



PHOTO COURTESY PLUM THICKET FARMS

# Using a Cover Crop for Grazing Options

Annual forages provide opportunity for grazing 11 months a year.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor

**P**roducing high-quality cattle, forage and grain with management practices that foster the best stewardship of land, livestock, soil and human resources is how Nancy Peterson described the mission of Plum Thicket Farms to Range Beef Cow Symposium attendees last November.

The family's operation is located at Gordon, Neb., and includes 563 acres of irrigated farmland, 1,774 acres of dryland farm ground, 2,230 acres of deeded native pasture, 1,850 acres of leased pasture and 380 acres of leased cornstalks. In 2015, they managed nearly 300 cow-calf pairs, 100 yearling heifers, 500 stocker steers from May through July, and a couple hundred steers and yearling heifers being carried over to 2016.

"Pasture is our most limiting factor," Peterson said. Despite that, they've found a way to maintain an 11-month grazing season.

How?

"We graze annual forages," Peterson reported. They utilize rye to calve on in May; graze sorghum swaths in winter; and graze cover crops following wheat, oats or other spring mixes. Additionally, they utilize crop residues, mainly cornstalks, and mob-graze dryland cool- and warm-season forage cocktail mixes.

Peterson admitted there was a learning curve to some of the forage crops and

grazing tactics they've used, but she said the effort has been worth the investment to improve their soil and environment for the future.

Among the most important tips she offered for an intensive-grazing management scheme is the need for flexibility. As an example, when mob-grazing forage cocktails, she said, "you must

**As part of the *Angus Journal's* full meeting coverage, you can listen to Nancy Peterson's presentation at <http://bit.ly/1PDA5Hw>.**



► Nancy Peterson said her operation utilizes rye to calve on in May; grazes sorghum swaths in winter; and grazes cover crops following wheat, oats or other spring mixes.

have a population that can flex because it is totally dependent on the weather and adequate rainfall.”

“If you take in stockers, make sure your contract specifies their removal in case of drought, hail, fire or too much rain,” she added.

Another caution that Peterson issued: If you are coming off mature native pasture onto a lush cover crop, you could lose cows to cow asthma, or atypical interstitial pneumonia (AIP).

“Begin feeding a rumensin-containing range block three to four days before moving them to the cocktail and continue for the first

couple of weeks,” she advised. “This should remove the risk.”



**Editor’s Note:** Kindra Gordon is a cattlegwoman and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D. This summary is part of the Angus Journal’s online coverage of the 2015 Range Beef Cow

Symposium hosted Nov. 17-19, 2015, in Loveland, Colo. For additional coverage, to review this presentation’s PowerPoint or to listen to the presentation, visit the Newsroom at [www.rangebeefcow.com](http://www.rangebeefcow.com). The Angus Journal’s coverage of the event is made possible through collaboration with the event committee and sponsorship of LiveAuctions.tv.

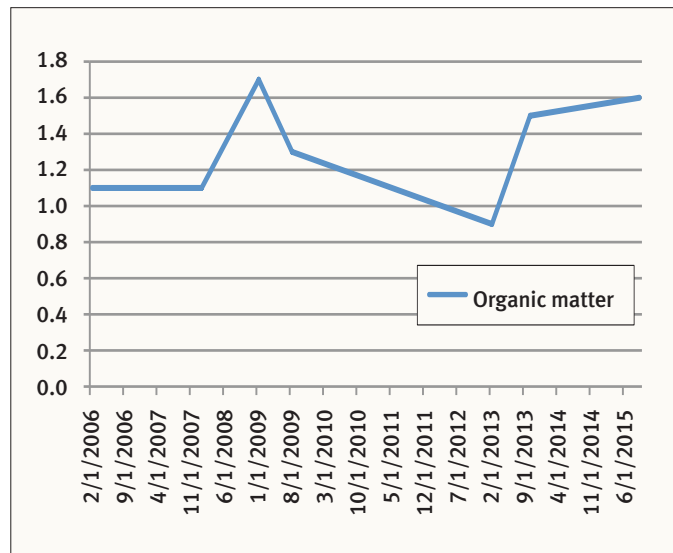
**Table 1: Organic matter trends, SW school section**

SW school section	Sandy loam soil, rotation ¾ grazed crops ¼ harvested small grains					
Year	O.M.	K	P	Test	factor	lb. available N
2/15/2006	1.1	257	29	Melrich	0.9	26.1
9/29/2006	1.1	296	26	Melrich	0.9	23.4
1/15/2008	1.1	273	32	Melrich	0.9	28.8
1/7/2009	1.7	345	39	Melrich	0.9	35.1
8/24/2009	1.3	282	37	Melrich	0.9	33.3
2/12/2013	0.9	417	22	Olson Bray	2	44
10/1/2013	1.5	496	27.9	Olson Bray	2	55.8
9/10/2015	1.6	470	21.9	Olson Bray	2	43.8

**Table 2: Organic matter trends, Bartel 3 North**

Year	O.M.	P	test	factor	lb. available N
1/5/2009	1.8	31	m-P	0.9	27.9
1/28/2011	2.3	29	m-P	0.9	26.1
1/14/2013	2.1	22.1	O-P	2	44.2
10/1/2013	2.5	13.5	O-P	2	27
9/10/2015	3	12.4	O-P	2	24.8

**Fig. 1: Organic matter trends, SW school section**



**Fig. 2: Organic matter trends, Bartel 3 North**

