GRAZING COVER CROPS CHECKLIST

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

WHY GRAZE COVER CROPS?

It is well known that cover crops can provide a wide variety of benefits to a corn/soybean cropping system when managed successfully. Soil protection, improved water infiltration and soil water holding capacity, increased plant and microbial diversity, and weed management are just a few reasons farmers are adopting cover crops. Grazing livestock on cover crops has potential to give value back to the farmer or landowner through manure nutrient distribution, increased soil organic matter and soil biological activity, and an additional forage source that can extend fall and winter grazing options to boost the bottom line.

As always when managing cover crops, there are several things to keep in mind when considering grazing cover crops. This informational sheet presents questions for you to consider as you think about integrating livestock grazing on cover crops with the hope that you will dig deeper into other more detailed resources provided.

SELECTION AND PLANTING OF COVER CROPS

	In which field will the crop be planted?
	Have you considered planting a shorter maturity cash crop to increase the available time in the fall for cover crop grazing?
	Were soil residual herbicides applied that could negatively impact cover crop establishment? If yes, which cover crop species should you avoid planting?
	What is the forage quality of the cover crop species you desire to plant?
	When do you plan to plant the cover crops? Do you want to interseed them into the standing cash crop so the livestock can be put out on the field immediately following harvest, or delay planting them until after harvest?

ROTATION PATTERNS

	Do you want the livestock to have access to the entire field at one time?
	Would you rather implement rotational/regenerative grazing techniques where livestock are only permitted access to portions of the field at a time and moved to a new section at your preferred frequency?

COMPACTION CONCERNS

	Do you plan to leave the livestock on the field over winter? If so, have you considered how you will address potential soil compaction if livestock are on wet ground for extended periods?
	Alternatively, is there a place you can move the livestock before excessive rain events to prevent compaction, or a sacrifice area where compaction impacts are not as great of a concern?

TEMPORARY FENCING AND WATER

	What fencing option best suits your time availability, desired rotation pattern, and budget?
	Will the livestock have access to fresh water at all times regardless of which rotation pattern you choose? What watering structure would work best in your situation?
	Can you place watering structures in such a way to prevent livestock from creating paths in the field, and thus reduce compaction?

TERMINATION OF COVER CROPS IN SPRING

	Which species will overwinter and produce spring growth?
	How long will you let the cover crop grow in the spring for the livestock to graze?
	What termination strategy do you prefer to use prior to planting your cash crop? (chemical, mechanical)
	When is your ideal time to terminate the cover crop? (2-3 weeks before planting, directly before planting, after planting [i.e. planting green], etc.)

START WITH THESE RESOURCES FOR AN EXTENSIVE OVERVIEW OF HOW AND WHY TO GRAZE COVER CROPS

WATCH
Grazing Cover Crops Webinar
https://bit.ly/GCC_MCCC

READ
Grazing Cover Crops: A How-To Guide
https://bit.ly/GCC_PastureProject

INTERACT
Grazing Cover Crops Farmer Toolkit
https://bit.ly/GCC_PFI

CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL TOPIC SPECIFIC RESOURCES

INTERACT
SmartMix Calculator
https://bit.ly/Smartmix

READ
Quick Guide to Cover Crops for Forage
https://bit.ly/GCC_Forage

WATCH
Grazing Cover Crops Farmer Toolkit
https://bit.ly/herbicide_carryover

WATCH
Grazing Cover Crops Farmer Toolkit
https://bit.ly/GCC_videoseries

READ
Quick Guide to Cover Crops for Forage
https://bit.ly/covercrop_termination

If you are interested in the benefits of livestock grazing on your fields but are not interested in owning the livestock yourself, visit the Midwest Grazing Exchange at **https://bit.ly/MGE_web**. This resource connects graziers and landowners in similar geographies to match livestock to the land.

ABOUT THE EMBARRAS GRAZING PARTNERSHIP

Since 2020, the Champaign County SWCD, The Land Connection, University of Illinois Extension, Terra Elossa, LLC, Illinois Soybean Association, and Wallace Center's Pasture Project have partnered to provide education and resources to increase regenerative grazing practices in and near the Embarras River Watershed in Illinois. Learn more about the EGP at **ccswcd.com/egp**.

The Land Connection

Illinois Extension
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Champaign County Soil & Water Conservation District

Terra Elossa LLC

Illinois Soybean Association

Pasture Project
at the Wallace Center