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Analysis of Minnesota & Iowa Farms Finds Grazing Cover Crops Saves Money & Improves Soil Health How-To Guide & On-Farm Trial Results Now Available

A study on eight farms in the U.S. Midwest shows that cover crops can pay for themselves when combined with managed rotational grazing of cattle. Released by the [Pasture Project](#), [Practical Farmers of Iowa](#), the [Land Stewardship Project](#), and the [Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota](#), the findings show how the practice can save money by producing valuable forage, reducing erosion, improving soil health and increasing nutrient efficiency.

Funded by a USDA Conservation Innovation Grant, the study is based on soil and financial data collected over three years on eight farms in Iowa and Minnesota. These farms rotationally grazed beef and dairy cattle on planted cover crops, which are non-cash crops such as small grains, brassicas, and legumes that are grown between the regular cash crop growing seasons. The analysis showed that grazing the cover crops provided an inexpensive source of forage while building soil health.

Seven of the eight farms had more microbial biomass on their trial plots compared to control plots, a sign of improved soil biology and a potential boost to cash crop production as a result of higher fertility levels. The average cooperating farm spent about \$83 per acre on their cover crop (\$61 for diverse, six-species seed cocktail and application, \$12 in increased management, and \$10 for termination). To graze their cover crop, the average cooperator spent \$17 per acre on fencing and water, but grew \$140 per acre of forage. The cost of cover cropping (\$83 per acre) against the benefit from grazing (\$123 per acre) indicates the cost effectiveness of the practice.

The full findings, as well as a new “Grazing Cover Crops How-To Guide”, a video series and other supporting resources, are available for viewing and downloading [here](#).

“While farmers recognize that cover crops improve soil health, many have been hesitant to implement the practice because they assume it’s too expensive,” said Pete Huff, program officer of the Pasture Project, an initiative of the [Wallace Center at Winrock International](#). “We’re excited to join our partners in announcing these findings, which demonstrate that grazing cover crops as winter forage can help farmers and graziers offset their expenses and even generate income.”

Learn more about this project, its findings and available resources [here](#).

ABOUT THE PASTURE PROJECT

The [Pasture Project](#) is an initiative of the Wallace Center at Winrock International. Since 1983, the Wallace Center at Winrock International has been leading the local food movement in innovation, networking, support, and capacity building to create a U.S. food system that is healthier for people, the environment and the economy.

ABOUT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

[Winrock International](#) is a recognized leader in U.S. and international development with a focus on social, agricultural and environmental issues. Inspired by its namesake, Winthrop Rockefeller, Winrock combines scientific and technical expertise with entrepreneurial innovation to deliver market-based solutions that improve lives around the world. Winrock's mission is to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity and sustain natural resources across the globe.

ABOUT PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA

[Practical Farmers of Iowa](#)'s mission is equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities. Practical Farmers of Iowa is an inclusive organization representing a diversity of farmers.

ABOUT LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

The [Land Stewardship Project](#) (LSP) is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1982 to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, to promote sustainable agriculture and to develop healthy communities.

ABOUT SUSTAINABLE FARMING ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA

The [Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota](#) supports the development and enhancement of sustainable farming systems through farmer-to-farmer networking, innovation, demonstration and education.

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