



FOOTHILLS FORAGE & GRAZING ASSOCIATION

Sustainable Grazing Solutions

June 2009

President's Note

Hi everyone,

I hope the grass is finally starting to grow for you; it's been a late one. Times are changing for the association as well, we have hired a new manager to run Foothills Forage Association on a full time bases. Laura LaBrash comes to us from Saskatchewan. She has just finished a degree in Agriculture from SASK UNI. We had over 25 people apply for the position and Laura really showed herself to be an outstanding young person who is keen to help the board members move ahead with the plans we have for the association.

The board members have moved to change the name to *Foothills Forage and Grazing Association* (FFGA) as we feel this is a better description of what we are about and what we do as producers and as a group. We have relocated the office from Calgary to High River, and can be found on the top floor of the Highwood Auction Mart. This will be a good central location, that better represents the geography of the membership and the association. I would like to thank the people of Highwood Auction Mart for helping us out with the new office space. We are looking forward to moving ahead with some major ideas, projects and tours. I would like to thank McPherson Management for all of the assistance they have given over the many years that they have been involved with FFGA and on behalf of FFGA I would like to wish Isabel a happy retirement.

We will be having regular newsletters and field tour information being sent out to the FFGA members and will be moving toward more frequent publications. We invite you to visit Laura in the office anytime and I hope that we can better serve and inform our members in the years to come as we move into a new time for the FFGA. We would like to hear from you; your ideas and thoughts as to what would make interesting tours or field days are valuable to the association.

Well that's about it for now,
Graeme Finn

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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.

WHO'S NEW

Manager



Laura LaBrash

Hi, my name is Laura LaBrash, the new Foothills Forage and Grazing Association manager. I am excited to take on this new role working alongside all of you. I was born and raised in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and am enjoying the change

from the prairies to the rugged beauty of Alberta. In the summer you will find me out in the foothills and mountains riding, doing pack trips and hiking. During the winter months, I keep myself busy snowboarding on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. I have a passion for the outdoors and think the best way to spend a day is exploring on horseback.

I enjoy working with ranchers and beef producers as well as keeping up to date with new production ideas and innovations within the industry. Growing up in Saskatchewan I have been involved with cattle working on several ranches, farms and a feedlot, near Perdue, as a pen rider. I have also enjoyed

recreational team penning with the Saskatoon Team Penning Club. I pursued secondary education at the University of Saskatchewan, completing my Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree, with a major in Animal Science this spring.

The position of manager with the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association is an exciting way for me to begin my career in the beef industry. I am looking forward to being involved in sustainable grazing and cattle production. I am happy to be on board, with a lot of ideas and even more to learn. I am looking forward to helping the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association become more active and move towards its goals. I will be working hard to plan events, tours and trials that stimulate action and growth within the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association. I am happy to hear from the FFGA members, whether it's to share ideas, thoughts or just have a chat so please stop in or give me a call. I look forward to getting to know you all.

Laura LaBrash

Board Of Directors



Wayne Robinson

directors this year. He and his wife Peggy live on the home farm north of Mossleigh, a little south of the Bow River. Wayne is the third generation Robinson to own most of this land and hopes that it will stay in the family. With help from their children, Wayne and Peggy manage a mixed operation on seven quarters. They run about 70 head of purebred Black Angus cows, marketing two-

year-old bulls and replacement heifers. Wayne aspires to establish a sustainable grazing operation while raising his level of land stewardship. The Robinson farm has followed a more traditional method of production in the past, but with skills learned through FFGA Wayne is working on ways to increase livestock carrying capacity and promote long-term pasture health. He is looking to extend his grazing period with the ultimate goal of 365 days a year on pasture. He's also working towards putting his cattle on a strictly forage diet by feeding very little grain. The FFGA is eager to utilize Wayne's experience and expertise. We look forward to a year of fresh ideas and new growth.

Board Of Directors

President:
Graeme Finn
(403) 312-2240

Vice President:
Morrie Goetjen
(403) 863-7484

Treasurer:
Sean LaBrie
(403) 999-3089

Directors:
Doug Wray
(403) 850-7643
Rod Vergouwen
(403) 934-1666
Michael Monner
(403) 599-3790
Alex Robertson
(403) 888-1517
Rick Kohut
(403) 994-0053
Ian Murray
(403) 860-8592
Wayne Robinson
(403) 807-3685

Manager:
Laura LaBrash

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association
PO Box 5145
High River, AB
T1V 1M3
Phone: (403) 652-4900
Fax: (403) 652-4090
Email:
laura@foothillsforage.com



Board Of Directors



Rick Kohut

On behalf of the FFGA I would like to welcome Rick Kohut to the board of directors. Rick is a new member to the board this year and we are glad to have him working with us. Rick was raised on the family farm east of Didsbury. Rick's parents still live on the mixed farm running about 150 head of yearling cattle. The Kohut's purchase weaned cattle to background and sell the following year, as well as breeding some of the heifers to sell as bred animals. Rick has been involved in both beef production and grain production his whole life. After high school he spent a year in Australia on a mixed farm through the IAEA (International Agricultural Exchange Association). Returning to school after his travels he received an Ag. Business Diploma from Olds College which he then followed up with a BA in Ag. Economics from the

University of Lethbridge. Rick has continued to be involved with the family farm as well as working for Parkland Agri Services (an Ag Retailer with 10 locations in central Alberta) in many capacities over the past eight years. Through his work with Parkland Rick has partaken in roles that involved work as an Agronomist, Crop Advisor, Business Developer Manager, Corporate Marketing and Livestock Division Manager as well as maintaining a 'Certified Crop Advisor' status.

Rick is the father of two beautiful children, a son of three and a daughter of seven months. He and his lovely wife, Amy, began their own health and wellness retail business in Olds in 2008. Business is going well for them which has resulted in Rick recently leaving Parkland Agri Services to spend more time with his family as well as help build the family business in Olds and become more involved with the family farm. Rick has great interest in sustainable farming and production practices. He is an active new member to the board this year and we are happy to have him on board.

Board Of Directors



Ian Murray

Photo by dee Hobsbawn-Smith

Ian Murray is also a new member on the FFGA board of directors this year. He and his wife Carman are the owners and operators of Shoestring Ranch in the Acme area. The Murray family has a long and proud history of ranching in Southern Alberta. Ian's Great Great Grandfather homesteaded in the Jumping Pound area west of Calgary in 1883. For over 125 years the Murray's have been farming and ranching. First in Jumping Pound, then west of Olds, and for nearly forty years north of Cochrane before Ian and Carman relocated to Acme to grow and expand their ranching operation. Their son Ty represents the 6th generation of Murray's in the Ranching Industry in Alberta.

Shoestring Ranch direct markets its own line of Natural Angus Beef to customers at the Bearspaw Farmers Market and directly from home, selling everything by the cut, just as you would buy it at the grocery store, except that they guarantee that all the beef they sell is their own,

raised from birth with no growth hormones, antibiotics or animal by-products, and it is dry aged for a minimum of 21 days. The Murray's pride themselves on customer satisfaction, service, taste and quality.

Ian and Carman feel it is important to work with nature to better their land for future generations. They are proud of their certification on the Verified Beef Production Program and the Environmental Farm Plan. Ian feels that programs like these provide producers with valuable tools to help them produce a safe consistent quality food product and support producers with verification to prove that they are doing what they have committed to. The Murray's run their operation on the principle that they don't produce cattle, they produce food, and that is a responsibility that they don't take lightly. Ian is a new member this year on the FFGA board and we look forward to having him and incorporating his leadership in industry to growth in the Foothills Forage Association.



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

Conserving Pasture Production During Dry Conditions

How you manage your pasture from the start of the grazing season will influence how it responds to drought conditions. The root system is usually proportional to the top growth. Maintaining a residual height of 3-4 inches (7-10 cm) and adequate rest and re-growth time will provide for a strong deep root system. These roots can gather moisture during dry periods and continue to grow to soil moisture when the surface soil is very dry. All the principles of good pasture management will be rewarded during a drought, so the effects are less severe than they could be. Grazing management must be adjusted quickly to drought conditions but species and plant health will also have a major impact on production.

Plants that are healthy because of good soil fertility programs and good rest periods that preserve root reserves will be ready to respond quickly once the rains return. Nitrogen, especially, will need to be applied in conjunction with moisture to be of benefit. Natural fertility or applications of phosphorus and potash will help to keep root systems healthy.

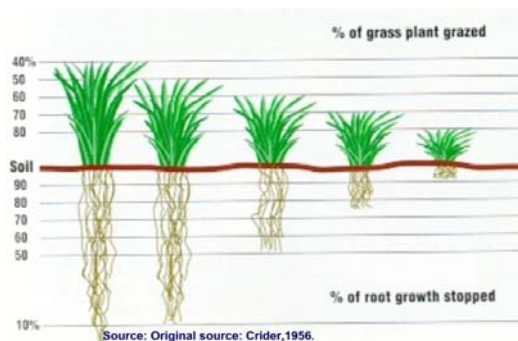
Healthy plants provide a more complete canopy which will reduce soil evaporation and keep the soil from drying out as quickly.

Subdividing fields will help you to manage pastures better. Grazing management is really "harvest management" of the forage you have produced. In a continuous graze system 70% of the forage produced is wasted, in a rotational system this is reduced to 45%. In a strip grazing system only 30% or less of the material is wasted. If pastures are not managed cattle tramp, lie and foul on too much material. If you can keep their heads all pointed in one direction and moving systematically across the field then you can greatly reduce these losses. We don't tramp fields with hay bines so why do we allow livestock to do even worse? Setting up smaller fields addresses all the principles listed at the first of this article. With smaller fields you can restrict livestock from a section allowing it time to rest and to re-grow. You can prevent livestock



from re-grazing and thus overgrazing forages. In this manner you will allow the plant to refill the root reserve system. Plants that have a larger leaf area left after grazing can rebound more quickly. It provides more area for photosynthesis and helps to maintain a larger root system. Seven days of overgrazing can delay re-growth by two weeks. You can never afford that delay but especially during a drought it is too expensive!

You have likely already faced the question of whether to leave fields for pasture or take them for hay. If you are grazing taller pastures tramping can be reduced by keeping the fields small. Livestock can effectively graze these if their movements are confined. The next decision will be when to return to a pasture. It is generally recommended that pastures with less than 6 inches (15 cm) of growth and less than 30 days re-growth not be grazed as they have the potential for more growth with rain. If the re-growth period has been over 30 days they should be grazed to remove the growth and to restart the buds so that re-growth may occur."



Agriculture Opportunity Fund

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Conserving Pasture Production During Dry Conditions

Supplementing pastures may be necessary to keep animals from overgrazing. This will mean moving them onto a "sacrifice" pasture and feeding. Livestock will usually prefer pasture so will keep re-grazing and weakening pastures rather than accepting the supplemental feed if they have access. Producers find that they require less supplemental feed and have better gains if they supplement early before livestock condition is affected and before pastures are weakened. Neither has to be adversely affected, but you will have to take control of the situation. Balanced rations are the most efficient method of feeding. Pastures can be extended by bringing other crops into the rotation. Second cut hay is often used to lengthen the rest period for pastures. Other crops such as cereals, sorghums, kale, annual ryegrass or others can also be grazed during summer to give an extended break to the main pastures. Half of the forage is produced in the first 60 days of the season with the other half produced throughout the rest of the season. Knowing this plan your grazing needs and plant an annual crop to be available for grazing in mid to late summer. Decide what you are going to do. Don't be backed into decisions by trying to respond when it is too late.

Careful attention to grazing management will allow you to realize the maximum production from your pastures without sacrificing next year's production to salvage forage for this year. Rest the root systems, do not overgraze and leave enough ground cover that recovery can be quick once the rains return. Good grazing management allows you to grow and harvest the production of the field more effectively.

Author: Jack Kyle; Provincial Grazier Specialist, OMAFRA

For more information:

Toll Free: 1-877-424-1300

Email: ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca



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



**FOOTHILLS FORAGE &
GRAZING ASSOCIATION**

Sustainable Grazing Solutions

Looking Back

AGM

The FFGA Annual General Meeting was held on March 11 at the Crossfield Community Center. Thank you to those of you who attended and shared your input on the future of the FFGA. The goals and future plans of FFGA were discussed and moved forward.



Sheldon Atwood from Carrus Land Systems, Utah joined us at the AGM and spoke on weed control. Sheldon gave an informative and motivating presentation on animal behaviour and how to use it as a tool for pasture weed control.

Spring Tour: Winter Grazing

A Spring Tour was held on April 8th to examine different methods of winter grazing and to look at the use of stockpiled forages. Around 25 people came out for the tour with some coming from as far as the Cypress Hills region. We were able to visit two sites which were using different methods of winter grazing as a successful management tool.

Scott Copley welcomed us to his operation to discuss and see how he is bunch grazing and bail grazing his cow-calf pairs. He has found this method to lower his production costs to improve his bottom line. He was able to provide financial backing to show how he is making this type of grazing work for him. The demonstration he had set up for the FFGA to view inspired thought and productive conversation amongst the group. Scott Copley is a leader in moving towards an extended grazing period and how to incorporate it into a successful beef operation.



The tour then headed to Don Evans operation in the Balzac area. Don has had success with swath grazing yearling steers and provided useful information how to set up the fencing to make it practical for individual operations.



After lunch Tracy Lundago, with Cargill, gave a presentation on the importance, use and options of winter minerals. Grant Lastiwka with the Department of Agriculture, based out of Olds AB, then gave a presentation on the use, nutritional value and economics of stockpiled forages. It was a great day of information and discussion based on increasing the number of grazing days in a year and some of the management strategies to make it work.



Looking Forward

Parkland Argi Services Seed and Soil Expo

On Aug 5th & 6th Parkland is presenting Alberta's first Seed and Soil Expo. The focus will be on pushing the limits of crop and forage development. The plots, will showcase new and forthcoming varieties and chemistries, and demonstrate the efficacy of optimized crop management practices and fertility technologies. Chemistry and Equipment suppliers will be on hand in the fields and under the big tent. The event, which includes lunch, is sponsored entirely by Parkland and its exhibitors, and is free to attend with RSVP to (403) 888-2050.

Both days have the same agenda running from 9:00am to 3:00pm. At 3:00pm on Aug 6th the FFGA will be adding on to the day by making a trip to a trial pasture that was sprayed last June to take a look at pasture herbicide control options. For those who are only interested in viewing the pasture please meet us at the Parkland Argi Services location near Didsbury at 3:00pm. Hope to see you there!

Laura LaBrash



Teach Your Cattle to Graze Canada Thistle, Brush & Other



- **When:** Aug 11, 2009 - 10:00am to 2:00pm
- **Where:** Difficulty Ranch, *owned and operated by Sean & Holly LaBrie in the Didsbury/Cremona area*
- **Guest Speaker:** Kathy Voth, with Livestock for

Topics include:

- Nutritional Value of Weeds
- Training Cattle to Graze Canada Thistles



Contact: Laura LaBrash at (403) 652-4900 (Foothills Forage & Grazing Association manager)

Sustainable Grazing Solutions



Winter Swath Grazing Varieties

Graeme Finn, the FFGA president, has started seeding for a new winter swath grazing trial on his land in the Crossfield area. Graeme is experimenting with different varieties of oats, rye, millet and triticale for winter grazing. The different varieties will be observed for their yield potential as well as their palatability and the cattle's preference.

FFGA vice president, Morrie Goetjen, is undertaking a trial on swath grazing hay. These projects are both in the beginning stages and we will keep you posted on progress, information and tour dates.



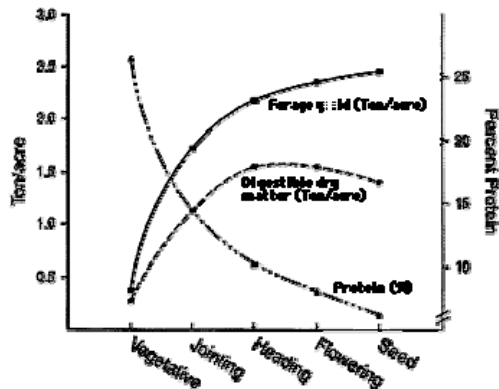
It's Never Too Early To Think About Making Hay

Hay is the most common source of stored feed used on livestock operations. It is also one of the most versatile stored feeds because: it can be stored for long periods of time with minimal nutrient loss, there are a wide range of plant species that can be harvested as hay, it can be produced and fed in large or small amounts, and it can supply the majority of the nutrients required by many different classes of livestock. Understanding the factors that affect hay quality is vital to ensure quality hay in the quantity desired is produced.

High quality hay can be thought of as hay that is palatable, highly digestible, with sufficient nutrients to meet the dietary needs of the livestock it is being fed to. Factors that determine hay quality include: stage of maturity when harvested, plant species, harvest management, weather, moisture content, and storage conditions. Of these, stage of maturity at harvest is one of the most important factors affecting hay quality.

As forage crops mature, their quality decreases. Fibre levels increase as grasses head out and as legumes flower, while crude protein, digestibility and palatability decline. Harvesting mature forages will result in lower quality hay that may not meet the needs of your livestock during the winter. However, cutting to optimize quality can come at the expense of yield. For example, the quality of an alfalfa hay crop is highest just before flowering. At this stage, though, yield hasn't been maximized. For many grasses, maximum quality is reached before flowering begins, but maximum yield occurs at, or just after, the bloom stage. Producers need to find the balance between quality and yield when cutting forage crops for hay.

Figure 1. Effect of reed canarygrass maturity on forage yield and quality at the spring regrowth.



Decker, A.M., G.A. Jung, J.B. Washko, D.D. Wolf, and M.J. Wright. 1969. Management and productivity of perennial grasses in the Northeast: I. Reed Canarygrass. West Virginia Univ. Agric Exp. Sn. Bull. 550T.

Forage species also has a large impact on hay quality. In general, legumes are higher in quality than grasses. They tend to have lower fibre levels, higher crude protein levels, and increased digestibility. However, properly managed legume-grass mixtures and grass crops can produce high quality hay. The keys are to cut at the optimal plant stage and minimize losses during harvesting and storage.



Forage quality can be maintained during harvest by promoting rapid dry-down, maintaining a high leaf content and baling at the correct moisture. Plant cells continue to respire and use energy even when cut. This stops once the material has reached a moisture content of 40%. To avoid excess quality losses, manage hay to reach that 40% moisture content as soon as possible. This can be achieved by using hay crimpers and crushers to increase drying speed, increase swath width, raking the swaths (but before that critical 40% moisture level is reached to avoid leaf loss).

Even though it is difficult to predict the weather, harvesting forage for hay is best done under warm, dry conditions. This helps speed up the drying process and reduces the risk of losing quality. Rain on cut forages causes nutrients to leach out of the plant cells and increase dry matter losses. The longer the forage is wet and the more rain that washes through the cut hay, the higher the nutrient losses will be.

When hay is baled, it should not be more than 12 to 18% moisture (depending on shape and size of the bale, and humidity). If the bale is at a higher moisture level, large dry matter losses can occur due to heating and mould growth. Moulds consume nutrients and produce heat. Heating causes a browning reaction to occur that ties up amino acids and sugars into insoluble nitrogen compounds that are unavailable to animals. This increase in insoluble fibre leads to lower digestibility and reduced hay quality.

The amount of storage losses in hay is related to both the moisture content during baling and the environmental conditions the hay is subjected to. As stated earlier, hay baled at higher than the recommended moisture content will heat and experience mould growth, leading to losses in both dry matter and nutrient content. Bales stored inside will be protected from weathering due to precipitation. If a producer has to store bales outside, large quality and dry matter losses can be avoided by storing bales: on a well-drained area, with space between bales for air circulation to facilitate drying, away from tree line, fences, and buildings, and by not stacking bales.

When managing for high quality hay, numerous factors need to be considered. It never hurts to come up with a plan of action on how to achieve the hay quality and yield needed for your operation. The overall goal is to produce enough hay that will meet the nutritional needs of your livestock over the winter.

For more information, contact Stephanie Kosinski at the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM.

