



**December 2009**

## Director's Note

Seasons Greetings,

I expect that everyone is now entering their winter feeding program, learning to navigate around those frozen deposits left behind by your cattle.

As I am writing this it is presently -29 degrees Celsius, too cold, too soon in the winter feeding season since many of us experienced drought and/or hail damage that reduced not only the quantity but quality of our feed stocks.

My wife, Monica, and I run a cow/calf operation in the Milo area. We graze primarily tame hay consisting of a high percentage of alfalfa with meadow brome and other varieties of grass, depending upon location, and calving in mid April through mid June.

Your board is made up of a diverse group of individuals who have a lot of enthusiasm about the potential, and resulting profitability, of striving for year round grazing. Everyone does things a bit differently depending upon their location, land base and management style. However their goals are the same - to reduce costs, labour and eventually turn their operation into a profitable one.

In the first part of December, FFGA held a one day seminar near Strathmore, at Director, Rod Vergouwen's ranch to hear speakers talk about swath and bale grazing, winter watering systems as well as other timely and informative topics.

One of the challenges we have at FFGA is in how, with such a large geographic area do we deliver seminars and events on a variety of topics, to as many members as possible within an hour or so driving time and still keep our costs inline.

If you have any ideas please contact Laura or any of us on the board. Some speakers charge a substantial fee for their services. How much are you prepared to pay for good information ?

Personally, for every seminar I have attended while being involved with FFGA, I have come home with numerous potential improvements that have been or will be incorporated into our operation.



If you have a passion for improving the state of the cow/calf and forage producer, playing a larger role in FFGA is one way you could participate in achieving that goal. Please submit your name to stand as a FFGA Director at our Annual General Meeting to be held in March. The time, date, and location yet to be announced. My turn as Director, has expired and as well, there is room for one additional board member. Please call Laura and let your name stand.

In closing I quote from A.D. Bradstreet.  
*"If we had no winter the spring would not be so pleasant"*

Regards,  
Michael Monner

IN THIS ISSUE	
Director's Note	1
FFGA Mission Statement	1
The Water Wagon	2
Looking Back Winter Tour	3
Looking Forward	
Knowing Your Options	4
Producer Membership Form	4
Ranching Opportunities	5
Rocky View Update	5
Agri Profit\$	6
Board of Directors	7

***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.

# The Water Wagon

Here is the silver lining to the cloud that may hang over your portable livestock watering needs. A portable, four seasons, wind and solar energy powered pumping unit. Tired of what was available on the market, which was developed by either someone with an agriculture background or a technical solar background? One such system uses discarded air seeder tanks for a reservoir. The industry is still struggling with concerns over B.S.E. from contaminated feed. No where has the point been made that watering cattle in a tank that treated seed laden with carcinogens and chemical should be avoided. I have put my two past times together and developed this design which is being marketed across North America.

We start with an internally braced 60 gallon trough which is UV rated for 60 years and built to oilfield standard. This supplies us with 27 lineal feet of drinking area. An immediate response when people see the system is it is low enough for calves to drink; if the calves cannot drink when the trough is almost empty you can bet they will drink out of the nearest pot-hole or slough. Remember our intent is to water the entire herd quickly with fresh, clean water. In order to optimize gains, they need to eat grass!

There have been many studies on water quality. Direct entry dugouts have been consistently tested at 15,000 coliform counts/100ml. Calves can only tolerate 10 counts/100ml and cows 5,000counts/100ml.

This system is designed to use solar and wind, in combination or separately. These stands fold down safely and easily for transport or to go in rugged terrain. By design, one standard side wind jack does all the work, no jack alls are required. Remember the system needs to be moved in muddy conditions to optimize your rotations.

I understand how family farms operate and have no problem allowing my daughter to move the system safely with a quad, when I may be baling hay or working off the farm.

It is for this very reason a huge amount of time went into designing this system, such as the remote and protected float switch and battery box location. I see where the common problems occur due to time restraints for producers in very small and simple things such as a float switch placed where calves can reach it.



Also included is an electric fence option which allows you to protect the pump cable and hose back to the dugout. This enables you to have fully adjustable protection with varying dugouts or locations.

To optimize the system, a producer may use several dugouts per season and alter the side of each site. No one location would be used more than once a year.

I suggest not fencing most locations. If the cattle have access to level, dry ground and ample water supply, 99% will not enter the water site unless very large numbers are watered.

The popular agriculture Uni-Solar panel is commonly used because of its unbreakable qualities (no glass), but glass panels can be used effectively on the system. Kelln solar had been marketing an insulated trough over the past 4 years with immediate success. This system has been updated and designed to be used in addition to the portable system.

For the first time, one system can be used for all four seasons and still be moved easily with a vehicle or ATV. This allows efficient use of money invested in solar panels, pumps and batteries.

I believe this machine will help us in reaching a sustainable agriculture industry by achieving higher productivity, reliability, and efficiency with our end goal being to have more time for our family and recreational activities.

## Bronze Member:



Marvin Jackson,  
Sundog Solar Systems  
(403) 638-9711



## Winter Herd Management Options

On Thursday Dec 3rd FFGA had a winter tour in the Strathmore area. We started the day off with information and presentations at the Wheatland County Office. We had Jim Stone discuss bale and swath grazing and electric fencing tips for winter. Marvin Jackson with Sundog Solar discussed different watering systems, solar watering systems and ways to make them work for different producers. Murray Green offered information on different funding options that are currently and will be coming available to producers through the Growing Forward program.



After a delicious lunch, sponsored by Sundog Solar Rod Vergouwen gave us some information on his winter feeding system. He is using bale and swath grazing a alfalfa and meadow brome hay on the same field. Rod uses electric fence to let the cows into about 3 days of feed at a time. Lee Eddy with Blue Rock Mineral provided feed testing on Rod's bales and swathes which Lee than discussed from a nutritional point of view.



After the presentations we all headed out to Rod's place to view his cattle in the bale & swath grazing field. He also showed us the frost free solar and wind generated watering system which he uses to pump water from his dug out. He has been using it for several years and finds it works quite well. This was another great event which about 35 producers attended. Thank you to Wheatland County for helping put the day on as well as Sundog Solar for sponsoring the lunch and Blue Rock mineral for providing the feed testing.



Merry Christmas,  
Laura LaBrash



Gold Member:



# Looking Forward

## Knowing Your Options Workshop

**Ranching is about more than livestock, it's a business.** Join FFGA, specialist Andy Sirski with Stocks Talk and Meyers Norris Penny for a one day workshop on improving your agriculture business.

Learn more about:

- ◆ Marketing options and tips
- ◆ Off farm investing
- ◆ Farm Transfer
- ◆ Farming & taxes
- ◆ Risk Management
- ◆ Much More!!!



Wednesday Feb 24, 2010  
High River Alberta



Mark your calendars and watch for more details in the January GrassRoots News & Views!!



**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.

*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](mailto:laura@foothillsforage.com)  
Website: [www.areca.ab.ca/site/ffa](http://www.areca.ab.ca/site/ffa)



# Looking Forward

\$25, FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>, 2010

8:45-4:15 Olds College- Alumni Centre

\* Lunch will be provided

\* Registration deadline - February 5th, 2010

To register or for more information contact:

Katie Roxburgh at Red Deer County

Ph: 403.350.2165 or

[KRoxburgh@reddeercounty.ab.ca](mailto:KRoxburgh@reddeercounty.ab.ca)

Make cheque's payable to Red Deer County 38106 Range Road 275,  
Red Deer County T4S 2L9 Attn: Katie Roxburgh

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

- CanFax 2010 Market Outlook
  - Livestock Handling
- Young Ranchers - Panel Discussion
  - Water in Alberta

Make sure to check out the tradeshow during breaks!

**BREAK-OUT SESSIONS:** (afternoon)

Choose your own sessions, you will have access to Agricultural Specialists, Alberta Agriculture and Industry

- Alberta Agriculture Growing Forward
  - Risk Management (AFSC)
  - Water Well Information
  - Private Banking Options
  - Shelterbelt/Tree Care
  - Pasture Management
  - Record Management
    - Tax Deferral
    - FCC - Loans



...Leading Change on the Farm

# RANCHING OPPORTUNITIES

**Rocky View**  
ALBERTA CANADA

## Up Coming Events

### Farm & Ranch Succession Planning

Rocky View County Building - January 23, 2010

Cost is \$100/farm family

This workshop is designed for farm/ranch families who are examining the viable options for succession planning. Some of the topics covered include: retaining the working farm/ranch in agricultural production, family needs and long-term goal setting, buy-sell agreements and transfer options, tax traps, tips and implications and much more.

### Living in the Natural Environment

February 5, 2010 - Cochrane Ranche House - 4 pm-8 pm

This annual dinner event will feature presentations on problem wildlife in the foothills of Alberta and conservation tools to help protect the foothills landscape.

For more information call Tim Dietzler at (403) 520-1271



Silver Member:

**AGROW PLOW**

**S.A.L.E.**

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



# AgriProfit\$ Business Analysis & Research Program For Alberta Beef Producers

Economics & Competitiveness

*AgriProfit\$*  
Information Bulletin

Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) regularly publishes a variety of economic and financial benchmarks, tools and applied research materials for agriculture industry clients. These materials are generated directly and indirectly through the *AgriProfit\$* program.

## What is *AgriProfit\$*?

*AgriProfit\$* is a business analysis and research program operated by ARD's Economics & Competitiveness Division. The primary roles of the program are to (1) deliver sound business management benchmarks and information, and

- (2) create applied analysis information, assisting producers in:
- evaluating their own business' performance
  - assessing production, management and technology options, and
  - charting their business' course, in an economically sustainable fashion.

Ultimately, the goal is to provide "better business management information, to knowledgeable business managers, to make better business management decisions".

## Where does this information come from?

Each year, the *AgriProfit\$* service is offered to Alberta beef producers. Through this service, participating producers gain, directly, valuable management information. Their farm data is then grouped with others in benchmarking and applied analysis activities. The strength of the program is two-fold.

### *AgriProfit\$*:

- employs accepted, consistent analysis standards. Individual and "group" results are reliable and broadly comparable
- covers a breadth of operations, regionally and by business type. Benchmarks and applied analyses address many information and management needs.

*AgriProfit\$* strength is also in its base of producer participants. Information comes from cattle producers throughout the province adding a degree of realism and practicality to the production, economic and financial analyses results. The same services, information and expertise are available to crop producers under the *AgriProfit\$* umbrella.

## What's in it for producers?

While participation in the *AgriProfit\$* program is free-of-charge, it does require an investment in time from producers. As it is essential for *AgriProfit\$* participants to see direct value in return for their time, each receive:

- a detailed economic analysis of farm enterprises of their choosing, driving at unit production costs and returns for their commodities,
- a financial analysis of their "whole farm" business, revealing financial performance, strengths and weaknesses,
- benchmark comparables to assess the productive and economic performance of each of their enterprises, and the financial performance of their farm over time. These are also comparable to "peers" (by region, size of operation, type of operation, management practices, etc.).
- newsletters, bulletins and analysis tools, based on standardized *AgriProfit\$* information.

Participants are in the position to measure performance, and take active management control of their business. *AgriProfit\$* provides better information and tools to make better business management decisions.

## How can *AgriProfit\$* help producers?

The link between *AgriProfit\$* and farm business success can be summed up by two phrases:

"You Can't Manage What You Don't Measure!"

To reduce unit costs and improve profitability, the first logical step is to measure the "current position". A basic business analysis, including key enterprises and a roll-up to the farm financial position, is a starting point. Each added year of analysis adds another dimension in measurement, showing progress, opportunity for change, and/or potential areas of strength and weakness.

These same enterprise cost profiles and farm financial analyses form the basis of financial projections, and operational or investment-based budgets. An individual's business analysis becomes useful in identifying and managing profit centers within the farm, plus farm capital investment activities.

"Who's in Control of this Business, Anyway?"

For all intents-and-purposes, without a business analysis a farm directs itself. Knowledge of unit production costs and financial performance helps producers focus, strategically, on necessary short and long term choices and changes. It provides a basis to measure success, and how each choice improves farm profits, with acceptable risks. The manager is now in control.

Bronze Member:



Gold Member:



### “How is my information used?”

**The confidentiality of individual producer information is paramount.** In addition to business analyses for participants, producer information is also used in benchmarking and applied analysis. Every precaution is taken to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of individuals’ information.

#### AgriProfit\$ Benchmarks

A number of *AgriProfit\$* enterprise benchmark reports are available through ARD’s “Ropin’ the Web” site. They deliver unit cost and returns profiles along with productive and financial performance by region, farm type and management group. Regional reports also include forage and grazing cost and returns profiles for typical land use supporting the beef enterprise. It’s important to note that these reports do not suggest that all producers in a region have the same “average costs of production”. In fact, significant farm to farm variation is normal, so application of averages to an individual situation requires caution. However, these benchmarks can be very valuable in assessing the competitiveness of a farm, and in identifying a farm’s operational strengths and weaknesses.

#### Applied Analysis & Tools

The *AgriProfit\$* database is used to create “knowledge nuggets” for producers. It supports applied research and analysis into topical production economics and finance issues, ranging from assessments of specific production practices (eg. swath grazing, summer calving, grazing alternatives, feeding alternatives) to business structure issues (eg. optimal herd size, yardage). These are delivered to the beef industry in the form of newsletters and bulletins. Producer tools, budgets and decisions aids have been (or are being) developed, keying in on using unit costs derived from their *AgriProfit\$* analysis. Examples include *CropChoice\$* Budgetor and the Bred Heifer calculator.



### Doesn’t my accountant do this?

Although you may get similar farm level information from your accountant:

- statements prepared for tax purposes may mask some of the things you could be doing to manage for profit within your operation.
- accounting statements don’t “burrow down” to the enterprise, or profit center level examining the pieces that create overall farm profits. They do not deliver unit costs of production.
- accounting statements are not typically prepared in a format directly comparable to industry economic benchmarks and analysis information.

These differences may seem small but can make a big difference in how effective you can be in using your own “on-farm facts”.

### Does *AgriProfit\$* have local partners?

*AgriProfit\$* staff work closely with local forage and applied research associations to bring the economics and business management message home. Activities range from applying costing to demo’s and trials to providing a forum to discuss production options and evaluation techniques.

### Home Stretch

An *AgriProfit\$* business analysis provides key management information, helping guide producers to sustainable business success. It’s designed to *measure* so producers can *manage*. The focus is to deliver information and critical thinking so farm managers can control their business future.

Should you have any questions or comments about the *AgriProfit\$* Business Analysis and Research Program, please contact us by phone toll free by dialing 310-0000 followed by 427-5390 (Dale Kaliel) or 415-2153 (Pauline Van Biert).

#### Dale A. Kaliel

Sr. Economist: Production Economics  
Economics & Competitiveness Division



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