

## AVOIDING ANIMAL HEALTH ISSUES WHEN GRAZING COVER CROPS

D.R. Oswald<sup>1</sup>

Successful, sustainable livestock operations maximize the use of forage crops and grazing days/cow to reduce the cost of production. Cover crops offer producers high quality forages that extend the grazing season, reduce purchased and stored feed cost, and can reduce labor for feed and manure handling. These benefits may be limited by forage allocation methods and potential feeding cautions or health concerns of certain cover crops. Management is the key to preventing health issues when grazing cover crops. Producers should be aware of cover crop feeding concerns and use best management practices to avoid problems. Grass tetany is a concern when grazing cereal grasses or annual ryegrass in the spring or fall. Bloat is usually associated with legume crops but may also occur when abruptly changing diets to high protein, high quality forages. Cover crops with bloat potential include red clover, sweet clover, alfalfa, hairy vetch, crimson clover and high quality brassicas or grasses. Brassica crops have contributed to polyencephalomalacia, nitrate poisoning and digestive disturbances. Prussic acid poisoning can occur in the sudan family of forages. Nitrate poisoning concerns often occur in over fertilized fields where manure or nitrogen applications were above agronomic rates or where drought conditions exist. Nitrate issues can occur in the sudan family, millets, cereal grasses, annual ryegrass and brassicas. By knowing the symptoms, and treatment methods livestock producers can identify, and quickly treat problems. But by knowing and understanding the potential health issues in advance producers can avoid and prevent problems through the use of best management practices.

<sup>1</sup>Regional Cover Crop Specialist, Illinois Council on Best Management Practices, Kewanee, IL ([doswald@illinoiscbmp.org](mailto:doswald@illinoiscbmp.org)).