

COVER CROPS: NUTRITIONAL VALUES AND RELATED FEEDING ISSUES

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Elevated nutritional values of fresh cover crop forages can greatly increase feeding-related animal health issues when abrupt changes are made in the animal diet. Selected cover crop species were tested to determine forage quality. Cover crop grasses and brassica crops tested had high moisture (79-92%); high crude protein (CP 17-30%); low neutral detergent fiber (NDF 23-39%) and high relative feed value (RFV 188-292) 90 days after seeding. Cereal rye, wheat, triticale, spring and winter oats, spring and winter barley, and annual ryegrass cover crops can cause bloat, grass tetany, nitrate or fertility issues. Thiamine deficiency, nitrate poisoning, bloat and digestive upsets in ruminant animals can be potential problems when feeding brassica crops like rape, turnip tops and bulbs, and radish tops and bulbs. High or excess soil fertility may increase potential health issues. Management is the key to preventing the health issues when feeding high quality fresh forages to ruminants. Forage testing is an essential part of prevention. Dietary changes in forage quality should be made slowly to allow rumen microbes to adjust to feeding practices.

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