



Agriculture Newsletter *Fall 2016*



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The Value of Cover Crops



The root of poor soil quality problems on the farm partially stems from the lack of just that - roots! If you're still undecided on whether or not it's worth the time and cost to use cover crops, consider the benefits below.

- **Reduce soil erosion**
The impact of raindrops on a soil's surface is minimized as the above ground vegetation serves as a protective barrier and slows runoff velocity while the roots help hold the soil together.
- **Increase water infiltration & reduce soil compaction**
Channels created in the soil after a deep-rooted cover crop species decompose will break up compacted soil and facilitate water infiltration.
- **Increase organic matter**
The decomposition of a cover crop increases organic matter above and below the soil surface. Organic material is rich in nutrients and acts as a sponge; holding water for plant uptake.



- Improve nutrient availability**
Cover crops improve nutrient availability as they take in nutrients from the soil and prevent nitrates from leaching. Once the biomass breaks down, nutrients are available to the next crop. In addition, rhizobia bacteria within the soil are able to convert atmospheric nitrogen into a usable form for plant uptake through nodules on the roots of legume cover crops (ex: red clover, alfalfa).
- Restore biological activity**
A healthy soil is one that is alive with organisms that help break down nutrients and make them available for plant uptake. Having a living root within the soil helps these organisms thrive and sustain the soil food web.
- Method of weed control**
Cover crops can prevent weeds from establishing through competition; they make it difficult for weeds to germinate. In addition, certain cover crops, including hairy vetch and buckwheat, possess allelopathic properties; releasing chemicals that impede another plant's establishment.
- Source of additional forage**
Whether the forage is harvested or grazed, cover crops can reduce reliance on buying supplemental feed. Grazing cover crops can additionally provide an income source to crop farmers that rent their land to graziers, and the animal's waste can provide added nutrients to the soil.

Resources

- Soil Health in field and forage crop production* by Sjoerd W. Duiker, Joel C. Myers, Lisa C. Blazure
- Understanding Cover Crops, Benefits, Selection and Establishment* by Dave Wilson

REAP Applications Available

The Resource Enhancement And Protection (REAP) Program is now available for the 2016 – 2017 Fiscal Year. Administered by the State Conservation Commission, the program allows farmers and businesses to earn PA state tax credits in exchange for implementing best management practices on agricultural operations that will enhance farm production and protect natural resources. Eligible expenses include cover crop establishment, no-till equipment, manure storages, watering systems for livestock, and more. For more information, visit <http://www.agriculture.pa.gov> or contact the District for an application.

20th Annual NW PA Grazing Conference



Be sure to save the date for next year's 20th Annual Northwest PA Grazing Conference to be held Thursday, March 16, 2017 featuring Jim Gerrish of American GrazingLands Services, LLC. The Conference will be held at a new location - the Trinity Point Church of God in Clarion, PA. Stay tuned for more details as they become available on the Headwaters RC&D Council Website at <http://www.headwaterspa.org>.

Livestock Grazing Home Study Course

The Penn State Extension is offering a home study course for livestock producers interested in running a profitable livestock operation that focuses on feeding animals with pasture resources.

This course is perfect for beginning grazers and a great review for seasoned grazers. The course is most appropriate for producers who would raise forages that would be grown in temperate areas such as in the northeastern United States.

The following topics will be covered:

- getting started with pastures
- plants in the pasture
- pasture management
- pasture facilities
- grazing management
- grazing economics

The course will run from October 12, 2016 – November 16, 2016. Cost is \$50.00 through internet/email, or \$85.00 via postal service.

Registration for the course can be made online at extension.psu.edu/events or call (814) 445-8912 by October 3, 2016.

For questions about the course, please send an email to meh7@psu.edu or contact Melanie Barkley at 814-623-4800.

Livestock Marketing Network Website

Taking control of your animal sales



Livestock Marketing Network, www.livestockmarketingnetwork.com, recently launched this September. This website is designed to enable farmers to market similar animals in a pot load quantity and gain an estimated 10 cents/pound premium for a truck load.

Each farm can make an offer to sell individual animals listing all of the qualities of the animal. For example, breed, sex, veterinary protocol, feeding program (whether they are grass-fed or grain fed, bunk-broke), weight class, body score, and frame score. The farmer can also negotiate the price directly with the buyer based on his offer.

The site is offering a 30-day free trial to list cattle for sale with a \$100 annual membership fee with no limit on the number of offers. This website provides the opportunity to help the farmer set the price, and negotiate the final price of his animals with the buyer. Money transactions are dealt directly between the farmer and the buyer; no money transactions between the farmer and buyer are done through the site.

The site designer, a local producer, is hoping to empower farmers to take control of establishing the price he/she receives for his/her animals before they leave the farm.



Jefferson County Drought Watch

A drought watch remains in effect for over half of Pennsylvania counties; including Jefferson. The Department of Environmental Protection issued the watch earlier this year due to below average rainfall for the region, decreased stream flow and depleted groundwater levels.

Residents are encouraged to take extra measures to conserve water. From shorter showers to skipping the car wash, visit www.dep.pa.gov for additional water conserving tips, and the latest updates in drought conditions across the state, or stop in the District office for more information.

It's time for the District's Annual Bird Seed Sale! A flyer is enclosed!

