



AGROECOLOGY FOR WEEDS

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AGROECOLOGICAL WEED MANAGEMENT REPOSITORY

The Agroecological Weed Management (AWM) Repository

<https://www.goodhorizon.eu/platform/awm-practices/>

is a virtual space where you can freely and openly find information and educational material on current and agroecological weed management practices in the European Union. You can browse and learn about several weed management practices and crops.

The **Agroecological Weed Management (AWM) Toolbox**, our Decision Support System that supports the user to reduce the use of synthetic herbicides and/or improve weed management by combining different Agroecological Weed Management (AWM) strategies with cover crops is LIVE!

<https://dss.goodhorizon.eu/>



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COVER CROPS + GRAZING

DESCRIPTION & BENEFITS

Cover crops + grazing is a combination of practices in which cover crops are grown between cash crop cycles or within crop rotations and then grazed by livestock before the establishment of the following crop. The cover crop competes with weeds for light, water, nutrients and space during its growth, while grazing removes biomass, can reduce weed seed production, recycles nutrients, and could help terminate or suppress the cover crop before the next cash crop. It could:

- **suppress weeds** by establishing a competitive cover crop before weeds dominate
- **reduce the amount of weed biomass and potentially limit seed return** through grazing
- **provide an additional forage resource for livestock**
- **recycle nutrients and organic matter** through animal activity; (5) maintain soil cover and reduce erosion compared with bare fallow
- **diversify the farming system**

STRENGTHS

- Suppression of weed growth through competition from the cover crop, followed by biomass removal and disturbance through grazing before weeds become dominant
- Provision of an additional forage resource, reducing feed costs or increasing feed availability during periods when cash crops are not grown
- Improvement of nutrient cycling through animals activity, while maintaining soil cover and reducing erosion compared with bare fallow

OPPORTUNITIES

- Integration of crop and livestock systems can improve whole-farm efficiency by producing forage while supporting weed management and soil cover
- Could reduce reliance on herbicides, mowing or repeated tillage when combined with competitive cover crops, crop rotation and other preventive agroecological weed management practices
- Could create additional income or cost savings through forage use and reduced external feed needs

WEAKNESSES

- Requires careful management of stocking rate, grazing duration, timing and soil conditions to avoid overgrazing, compaction or uneven residue cover
- Weed suppression is variable and depends on cover crop establishment, biomass production, weed species, grazing selectivity and the amount of residue remaining after grazing
- Requires fencing (usually), water access, livestock handling, animal health monitoring and coordination between crop and livestock operations

THREATS

- Overgrazing or grazing on wet soils can damage soil structure, increase compaction, reduce infiltration and weaken the weed-suppressive effect of cover crop residues
- Some cover crops or weeds may regrow after grazing, compete with the following crop, or set seed if grazing and termination timing are poorly managed
- Animal health risks, poisonous plants, residues from previous pesticide applications or regulatory restrictions may limit grazing options

TIPS

- **select cover crop species or mixtures that are suitable both for weed suppression and livestock grazing** considering palatability, biomass production, rooting depth, regrowth ability, climate and the following crop
- **establish the cover crop early enough to produce sufficient biomass before grazing**, because weak or patchy stands provide limited weed suppression and little forage
- **graze at the correct stage**, when the cover crop has produced enough biomass but before problematic weeds set viable seeds
- **avoid overgrazing**, as too little residue left on the soil can reduce weed suppression, increase erosion risk and reduce soil health benefits
- **adjust stocking rate and grazing duration**, according to biomass availability, soil moisture and the amount of residue that must remain after grazing
- **avoid grazing when soils are very wet**, because trampling can cause compaction, poor infiltration and damage to soil structure
- **use rotational grazing where possible**, to improve biomass use, avoid selective grazing and maintain more uniform residue cover & protect sensitive areas such as slopes, watercourses and compacted zones from excessive livestock pressure
- **monitor fields** for poisonous plants, nitrate accumulation or animal health risks
- **check whether grazing alone is sufficient to terminate the cover crop**, as some species may regrow and require mechanical, frost or other termination methods

LIABILITY DISCLAIMER

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