



GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS



August 2009

Vice - President's Note

Well, howdy all!! This is my first report as vice chair of our association and I must say that there is quite a lot to report. Perhaps I should give you (our members) a little background on just who I am and what I am all about. My name is Morrie Goetjen and although I grew-up (loosely speaking, of course) in northwest Calgary, we always had land and cattle west of Didsbury, where my late father was born and raised. I began buying land in that same area in the early eighties and purchased the quarter that my wife and three children presently live on, in 1988. This particular quarter is northwest of Cochrane, approximately 30 mins south of our land west of Didsbury. Presently, my wife and I run a cow/calf operation on 6 quarters of deeded land and another 4 quarters of

rental property. I became involved with Foothills Forage & Grazing Association a few years ago, first as a director and for the past 18 months as the vice-chair. It was never my intention to get *this* involved but I got persuaded (read, tricked) by our president (and good friend) Graeme Finn. What first drew me to this association was my desire to learn about getting my input costs under control and (perhaps) becoming more holistic in my approach to farming and ranching. In the past 4 or 5 years, my operation has changed dramatically, from a basic mixed farm, with 100 cows calving in March and April, to a ranching operation with 150 cows (and growing) calving in May and June. Sound familiar? I'm downright giddy about the future of the cow business and can't wait for the demand of beef to rise, because we all know that it will. Sadly, I/we have seen so many operations leaving the business every day. Leaving the industry was really not a viable option for me, so I simply HAD to get better at what I did! The knowledge I have gleaned along the way from the likes of Doug Wray, Steve Kenyon, Grant Lastiwka, et al. has not only changed how I have worked on the land, but how I actually *view* the land. One change I have implemented during the past number of years is the swath-grazing of annual crops. That worked so well that I thought, why not perennials? I deliberately

grazed a piece of old hay land until June 5th, but the re-growth has been slow due to the lack of rain in June and early July. It is looking a little better now but its still a little thin. My hope was to graze half in November, just prior to weaning my calves and saving the other half until later in the winter. I will keep you posted on those developments as they unfold.

For a number of years we calved our own cows here at home. In the spring, this little chunk of range was a busy little place, with cows, yearlings, a few young bulls, 2 or 3 horses and a couple of 4-H steers thrown in for good measure. I knew I had to change how I did business because I was having a real problem with calf mortality, largely due to the over-crowded conditions. Changing my calving dates, but still calving at home was only half the solution to an even larger problem. Consequently, we also had to change *where* we calved. Now we calve the cows on the grass in May/June *and* 30 mins north of here. I check the cows in the morning, then again in the afternoon. That's it. We calve 'em and move 'em; calve 'em and move 'em. The other thing I try NOT to do is feed the cows after they calve. I make the cows scrounge for grass in old stands. My calf weights might be down a little come November, but I know I wean more beef/acre than I would if I poured feed into them. It's all about input costs, right? *(Continued on Page 2)*

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Vice - President's Note

Anyway enough about me, I would also like to address a few things going on within our little organization. Firstly, as most of you know (unless you have been living under a rock or in Edmonton) we have a new manager and she has brought about some huge changes and benefits to our association. Because of these changes, we are now getting our message to more producers of forage crops (alfalfa, grass, annuals) and livestock (cows, yearlings, sheep) that we know are out there, trying new things, connecting with experts from across north America and sharing what we have learned. One avenue is, of

course, this newsletter, but we also have recently set up a booth at the Millarville Fair and will be at the Cochrane fair on Aug 30th and hope to expand on this next summer. We have advertised with Caitlynn Reesor on the Call of the Land and have re-connected with other associations and various Ag-service boards in our area. We have just gone through a logo change to better reflect who we are and what we are doing. It's a fairly basic design that we hope will lend itself well to embroidered hats and tee-shirts. Look for those in the future!!

Well, that's about it for now. As I mentioned above we are testing new ideas. We are tapping into others and are more than interested in your ideas and comments. If you have any inkling to learn more, or to pass on information that you learned, please don't hesitate to contact one of our/your directors. As a footnote, I have sat (and presently do sit) on numerous volunteer run boards, but have never been involved with a board of directors more committed than this group. As Baxter Black says, "It's been a pleasure to serve".

Until next time, Pardner,
Morrie Goetjen

Stockpiling Pasture for Winter Feed

The idea behind stockpiling pasture is to let a pasture grow and accumulate forage tonnage that is set aside for later grazing. The amount of tonnage that accumulates and when it is best grazed depends upon some variables and management decisions. Some of the production variables can be controlled and some can't. Let's take a look at the process, variables and economics behind stockpiling pasture.

Generally, if a pasture is going to be stockpiled for winter feed, the recommendation is to take a last cutting, clipping or grazing pass in early to mid-August and then let the pasture re-grow and stockpile or accumulate forage until the end of the growing season. Stockpiling research and on-farm trial results have shown this is the best compromise between quantity of forage stockpiled and quality of forage stockpiled. Beginning earlier can result in more tonnage but quality will be lower, while beginning later will result in higher quality forage, but lower total tonnage. Tall fescue is our best stockpiling option, especially for late winter grazing, because it holds its forage quality value better than something like orchardgrass. However, orchardgrass can be stockpiled, just manage it to graze it off in the late fall through early winter.

Variables in this system include weather and nitrogen fertilization. Nitrogen fertilization can increase both the quality and the

quantity of the forage being stockpiled. Research from a south-eastern Ohio location showed that applying nitrogen increased the crude protein content of stockpiled fescue by an average of 2 to 3 percentage points as compared to the unfertilized fescue across late fall and into winter. Nitrogen applied to tall fescue in the early to mid-August time period should return 20 to 30 lbs of additional stockpiled dry matter (DM) per lb of nitrogen as compared to stockpiled fescue without supplemental nitrogen. Of course without rain none of this matters. Look no further than the past two dry falls we have experienced. No rain equals no growth.

The main reason for considering the practice of stockpiling pasture for winter feed is to reduce the cost of raising livestock. In most ruminant livestock operations the highest cost of raising an animal or maintaining a flock or herd through the winter, is the cost of using stored feed. For most ruminant livestock farmers that stored feed is hay. In most situations you just can't beat the cost of livestock out harvesting and eating their own feed compared to the fertilizer, machinery, and labour costs associated with making, storing and then feeding hay.

A good place for the farm manager to begin when considering the decision to stockpile pasture or not is with some basic economic comparisons between the costs of hay and the costs of stockpiling. For those who make their own hay, one way to generate a cost of that hay is based on the nutrient value of the hay plus machinery and labour costs to make the hay. I just made a phone call to some fertilizer dealers in the Athens County area and as, July 22 2009, farmers could purchase urea (46-0-0) for \$385/ton, DAP (18-46-0) for \$400/ton and Potash (0-0-61) for \$745/ton. Each ton of dry matter (DM) hay contains about 40 lbs of nitrogen, 15 lbs of phosphate (P₂O₅) and 50 lbs of potash (K₂O). Applying current fertilizer prices to the N-P-K nutrients in a DM ton of hay figures out to a value of \$45.85.



Stockpiling Pasture for Winter Feed

On top of that must be added the machinery and labour costs to make the hay. I used the OSU Extension 2008 Ohio Custom Rate figures and a production level of 2 tons/acre DM per cutting. This added up to another \$29/ton. The total value of hay based on the nutrient value and the machinery and labour costs associated with that hay comes to \$74.85/ton. If the nitrogen value is subtracted because nitrogen is being supplied by a legume component in the hay then the total value of the hay is about \$60.55/ton.

What does it cost to stockpile pasture? The answer to that question depends upon whether synthetic nitrogen fertilizer is applied. If the pasture that would be stockpiled has 30% or more legumes evenly distributed throughout the stand, there is no need for any additional nitrogen. If the legume component is under 30% and/or unevenly distributed in the stand, it may be beneficial and economical to apply nitrogen. Stockpiling research results indicate that in predominantly grass stands, providing 50 lbs of actual nitrogen per acre is economical. Considering today's urea price of \$385/ton, plus a spreading cost of \$6/acre, it would cost \$27/acre to apply 50 lbs of actual nitrogen. Provided there are some timely rains, we might expect an additional 1000 to 1250 lbs of DM to be produced by an early to mid-August nitrogen application. This figures out to \$43 - \$54/ton of additional DM. This is cheaper than producing a ton of hay and doesn't involve the cost of moving the hay bale out to the livestock.

OK, now let's look at the total management picture involved in stockpiling pasture. Going back to research done by Extension Educators at the Jackson Experimental station, it can be expected that fescue without supplemental nitrogen fertilizer will stockpile on average about 2000 lbs of DM from a mid-August to end-of-the-growing season time period. Our economic analysis of nitrogen at current prices looked favourable, so if the forecast for rain looks favourable, supplemental nitrogen could be applied and the total amount of stockpiled forage should be around 3000 to 3250 lbs of DM. If the livestock manager wants to get the most return from this stockpiled pasture, access must be controlled. Strip grazing is the most efficient way to utilize stockpiled pasture. Giving livestock access to no more than 3 days worth of intake can provide a utilization rate of around 65%. If the manager is willing to restrict access more and move fence every day, that utilization rate might be bumped to 80%. On the other hand, if management is less intense and livestock have access to an entire stockpiled pasture without restriction, utilization might be no better than 35 to 40%. How a stockpiled pasture is managed has a big impact on the bottom line cost.

Another management consideration that can be thrown into the decision on whether or not to stockpile is the timing of feeding hay. What I am getting at here is the question: If pasture is limited, should hay be fed during the stockpiling time period rather than through winter and early spring? I believe there is merit to seriously consider this question, especially if there is some late

July or early August rainfall in an amount that would insure that grass will be growing during the stockpiling period. In this case, feeding hay during this time period while stockpiling



some pastures would allow pastures to recover from any overgrazing that occurred during the season and would allow those pastures to build carbohydrate reserves during the critical fall period. This system might also match up forage quality with livestock nutritional needs better than winter/spring feeding of hay. Often first cutting hay is low quality due to rainfall that delays cutting or hay getting rained on. Feeding this low quality hay anytime from August to November is going to come closer to meeting early gestation nutrient requirements as compared to feeding it in late winter/early spring when the animal is in late gestation or, in some cases, early lactation and needs a higher level of nutrient intake. Meanwhile, stockpiled fescue, especially if some nitrogen has been applied, could supply 13-15% crude protein forage from January-March, generally higher quality than first cutting hay and about equal to a lot of 2nd cutting hay.

In practice, a livestock farmer might think about stockpiling enough acres to permit grazing for 90 days, January - March for example. For a 30 cow herd with an average weight of 1200 lbs and figuring cows eating about 2.5% of their body weight in DM per day, this equals 30 lbs/cow/day. So, that 30 cow herd needs 900 lbs of DM/day. Over a 90 day period this adds up to 81000 lbs of DM. If 3000 lbs of DM is accumulated by stockpiling and strip grazing is used to get 70% utilization, then about 39 acres need to be set aside to stockpile. Pasture acres above this amount could be rotationally grazed in combination with feeding hay until the stockpiled pastures are grazed beginning in January, when hay feeding would end.

Stockpiling pastures is not without risk, but if Mother Nature cooperates and the livestock owner is willing to apply some management skills it offers an opportunity for an economic return and the possibility of greatly reducing the practice of feeding hay during the winter months.

Source: Rory Lewandowski, Extension Educator, Athens County (Ohio) For more information contact:

Stephanie Kosinski, Forage Specialist, Ag-Info Centre (403) 742-7931

Stephanie.Kosinski@gov.ab.ca

A Special Thanks to:
Wylie Wickland & Associates,
accounting firm in Airdrie, for
all of their help and continued
assistance.

Looking Back

Ladies Livestock Lessons

I attended the Ladies Livestock Lessons that were put on by Red Deer, Wheatland, KneeHill and Mountain View Counties as well as the MDs of Big Horn and Rocky View. Cows and Fish and ASEA also supported this event. It was a two day ladies retreat in Watervalley, June 23rd & 24th. About 40 ladies in the livestock industry turned out and it was a great event.



The two days were packed with learning and socializing. There were hands on field sessions based on riparian health, weed management, plant identification and pasture health. Industry members were present to provide information and insight on sprayer calibration, portable electric fencing and solar options for fence and water systems. Classroom sessions were held on herd health protocols, age verification and on farm food safety. All of the ladies attending had an opportunity to learn, inquire, relax and enjoy the event.

Laura LaBrash

Parkland Agri Services Seed and Soil Expo

Thank you to those of you who joined us for the Parkland Agri Services Seed & Soil Expo. It was a great couple days full of information on crop varieties fertilizer options and new innovative chemical products. Over 350 people attended over the two day expo.



Different winter feed varieties and options were discussed including triticale, barley, oats, rye and corn.



FFGA followed the expo with a trip out to a trial pasture that was sprayed with Reclaim, an up and coming pasture weed and brush control product produced by Dow AgroScience. We look forward to the expo again next year!

Laura LaBrash



Gold Member:



Looking Back

Training Cattle To Graze Canada Thistle Trial 2009

Sean and Holly LaBrie of Difficulty Ranch, near Didsbury were enthusiastically preparing to teach their cows to graze Canada Thistle at the beginning of August. Using Kathy Voth's Livestock for Landscapes 'We'd Eat It' program, they spent a few hours watching the teaching videos and planning, with the help of a workbook. Twenty nine heifers, one bull and one quiet cow/calf pair were selected for the trial, training feed was purchased for approximately \$100 and ten empty Crystalyx tubs were donated by a local dealer, Albert Kendze. A small test pasture was fenced off with enough feed for the herd for one day, with around 30% of the pasture being thistle. Some patches were waist high and the thistle was just starting to bud.



Day one of the trial started off smoothly with the heifers behaving exactly as predicted by Kathy's program. At 1:00 AM on the morning of day two, Difficulty Ranch was hit by a large hail-storm. The hail was marble sized, but the volume and force caused by the winds was enough to completely shred and flatten the thistles and pasture lands. Luckily the cattle were not harmed but what started as waist high thistle was no more than a few 10 inch shredded stalks, effectively putting an end to the thistle trial.

If the thistle makes enough of a comeback this year the trial will begin again, otherwise the LaBrie's plan to start again next year targeting Canada Thistle and Snowberry.

FFGA is encouraged by the beginning of positive results with this trial and looks forward to perusing it further next season with trials at a variety of locations.

As reported by Holly LaBrie



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Looking Forward

Learn cattle handling skills that make your herd calm and easy to control.

Low Stress Cattle Handling Clinic Sept 10, 2009 Featuring Dylan Biggs Registration: 8:30am Wrap up: 5:00pm

Make working with your cattle easy and trouble free

The day will Include:

- ◆ Classroom sessions
- ◆ Demonstrations
- ◆ Hands-on learning

The focus will be on:

- ◆ The benefits of being able to control livestock in all situations
- ◆ Understanding the foundation for achieving control of individuals and herds
- ◆ Skills required to achieve control
- ◆ Herding Dynamics - position (where to be), timing (when to be) and feel (how to be)

Enjoy a complimentary lunch



Directions:

- ◆ Robertson Ranch is owned and operated by Alex & Carol Robertson
- ◆ Robertson Ranch is located 3/4 mile (1km) east of Longview on the south side of Coal Trail.
- ◆ For further directions call Alex at (403) 888-1517

Registration: \$125.00/person or \$225.00/two-person unit for FFGA members and \$150.00/person or \$250.00/two-person unit for non-members, please register by Sept 4th by calling or emailing Laura at (403) 652-4900,



Pembina Sheep Grazing Symposium

September 11-12, 2009

Sangudo, AB

Contact Carla with West Central Forage Association to register or for more information (780) 727-4447

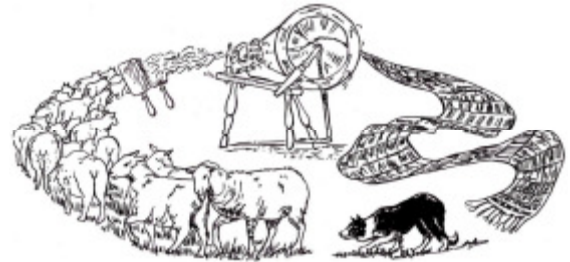
Guest Speakers (Sept 11th):

Martin Gooch, Director, Value Chain Management Centre, George Morris Centre Consumer Data for Farmers & the agri-food industry-Condensed Lamb report on national purchasing panel data

Len Larson, Producer, Rouleau Sask - Mixed "flerd" grazing operation

Adam Moilliet, Producer, Aveley Ranch, Vavenby BC 4th generation family farming operation with agri-tourism and alpine grazing

Sheep Grazing Bus Tour (Sept 12th):



Bronze Member:

Silver Member:



Agriculture, Automotive & Short Line Equipment Distributor

For information on some of the quality products we carry, please click the logos below:

Looking Forward

Winter Feeding and Nutrition Seminar Oct 5th, 2009 Guest Speaker: Bryan McMurray, Cargill Nutritionist

Topics:

- * How to feed this winter with what you've got
- * Feeding low quality feeds
- * High nitrate feeds
- * Cattle nutrition
- * Cow/calf size
- * Health issues related to feeding low quality feeds



Photo:
Stock piled Tall Fescue, Stephen J. Herbert,
Masoud Hashemi
Dept. of Plant and Soil Sciences



To Register call Laura at (403) 652-4900

Watch for more details to come!!

Location:

Alberta Agriculture Building in Airdrie

Time:

10am - 4pm

Price:

\$40.00/member and \$50.00/
non-member



Foothills Forage and Grazing Association is a producer driven organization focusing on the use and development of forages and grazing. The guiding principles of FFGA are to respect the land, water and natural resources.

FFGA members benefit from our information network including our GrassRoots newsletters, brochures and information of upcoming tours, field days and seminars which they are invited to attend at discounted rates. Members also have the opportunity to participate in projects and extension work undertaken by the association. Members are kept up to date with information about and from other forage and livestock associations as well as affiliated industry members. We look forward to having you as a member of the association.

To become a producer member today or invite a neighbour to join please fill out the form below or contact Laura for more information.

Membership: \$30.00 plus gst

Total: \$31.50

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

City/Prov/Postal code: _____

Email: _____

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association
P.O. Box 5145, High River AB, T1V 1M3,
Phone: (403) 652-4900, Fax: (403) 652-4090
Email: laura@foothillsforage.com
Website: www.areca.ab.ca/site/ffa



Thank you to the Southern Alberta Livestock Exchange and all of the folks at the Highwood Auction Mart for our new office space.

How Will You Harvest This Year's Crop?

To say it's been a challenging crop year, so far, is a gross understatement. The big question to be answered is whether there is enough of a crop to leave it to maturity and take it as grain or take it earlier as forage. When it comes to answering the when and how of harvest many producers are finding that they have fields where at least two crop stages are growing.

"Poor germination this spring, repeated frost events followed by a dry spell then rains in July, have led to multi-staged crops growing on most fields," says Harry Brook, crop specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Stettler. "This will make it a challenge to harvest as the first crop will be mature while second growth will just be coming into head or in full flower. Swathing this mixed-bag will probably not be an option as immature second growth will extend the time it takes to dry down the crop. Other issues include the date of the first killing frost. Crops are still almost two weeks behind on maturity compared to the long term average."

"If crops are to be salvage or written off, and the crop is under moisture stress, it is best for feed value purposes to harvest it earlier rather than later. Currently in the province, there is a definite market for salvaged annual crops to be harvested as silage or baled feed" says Brook.

When salvaging a crop for stored forage or grazing, it's important to be aware of the fertilizer program that was used. High inputs of fertilizer, especially nitrogen, can lead to potentially toxic levels of nitrates accumulating in the crop. Nitrates in high enough levels can result in the death of cattle by suffocation. Nitrates can be dealt with through dilution with other feeds and by acclimatizing the livestock to the feed. Grazing animals can adapt to low to moderate levels of nitrates on pasture given time to adjust.

"If a crop will still provide sufficient yield potential to warrant harvest, the multiple stages of crop growth will have to be dealt with. Any second growth that started

growing after June 15 has very little chance of making it to maturity. Second growth will only complicate harvest as it will be too immature to add to yield. Immature seeds, if harvested, will downgrade quality and the excess, immature second crop will cause delays in drying down the ripe crop."

For canola, to handle this second crop that will never make it, use Reglone® to desiccate the crop. Some glyphosates are registered for use as a preharvest application in cereals and canola when the crop is at less than 30 per cent moisture. However, remember that glyphosate is not a great desiccant and dry-down will take longer with glyphosate than with a true desiccant. Using a desiccant can also increase the chance of pod shattering in canola.

"This year's harvest is going to be a challenge," says Brook. "It is good planning to look at all contingencies prior to harvesting. If the crop is going to be written off, using it for forage may be the best alternative."

Contact: Harry Brook
310-FARM (3276)

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association

MISSION STATEMENT

The foothills Forage & Grazing Association encourages a profitable and sustainable forage industry by providing an information network for Southern Alberta forage producers.

Gold Member:

