN Grazing Specialist Dean Thomas will be available for question along with flock owner Jerry Tesmer. This flock started out as a 4-H project approximately twenty-five years ago and has gone through a number of changes as the family has changed.

A representative of the Farm Service Agency and specifically the Farm Loan Program personnel are planning to attend to present the FSA programs for existing producers, individuals interested in starting a farming operation in the conventional and non-conventional sense, as well as possible youth applicants.

The Jerry & Kathy Tesmer farm is located at 22097 County 30, Harmony, MN. Travel 10.5 miles west on Highway 44, 2 miles south on 225th Avenue, 1/2 mile west on County 30. The farm is on the north side of the road. The event will be held rain or shine. There is no charge to attend.

Cover Crops to Improve Soil in Prevented Planting Fields

Source: USDA, NRCS - Indiana Guide Sheet

Prolonged rain and flooding has resulted in many fields that will go unplanted this year. Farmers in this situation need to weigh not only their program and insurance options (“prevented planting”), but should also assess agronomic options to ensure long-term productivity from this difficult situation. Producers should explore the benefits of planting a cover crop that has the potential to fix nitrogen, build organic matter, control weeds, control erosion and/or improve soil quality during the remainder of the season. These together can build considerable yield potential for following crops. With the potential “prevented planting” payment and the improved yield potential following a full season “green manure” crop, their economic potential for the whole rotation could be considerable.

Producers are advised to check with FSA and RMA on harvest restrictions for cover crops. *A key soil quality concept is to ensure that there is vegetation green and growing during all times of the year.*

Building vs. Loss of Topsoil: As excessive rainfall runoff or flood waters cut across unprotected fields, the top soil may have been lost from erosion and scouring. With the productive topsoil lost, so too are the nutrients, organic matter, and soil biology. If tillage is applied to these water-damaged fields to control weeds or smooth them out, even relatively flat soils will lose carbon, nitrogen and biomass.

The above-ground biomass of cover crops will help protect the soil from further sun, wind and water damage.

Selecting high bio-mass cover crop mixes will rebuild topsoil. Cover crops, especially if no-tilled, will add organic biomass both above and below ground to rebuild topsoil quicker than if left to grow weeds or especially if left with no cover.

Avoid harvesting for forage or grain, which will reduce the organic matter benefits, and instead consider killing or mowing prior to seed-head formation, particularly if reseeding could be incompatible with subsequent crops. This will also ensure rapid decomposition and leave more nutrients in the below-ground plant material that are available to soil organisms and subsequent crops.

Soil Biology, Structure and Compaction: Many fields saturated for long periods lose soil organisms that create soil macro-pores and cycle nutrients and lose beneficial soil biology, such as mycorrhizal fungi and rhizobia bacteria that build structure and tilth. Without these organisms, the soils are very subject to compaction, crusting, and high bulk density problems.

Some fields may be so compacted that deep tillage or other remediation activities are needed. However, cover crops, whether used alone or in conjunction with other compaction remediation activities such as deep tillage, are essential to rebuild healthy soil structure. The roots of cover crops help to penetrate compacted zones, hold soil aggregates together, and sustain healthy organisms to restore soil structure. Growing roots are essential to re-establish the mycorrhizae in the soil and to create pathways for air and water to move through the soil profile, which are key components to restoring the soil’s functional properties and will keep the recently deep-tilled layers more open to result in a quicker fix of the compacted layers.

Manage Grazing in Areas Near Surface Water for Best Results

John Zinn, USDA/NRCS Grazing Specialist

Above average rainfall in Southeastern Minnesota this year saturated soil and made stream corridors and areas around ponds more susceptible to erosion. Unlimited and continuous livestock traffic in these areas creates a number of negative effects. Some of these effects include:

Pugging- hoof traffic on saturated soils tears up sod and in riparian areas prone to flooding may open up riparian areas to soil erosion.

Bank erosion- livestock access sites may lose all vegetation creating opportunities for turbulent flood waters to rapidly erode streambanks. This delivers sediments to the stream that increase turbidity, nutrient loads, and cause deterioration in water quality.

Deterioration on livestock pond water quality by increasing sediment, nutrient, and pathogen loads.

Loss of bank cover- increases water temperature in stream causing declining habitats for cold water species such as trout.

Direct deposition of manure and urine in the stream that adds excess nutrients and decreases water quality.

Decreases habitat for desirable cold water species such as trout.

Decreases forage quality and quantity through overgrazing desirable species and not grazing weeds and undesirable plants.

Although the above adverse effects are worse when the soil is saturated, they also can occur during a more typical season. Managing access to areas around surface water allows for improvement in conditions. Strategies that can be used include:

1) "Flash Grazing"- when access is allowed to the area immediately adjacent to the stream or pond for a period of one to two days per year. Water must be provided in

another way if the surface water is the main water source.

- 2) Dividing the area adjacent to the surface water into multiple paddocks as part of a rotational grazing system.
- 3) Total exclusion of the stream or pond corridor. May include apparatus to pump water out of the stream or water is provided to adjacent pastures by a pipeline and tanks hooked to a well.
- 4) Create one rock armored access point at the water source and exclude the rest.

Situations to avoid in grazing near surface water include:

Setting up trails adjacent to and parallel to a stream.

Setting up a pasture or paddocks with the water in one corner or along one side in a small portion of the overall pasture. This will result in overuse of the area near the water, excess manure and urine in that area and underuse of areas away from the water.

UPCOMING EVENTS:



Field Day

July 18th at 5:00 pm.

The Midwest Forage Council is having a Field Day at Brian Hazel farm, rural Lanesboro.

RSVP to 651.484.3888 by July 11; Free Meal

Driftless Region

Beef Conference Update

January 30-31, 2014

Grand River Convention Center, Dubuque, IA

<http://www.aep.iastate.edu/beef/>, the website includes a sign-up to have your name added to the mail list for future conferences.



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