



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

January 2023

Director's Note — Dave Sammons

Hello,

Seasons Greeting's everyone. Our family has a mixed farm NE of Gleichen where we run cows in farming country. Grazing on multiple smaller pastures is challenging but, the benefit of integrating our ranching and farming enterprises is helping improve the soil, utilize crop residues and lower feed costs.

Our cows graze crop residue and field edges from the time crops are combined until the first part of December. Then, we start swath grazing a full season cover crop. The cover crop mix was seeded in the spring and was composed of barley, fall triticale, field peas as well as a seven-variety cover crop mix. The cows will swath graze until mid-January. Currently, they are digging through 8 inches of crusted snow but still seem to be able to get to the swaths. After the swath grazing, they will be rotationally grazed through standing corn until the beginning of April (when calving starts.) We supplement the grazing by feeding hay when the weather is extreme, and the cows won't leave the windbreaks. When in the corn, the cows are given hay every third day when they are moved into a new corn cell. The hay provides calcium that the corn is deficient in.

This winter-feeding program we utilize brings many benefits to our operation. The grazing has helped to substantially reduce our feed costs. The full season cover crop that we swath graze is helping to improve soil health. Ten successive years of corn grazing has improved the organic matter on those fields from 2.4% to over 5%. The other benefit of the grazing is the saving of labour as I only move an electric wire every three days. It takes on average, about half an hour with a golf bag full of fiberglass posts and cordless drill to set up the new fence and take the old one down.

So, when you only have to work for half an hour every three days to feed your cows, what do you do with all your spare time? You have the privilege of attending FFGA's Ranching for Profit School with Dallas Mount for six days. Follow this by finishing hauling bales and then taking off to Edmonton for The Western

Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing. Not a bad way to spend the good chunk of a month!

Ranching for Profit was a fantastic educational opportunity. It focusses on the importance of working on the business (WOTB), which most of us are guilty of not doing vs. working in the business (WITB), which is what we all spend 95% of our time doing. Ranching for Profit covers everything from completing a Mission and Vision Statement, to analyzing the economics of your ranch, to preparing grazing charts. If you are thinking you need to improve your ranching business, I urge you to make the time to attend a Ranching for Profit School. FFGA is in the process of booking another school in the fall— stay tuned!

The Soils & Grazing Conference was packed full of powerful speakers. Greg Judy, of YouTube fame, shared his experiences grazing cattle in Missouri. Keynote speaker, James Rebanks, spoke about his farm restoration project which was the subject of his book Pastoral Song. There were many excellent speakers presenting their knowledge and expertise on grazing and soil health. It is always great to hear what is happening on a more local level, when the producer panels are on stage.

Many thanks to Laura and Kayla who put in many hours organizing these schools and conferences. Their enthusiasm, hard work and professionalism comes through every where from the Proceedings for the Soils & Grazing conference to the seamless flow and mid-afternoon snacks at the Ranching for Profit School.

Well, I better grab my golf bag and go move some fence. Here's to a healthy and prosperous 2023!

Dave

Photo: Dave Sammons



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Tongue Creek Ranch Prescribed Fire Info Session



Weston Family
Foundation

February 24, 2022
Longview Community Hall

DETAILS

- 9:45am: Registration
- Noon: Lunch (provided)
- 3:00pm: Wrap-Up

TOPICS

- Forage quality post-fire and recommended burn frequency- Dr. Roy Vera
- Update on Woody Encroachment at Tongue Creek Ranch
- Tongue Creek Ranch 2023 Prescribed Fire plans and Q&A

***This event is free to attend!**
Please register using the link below.*

REGISTRATION

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/prescribedfire>



On the Cover: Greg Judy and James Rebanks speaking at the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing.
Photo: Amber Kenyon

Thank you for your support!



PRODUCER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



February 2, 2023
Nanton Community Hall



Topics Include:

- Grazing Principles
- Utilizing New and Existing Water Sources
- Pasture Design Tips to Improve Rotational Grazing
- Introduction to Cover Crops
- On-Farm Climate Action Funding
 - To offset the cost of implementing new rotational grazing plans, cover crops and nitrogen management on your farm.

Agenda:

- Registration & Coffee | 9:45am
- Lunch (provided) | Noon
- Wrap-up | 3:00pm

Cost: FFGA Members: \$10 | Non-Member: \$15

Register:

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/fundingworkshop>



Special Guest: Grant Lastiwka

Grant Lastiwka is a forage extension expert and is a director with the Alberta Forage Industry Network. Grant has worked in Central Alberta with Alberta Agriculture in varying roles:

Forages/Grazing/Livestock/Economics Extension for over 30 years. These efforts are almost always related to trying to realize the value from seizing the opportunity of managing forages and grasslands to be a highly productive crop.

Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Workshop

Vulcan County Administration Building
February 7, 2023

Workshop Details

- Workshop will begin at 9:00am and wrap-up around 3:00pm
- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring the following items:
 - Laptop or Tablet for internet access
 - Information on the Farm's water sources & water bodies
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

Register before January 31, 2022

Register

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/vulcan-efp-workshop>



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ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN (EFP) WORKSHOP

ROCKY VIEW COUNTY OFFICE
FEBRUARY 22, 2023

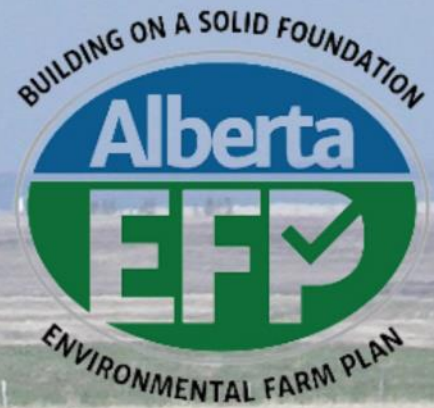
WORKSHOP DETAILS:

- Workshop will begin at 9:00am and wrap-up around 3:00pm
- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring laptop or tablet
- Please bring information on your water sources & water bodies
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

Please register before February 14, 2023

TO REGISTER VISIT:

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/efp2023>



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Swath-graze cattle to save and gain



Photo: FFGA

Swath grazing can save livestock producers time, labor, and money. This winter feeding strategy involves cutting forage in late fall and raking it into windrows for cattle to graze over winter – even under piles of snow.

Iowa State University will utilize swath grazing for the third year this season. This is also the third year forage sorghum and German millet will be the species used on the university's farm.

Garland Dahlke, an associate scientist at the Iowa Beef Center, notes that after an initial harvest for hay in July, the sorghum and millet are left to grow until it is cut again before the first consequential snowfall. Then, the forage is raked into swaths that are wide enough for cattle to find beneath a blanket of white.

"Last year, for instance, mowing and raking occurred December 9," Dahlke reports in a recent Iowa Beef Center newsletter. "The first snowfall occurred December 11, and the cows were given access to the swaths after they were removed from the cornstalk residue field on December 23."

The beef specialist notes that producers in areas with colder weather could cut forage earlier to ensure better quality; however, this process is delayed as long as possible on the university's farm because of frequent freezing and thawing events and rainy weather that the central part of the state experiences this time of year.

Delve into the data

Swath grazing only requires a few minutes of a farmer's time to move electric wire along the windrows every two to three days. At Iowa State, no

back fence is used so cattle have access to the single water source stationed in the field, which saves even more time and labor. Last year, the university's cow herd swath grazed until mid-February before they started receiving supplemental feed prior to March calving.

"Forage utilization in the swaths was measured last year and 70% of the provided forage was utilized by the cows, allowing for 88.1 cow-days per acre," Dahlke states. "Data from older experiments, using intensively managed grazing of stockpiled forage, indicate about 40% forage utilization, or 46.1 cow days per acre," he adds.

To further compare, Dahlke points out cattle have been shown to utilize roughly 85% of forage that is baled, stored, and fed daily. Doing so also affords about 98 cow days per acre, but this practice demands more equipment use.

Observed benefits

Swath grazing requires access to a field for mowing, fencing materials, and a water source. If these criteria can be met, Dahlke offers a list of benefits to this winter feeding strategy that have been observed on the Iowa State farm.

1. Fall labor issues have been resolved.
2. There is no longer a need for favorable weather to harvest forage in the fall.
3. The net return per acre was considerably better than stockpiling forage or baling and feeding hay.
4. There is no longer a need to start a tractor every day to care for cattle, or to haul manure or feed.
5. Cows remained clean throughout the winter and during calving, which also may have contributed to no scour problems in calves.
6. There were no ruts or residue in the field once spring grazing began, thus facilitating easier spring fieldwork.
7. With adequate rainfall, forage sorghum and German millet yields were substantial and proved to be viable options to work into corn-

soybean rotations on productive land.

8. Forage sorghum handled late summer drought well and was a competitive crop that helped control weeds.
9. The calf crop following swath grazing was quite robust with no issues, and rebreeding the following season resulted in a pregnancy rate of about 95%.

Author: Amber Friedrichsen

Original Article: <https://hayandforage.com/article-3772-swath->

PODCAST CORNER

What is FFGA listening to?

Monthly Podcast
recommendations given by
FFGA Directors

PODCAST CHANNEL
COFFEE, COWS & CROPS

TITLE
SWATH GRAZING WITH
DR. OBIOHA DURUNNA

Swath Grazing has its pros and cons, in this episode, we discuss Lakeland College's Swath Grazing and Garlic feeding projects with Research Scientist Dr. Obioha Durunna. These projects cover animal performance on swaths, mineral intake and the factors that change the effectiveness of Garlic additives.

SCAN CODE

for direct access
to Podcast



LINK



<https://www.peacecountrybeef.ca/podcast/episode/cd0ff326/swath-grazing-with-dr-obioha-durunna>

LADIES

LIVESTOCK LESSONS

Mountain View Heritage Center January 20, 2023

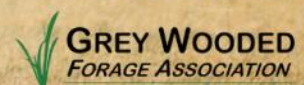
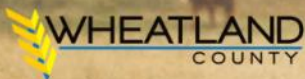
Featuring
@WildroseFarmer Katelyn Duban,
Host of "The Rural Woman Podcast".

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include sessions on
grassland management,
building a vaccine cooler,
livestock first aid, and
more!

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Year-round grazing reduces winter feeding costs



Photo: FFGA

The cattle managers at the Copperfield Hutterite Colony near Vauxhall, Alta., northeast of Lethbridge, are using livestock to improve soils and pastures. Phil Hofer and the boys in charge of the cattle are using them in a year-round grazing system that includes intensive pasture rotations on swathed cover crops.

"I am thankful to the management at Copperfield Farms for their support in making this change in our cattle operation," Hofer says. "What got us started into swath grazing and feeding cattle differently was the fact we were tired of putting up hay all summer, turning around and feeding it to them all winter. We'd just be finishing our haying and cropping season and a month later had to start hauling it all back out again! It was tiring; we didn't want to feed cattle anymore. More importantly, there wasn't much profit left with a six-month-long winter," he says.

Hofer says while he isn't an expert on production costs, he trusts the Alberta Agriculture website for providing a reliable indication of feeding costs.

"I've looked at the Alberta government's agricultural website for figures from earlier years, that listed the average cost at \$3.75 per day per cow over the winter," he says. "I assume it's quite a bit more this year, with the drought. And hay is likely even more expensive — if you can even find any.

"With the old system, it appeared any profit was going into feeding cows, and now we rely more on seeding forages for swath grazing, planting them in late spring and early summer."

The seed blend is not the same eve-

ry year and there is no set recipe for a mix that works best. "We are trying different things to see what might work on our place," Hofer says.

Although it doesn't often happen, even with two feet of snow on the ground cattle on Copperfield Colony have no difficulty finding the swath crops. photo: Courtesy Copperfield Colony

"If we don't get midsummer rains, we have irrigation to help us along. This is a huge advantage when growing crops for swath grazing. Our fields are all under irrigation pivots. Giving the crops half an inch of water every six days throughout July and August makes all the difference. In our area we don't get much rain at all, that time of year."

More tons, less work

The colony is now taking off more tons of forage per acre with cover crops and swath grazing than with three cuttings of hay. The cattle are harvesting the feed themselves — it only has to be put into a windrow instead of being cut, baled, hauled, stacked and hauled out again.

"It takes me 20 minutes to feed 300 cows, just moving a small piece of electric fence every day," Hofer says. "When it's 30 below zero, that's about the time it takes to warm up the feed truck before you can even start feeding! It also takes a lot of fuel to run the trucks and equipment. The swath grazing makes it fun to feed cattle again."

After combining peas at the end of last July he went into those fields right after to seed brassicas and barley for fall grazing. "We had an excellent fall for raising a good cover crop to run the cows on," Hofer says.

The manure from grazing cattle adds a lot of fertility and this spring they plan to soil-test those acres to see if there are sufficient nutrients to make it possible to cut back on expensive fertilizer.

Double-cropping options

"We still have a lot of learning to do regarding cover cropping, but are

willing to learn and try different things since we don't have the big expense of wintering cattle anymore," Hofer says. "Next year we are thinking about double cropping."

The crop grown for swath grazing is seeded about the first of June, which means there is nothing growing on those fields for about six weeks from early spring until June 1.

"So for next year we're planning, perhaps in late April, to seed oats and forage peas or other crop that will come up quickly," Hofer says. "We have a couple options on how to manage the first crop. We could put it up as haylage or let it cure for green feed and sell it. Once the first crop is harvested, then by early June we can seed our swath-grazing crop, which would be ready for swathing at the end of September. We could take off a quick cash crop and then do swath grazing."

A forage blend of grains and broadleaf crops are seeded in June and then swathed in September to be used as the late fall and winter swath grazing that should carry cattle right through the calving season that starts in March. photo: Courtesy Copperfield Colony

For the winter feeding program, cattle now graze on those swathed-crop windrows right up until calving in March. Hofer says if the weather is nice the cows stay right there, and start calving on those fields.

"If the weather is unfavourable we pull them off and bring the cows closer to home where they can be more easily monitored and have shelter if necessary," he says. "But as soon as the calves are up and around the pairs go back to the swath grazing to clean it up." Later they will be moved to different pastures for breeding.

Healthier calves

Hofer says it appears cattle that stay out on the swath grazing to calve seem to be in better shape than the ones fed hay and brought in to calve, and the calves born out on the swaths just seem more healthy and vigorous.

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

While snowfall can be unpredictable in this part of southern Alberta, cattle can swath graze under most conditions.

“Last year in late November we got a lot of snow,” Hofer says. “It was a storm to remember. We thought the snow was here to stay, but a couple weeks later it was all gone and the cattle had no trouble grazing. With swath grazing, the cattle can easily handle up to two feet of snow.”

The swather takes 30 feet of forage and puts it into a long pile. Instead of rooting around over 30 feet to find feed, the cows just have to find the windrow.

When swath grazing the field the next year, they adjust their GPS guidance system on the swather by 15 feet so new windrow lays in a different part of the field than the previous year. This means the litter and manure from the swath grazing will be concentrated in a slightly different area of the field each year, providing more complete cover-

age over the field, which all helps to improve soil fertility.

“The thing about all this is that it’s nothing new,” Hofer says. “We are just rediscovering some things that farmers did a long time ago.” Copperfield colony may eventually include different crops in the program, but currently they continue to experiment with double cropping, taking off the peas as an early crop and then growing the cover crop to be cut for swath grazing.

Their cow herd is mostly straight Black Angus bred to Charolais bulls to produce calves to sell. These crossbred calves grow fast and can be sold in the fall right off the cows, and the market is usually quite strong for these Angus-Charolais cross calves. This is a terminal cross however, none of those heifer calves are kept.

“We have a smaller, separate herd of Angus for raising our replacement heifers,” Hofer says.

While heavier steer calves are marketed early, the younger, lighter calves and replacement heifers are kept

through the next winter and fed in a pen.

“Wintering those calves on swath grazing is an option we want to explore. They want to try some new seed blends with a little more energy and higher-quality nutrition for those younger animals.

“If our cattle can graze through the winter, it is an excellent way to cheapen up feeding costs and improve profits,” Hofer says. “We can’t control the markets for our cattle so we have to reduce the costs of feeding them, and help our bottom line. Cattle are supposed to work for us and not the other way around!”

Author: Heather Smith Thomas

Original Article: [https://](https://www.grainews.ca/livestock/year-round-grazing-reduces-winter-feeding-costs/)

www.grainews.ca/livestock/year-round-grazing-reduces-winter-feeding-costs/

ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN (EFP) WORKSHOP

When: February 16, 2023

Where: Kneehill County Maintenance Shop

Workshop details:

- Workshop will begin at 9:00am and wrap up around 3:00 pm.
- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring a laptop or tablet
- Information on your water sources & water bodies
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

Please Register before February 6, 2023

To register visit:

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/efpworkshop2023>



Get your farm finances on track to reduce stress



Photo: FFGA

Mental health among farm families is much written and talked about in the media these days — and rightly so. Over the last couple of years, western Canadian farmers have been hit by record-setting droughts and other hardships while they cope with the lingering effects of the pandemic.

In Alberta, there was an excess of moisture in many areas in 2020, which led to late or no seeding, and what finally grew produced poor yields. In 2021, there was drought in much of Western Canada, which, once again, led to greatly reduced yields. Fortunately, commodity prices increased significantly that year. However, the net result was a break-even situation for many. As one farmer told me, “Half of the crop at double the price is the same as a normal yield at the normal price.”

Now, in 2022, we have rampant inflation with seed and fertilizer prices and fuel and crop insurance premiums, the main inputs in a grain operation. All of this on top of COVID-19 — it really can affect one’s mental health.

As a result of these and other factors, some farmers are finding themselves in financial difficulty. Pressure like this often causes mental stress, which can permeate the whole family, and then everyone suffers. As a farm business consultant for 18 years, I have helped farmers deal with financial distress situations many times, and I have some ideas that may help.

The first thing I recommend is to analyze your overall financial situation. That starts with preparing a net worth statement as of the farm’s last fiscal year-end. To do this, list all assets (at fair market values) and all liabilities. The difference is your net worth. If you have 75 per cent or higher net worth you should be in reasonable financial shape. On the other hand, if you are down around 50 per cent (or lower) you are probably in financial difficulty.

Next, look at your income and expenses over the last five years. This will show you what the income trend is for your farm. Combining these two factors will tell you if

there is a financial issue and how serious it is.

Next, discuss with your family/team what your personal and business goals are for the short term (one to five years) and long term (five to 10 years). Take the above financial situation and your goals and see if there is any way to combine the two. If there is a financial problem, there are basically three ways to deal with it, alone or in combination:

- Sell assets to reduce debt load
- Off-farm employment
- Restructure debt

Sell assets to reduce debt load

On many farms, there can be an excessive amount of machinery, some of which I call toys (specifically, items that are not absolutely necessary). My rule of thumb is if you haven’t used it in the past two years, why do you need it? Remember, machinery is a depreciating asset. The more you can reduce unnecessary equipment, the better off you will be. For smaller farms, I suggest sharing equipment or getting the work done by a custom operator, so you won’t need a seeder, sprayer or combine.

If selling excess machinery doesn’t solve your debt load problem, you may have to consider selling some land. This is not a popular suggestion but is the logical next step. I’ve had some cases where I’ve recommended clients sell one or more quarters and then rent them back, so the productive value of the land is retained. A couple of times, we were even able to include a buy-back clause in the sales agreement, whereby the seller had first option to buy the land back at an agreed price within five years.

Off-farm employment

Depending on the location of your farm, its size and your time availability this may or may not be possible. Some grain farmers have time over the winter when they can work off of the farm.

Restructure debt

This is usually done in conjunction with selling assets to reduce debt load. This can be achieved by taking some or even all of your total debt (current, intermediate and long term) and amortize it over a longer period of time. This allows you to reduce your cash flow requirements to meet your income stream.

Some other suggestions for managing debt include the following:

- Try to keep current with all of your payables. If you fall behind with your loan payments, it adversely affects

your credit score. It also makes for difficult relations with your lenders or can make it harder to find new ones.

- At the very least, always try to make the minimum monthly payments on your credit cards. Failing to do so will, again, cause your credit score to suffer.
- Be open with your creditors. If you have financial challenges, discuss the situation with them, sooner rather than later. Hopefully they will work with you to make some adjustments to your payment schedules.
- Sometimes the financial situation has deteriorated so much your existing lender will not work with you. Then it’s time to find a new one. However, before you do that, prepare a business plan that outlines your situation and how you intend to work through it using some of the above tools. Also, it’s helpful to include a section on how you plan to avoid your present predicament in the future. Once you have a business plan, present it to all of the lenders you know of, you never know who will bite. If you can’t find a new, conventional lender and want to continue farming, an equity lender may be an option. These types of lenders typically have higher interest rates and higher application fees but are usually willing to work with farmers if they have adequate equity.
- Bankers like business ratios, so it’s important to try to include those in your business plan (specifically, before and after scenarios). The debt servicing ratio is an important one. Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has a program called Agricultural Business Analyzer to help farmers calculate business ratios, which can be found at agriculture.alberta.ca.

I hope by exploring these suggestions you can see that it is possible to work through financial challenges. It’s better to start sooner rather than later. If you must find a new lender, it can take from six weeks to six months to get it all arranged. The farmers I have worked with who have participated in this exercise say they have experienced an immense reduction in mental stress and family life has also greatly improved.

Author: Art lange

Original Article: [https://](https://www.grainews.ca/news/get-your-farm-finances-on-track-to-reduce-stress/)

www.grainews.ca/news/get-your-farm-finances-on-track-to-reduce-stress/

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