

Continuous Living Cover Success Stories

Grand View Farm and Ranch

Belmond, Iowa

Continuous Living Cover (CLC) includes agroforestry; perennial grains, forage, and biomass; and cover crops and winter annuals. CLC keeps living cover on the landscape and roots in the ground year-round, providing both economic and environmental benefits. This series highlights farmers using dynamic CLC strategies and the research behind their practices.



On a farm that has been in the family since 1914, Troy and Beth Severson manage a cow-calf herd and raise corn, soybeans, and hay on the rolling hills of Northern Iowa. Their son Knute and daughter-in-law Amanda purchase the steers, finish them on grass, and market them through their direct-to-consumer business, [Grand View Beef](#).

Since 1996, Troy and Beth have been raising Horned Herefords, a long-haired breed that thrives in the cold but sheds to stay comfortable in the summer. In 2017, their son Knute and his wife Amanda returned to the farm, partnering with Troy and Beth to finish and market the steers, which are 100% grass-fed and pasture-raised.

Amanda and Knute use an intensive rotation strategy for the steers, moving them frequently between two acre paddocks. Troy and Beth rotate the calf-cow herd regularly, weekly to monthly depending on the landlord's specifications.

Cattle spend the majority of their lives on pasture, and eat grass, hay, and alfalfa through the winter. Calves spend the first eight months of their lives alongside their mothers, too. The Seversons reduce fossil fuel inputs into their operation in a unique way: a pair of Belgian draft horses haul hay most of the year, even in snow. Occasionally Troy uses a tractor, but he much prefers using the horses, calling it the highlight of his day regardless of weather. Riders on horseback bring the cattle back from summer pastures, reducing the stress caused by moving with trailers.

Benefits and Opportunities

With these practices, the Seversons are able to offer beef that is both more sustainable and more ethical. The family has noticed dramatically improved soil fertility as a result of the grazing rotations, and there are quality of life benefits, too.

Grazing is "good for the soil, good for the environment, good for the soul," Troy says. He finds raising animals more enjoyable than crops alone. Beth notes that it's "labor intensive, but rewarding." They enjoy getting outside, being active, and taking care of livestock.



Photo: Adam Ryan Morris

Finding a way to support the next generation on the farm is a challenge for many operations, but working together to raise cattle and direct market the beef has facilitated a profitable, sustainable operation. Having a buyer for their cattle through their son and daughter-in-law has been really helpful for Troy and Beth, taking the guesswork out of marketing, and Amanda and Knute have a consistent supply of local, high-quality beef.

Conservation that Pays

Amanda and Knute found that prices were better for grass-fed beef, and they were impressed with the flavor. Improved herd health also led to lower vet costs. Using horses instead of trailers to move cattle in the fall helps reduce stress on the animals, keeping them calm and healthy and ensuring that the meat is tender and flavorful.

Practitioner Resources

- [Grassland birds](#): Pastures can provide habitat and enhance nesting success
- GLBW [Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group](#)
- [Pasture Project](#): Regenerative grazing the in Upper Midwest - tools, information, events, and more
- [Practical Farmers of Iowa Livestock info](#): resources, workshops, research, and more
- Land Stewardship [Factsheets on Managed Grazing and Grazing Cover Crops for Farmers without Livestock](#)
- [Grassland 2.0](#) - stories, research, information, and advocacy for grass-based production systems

This fact sheet is a joint effort based on the [Reintegrating Grazing Ruminants in Row Crop Country](#) project by George Boody, with funding from the Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems through Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture, College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. The project [features ten videos](#) highlighting farmers who graze continuous living cover.

Science Supporting the Practices

Managed grazing can improve environmental quality - including soil health and higher GHG sequestration - and allow cattle a less-stressful, healthier life. It may also support the production of meat higher in omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidant compounds derived from the plants consumed ([Provenza et al. 2019](#)).

Well-managed grazing systems can improve cattle health, reduce stress levels, and support the expression of their natural, healthy behaviors. Nutritionally appropriate pastures and stocking densities can also support higher antioxidant intake and boost immune function compared to confinement systems ([Nakajima and Yayota 2019](#)).

Regenerative grazing practices can support farm financial health through reduced input costs and improved soil and herd health. Pastures can also provide ecosystem services: bird and pollinator habitat, improved water infiltration, and reduced erosion and downstream flood risk. In addition, it offers a way to diversify and add a revenue stream, and a point of entry for younger generations ([Spratt et al. 2021](#)).



Green Lands Blue Waters is a vision for productive, profitable agriculture in the Upper Midwest based on the straightforward concept of getting as much value as possible from farmlands by growing crops that keep the soil covered year-round—what we call farming with Continuous Living Cover. The values from the crops we promote can be measured in yields and farm profits; but also as reduced risk, improved outlook for long-term productivity from the soil, more jobs, more wildlife, cleaner water and resiliency in the face of a changing climate.