**Utilizing Beef Stocker Cattle to Enhance the Value of Cover Crops**

**Issue:** The increasing popularity of cover crop usage presents a substantial amount of potential forage available to the beef industry that would otherwise be wasted beyond their agronomic purposes. While research has shown the benefits of improved soil health and nutrient retention from cover crops, very limited data is available on utilization of cover crops by beef animals.

**Objective:** Because of the variability of cover crop success and yield from year to year, stocker cattle appear to be a natural fit, offering the flexibility to be purchased and sold depending on forage availability.

**Approach:** ISU Research Farms, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Iowa Beef Center are partners in this project to begin determining the effects of grazing cover crops on cattle performance and soil health. Cover crop plots at the McNay Memorial Research and Demonstration Farm and the Allee Research and Demonstration Farm are involved in the research. Cattle will be individually weighed before being turned out onto the cover crops and after removal to determine average daily gain. Forage yield, forage quality and soil parameters will be measured three times throughout the growing season. The soil and plant health component of this project is being funded by the Iowa Nutrient Research Center.

**Investigators:**

Mahdi Al-Kaisi, Professor, Agronomy, Iowa State University

David Kwaw-Mensah, Research Associate, Agronomy, Iowa State University