

building fertility with chickens

Contributed by mike bernhard
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Bob,

I consider rotational grazing to be no net loss¹ of nutrients. It actually helps to speed up the cycling of your minerals. If the animals get any supplemental feed while they graze, it will actually build a little fertility. I'm sure that you know more about managing grazing sheep than I do and will keep them from harming the clover so the grazing may even stimulate the clover to grow faster by removing competition. Grazing your oats is a great idea.

When broilers graze in moveable pens, they leave behind a tremendous amount of fertility. I did the calculations for ours several years ago and found that by moving the pens once a day, we were adding about 300# per acre of nitrogen plus nearly that much P₂O₅ plus over 100# of potassium per acre. That can jump start a low fertility field so that it produces lush rich grass afterward. The combination of alternately grazing ruminants and birds is what made Joel Salatin's farm go from producing sparse poor yielding grass to being incredibly productive in just a few years.

One thing I forgot to mention in my first post is that when large amounts of surplus nitrogen are applied to soil, regardless of the source, it leaches out cations as well as destroying organic matter. That is seldom a problem with manure that is generated on farm. When a lot of high analysis manure is imported over a long period of time though, it is possible to use so much that it lowers your calcium levels. That is part of the reason why the EU regulations prohibit importation of manure except during periods of "focused soil building"¹ When that happens, we cross the line between organic management and conventional management with organically allowed inputs.

When we see weeds such as galinsoga begin to dominate on organic market gardens where huge amounts of compost have been used, we have the same problem occurring. Nature has a way of telling on us.

Klaas