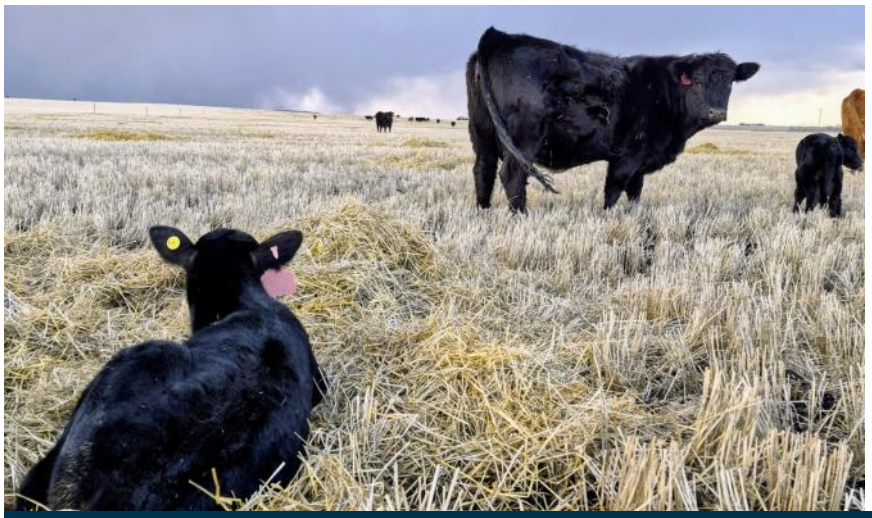

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
June 2026

Director's Note-Brandon Toews

Greetings FFGA Members

As one of the newest members of the Foothills Forage board, I'm excited to be part of this forward-thinking group that has played such a big role in my regenerative journey. I know I'll likely take away more than I'll ever be able to contribute, but I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn and be part of the conversation.

It's been quite a year so far. A relatively easy winter with ample grazing made for a fairly economical feeding program, as we were able to make good use of swath grazing and other crop residue.

I also had the chance to attend the corn grazing day at Dave Sammons' operation. It was great to see firsthand how producers are really utilizing their land efficiently and achieving impressive stock days through corn grazing. The event provided a valuable opportunity to learn more about grazing management strategies, hear producers share their experiences, and see the practical benefits that corn grazing can offer for extending the grazing season and reducing feed costs.

Calving started off fairly easy in April, but by the time we got rolling with our mature cows, we were hit with some big late storms. The losses were short-term, but tough, and they raised some good questions about when the "right" time to calve really is.

There are a lot of variables at play, and there's no magic bullet that works for everyone, feed resources, hauling to summer pasture, marketing plans, and overall management goals all factor into that decision.

As the grass greens up and the prairie comes back to life, even as many of us continue hoping for a little more moisture, I'm reminded of just how incredible this season of renewal is. Watching the landscape change so quickly fills me with awe for the One who created it all and the resilience built into both the land and the people who care for it. It also brings a renewed sense of energy and optimism as we head into the busy summer grazing season, ready to take on the opportunities, challenges, and projects that come our way.

Happy grazing,

Brandon Toews

(Photo: Brandon Toews)

IN THIS ISSUE

On the Cover Spring Calving Photo: Brandon Toews

Thank you for your support!

Extend Grazing Season With Summer Annual Forage Types


Photo: FFGA

Although grazing season has yet to get started in many areas, now it a good time to plan for ways to extend the time animals are on pasture.

Penn State Extension educators detailed the pros and cons of forage types for pastures during a March 31 workshop in Columbia County. Choosing the right ones, they said, could meet the nutritional needs of livestock and add days that pastures can be grazed throughout the year.

"Feed is expensive," said Zachary Curtis, an agronomy educator. "We want to graze our forages as long as we can."

Producers have two options for season-extending forages: cool-season and warm-season annuals. Each has its challenges and advantages, Curtis said, but they can be used together to create a new pasture.

The process begins in late spring with killing the existing forage on the area to be pastured, essentially starting with a clean slate.

A summer annual such as sorghum, sorghum-sudangrass or millet can be planted — usually two weeks after corn — to control weeds. Summer annual can be grazed or harvested for baleage.

Then, in late summer, the new forage stand can be seeded so it will be established and ready to use next year.

Along the way, there are plenty of decisions for selecting forage types.

"To make it work, you have to understand the nutritional needs of your animals," Curtis said.

Using warm-season annuals is a good way to "clean up" a field ahead of the more long-term seeding that will become the pasture. But Curtis said it's important to understand the risks and the management steps to lessen them.

Nitrate poisoning can occur when sorghum and sorghum-sudangrass can't fully convert nitrates to crude protein in the plant. This happens when excess nitrates accumulate in plant tissue because of drought or overapplication of nitrogen fertilizer.

"If we pay attention, we can manage nitrate concerns," Curtis said.

Nitrates can be managed by applying the appropriate amount of nitrogen based on a soil test and by not cutting too low when harvesting. Nitrate accumulation is highest in the lower 6 inches of the stem.

Farmers can also delay harvesting until after a stressor such as drought has passed, and consider ensiling the harvesting crop, which can reduce nitrate levels by 50%.

Prussic acid poisoning is another concern with warm-season annuals such as sorghum-sudangrass.

In livestock, prussic acid poisoning causes a buildup of hydrogen cyanide in the bloodstream, which can lead to death.

Curtis said the occurrence is driven by stress factors like frost or drought, and it can be mitigated by delaying grazing until the plants are 2 to 3 feet tall or, in the case of frost, waiting five to seven days after a frost before allowing animals to graze the crop.

Some sorghum-sudangrass varieties are prussic acid-free, and Curtis said they work well for grazing.

"If you want to bale it instead, prussic acid isn't a big deal when using these varieties," he said.

Millet has a lower yield and feed quality than sorghum-sudangrass, but it doesn't contain prussic acid and does better in cooler weather.

Brassicas can also be useful for season extension, though they can cause bloat and don't have much fiber. Supplemental roughage, such as dry hay, is needed with these forages, Curtis said.

If harvesting summer annuals, Curtis said farmers should stick to baleage or chop them for silage.

Making dry hay with summer annuals is difficult.

Also, the pH level in the soil should be greater than 6.0 for the annuals to thrive.

"These aren't grasses meant for abused ground," Curtis said.

Author: Tom Venesky

Original Article: https://www.lancasterfarming.com/farming-news/conservation/extend-grazing-season-with-summer-annual-forage-types/article_aff430cc-f585-41cf-b3a8-06264278f1d2.html

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JULY 27, 2026
8:45AM - 4:00PM
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FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

JUNE 24, 2026
PATRICIA COMMUNITY HALL
8:30AM - 4:00PM

Join us for a day of learning focused on the Pasture Powerup Project. Explore the role of grazing systems in invasive species encroachment, and hear insights from representatives with Corteva and Envu.

The day will include visits to two pastures, where we'll tour demonstration plots, compare treatment and control results, and discuss product performance. You'll also gain practical knowledge on grazing management and how these approaches can be applied on your operation.

COST

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www.foothillsforage.com/pasturepowerup

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RANGE WARD

Greener pastures: Grazing sheep and goats alongside beef cattle


Photo: FFGA

In Lee Sexton's experience, livestock producers begin grazing multiple species on the same pasture to deal with a weed problem and then discover the many benefits.

"It usually starts with a problem," says Sexton, of Sexton Grazing and Consulting, based out of Hanley, Sask. He has guided dozens of people through the process of adding a second species, usually sheep or goats, to a cattle operation to improve pasture health.

"It is okay to be a rancher with small ruminants."

Why it matters

Weeds like leafy spurge cost cattle producers pasture productivity and dewormer dollars — but sheep and goats eat what cattle won't, and break parasite cycles cattle alone can't. For operations watching margins tighten, a second species can mean a second cheque, a smaller herbicide bill, and more grass next season.

Starts with a weed problem

In his presentations on the economics of multi-species grazing, Sexton says the benefits can be varied. For him, adding goats has created a second income. His excess goats are sold to a Saskatoon restaurant.

"There is a demand for goat meat," he says.

For years, Sexton and his sheep or goats travelled across the province, often to control weeds in traditional cattle pastures. Where others see weeds, Sexton sees opportunities for his livestock.

Adding sheep and goats to a pasture is like getting free food for the smaller ruminants that often eat the shrubs, forbs, weeds and grasses the cattle can't or won't eat. Leafy spurge and other noxious weeds can pose a threat to cattle but can make up a large part of the diet for sheep and goats.

Sexton targets a weedy area by directing the animals from horseback with the help of his border collie dogs, who keep the sheep or goats grazing in the desired area. It's a job that requires a skilled stockperson who understands animal health, range health and animal behaviour.

Adapting livestock handling facilities can be the costliest part of multi-species grazing. Sexton works with livestock producers to modify their handling facility to keep the smaller livestock inside.

During a livestock conference, livestock handling expert Temple Grandin sketched out a plan on a napkin of how Sexton could adapt his cattle facilities to handle both cattle and goats. He also works with the animal's natural behaviour. For example, he grazes the goats early in the morning, rests in the afternoon and once again in the evening before bringing the animals back to the safety of the corrals.

Sexton believes virtual fencing will help multi-species grazing. He has seen the technology work in the U.S., but there are no companies in Canada yet with collars for small ruminants.

"It is going to revolutionize targeted grazing," he says.

A second species, a second cheque

Christine O'Reilly, a forage and grazing specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, who is located in Lindsay, Ont., says one of the biggest benefits of multiple species grazing is financial.

"Mixed-species grazing adds another enterprise to the farm. Market cycles in cattle and sheep are not the same. It does add another income stream to the operation, and that can add income stability."

While there has been limited research on multi-species grazing in Canada, the benefits of rotational grazing, whether with cattle or sheep, are clear, O'Reilly says.

"If you allow a long enough rest period for the plant to fully recover after each grazing period, that puts more carbon in the soil than either continuously grazing or not grazing at all. Some sort of rotational system is not only good for the plants, but it is storing a lot more carbon, which is good for the environment."

Rest and recovery play an important role in grazing management. Mixed-species grazing helps improve soil, grass and livestock health, she says.

"Introducing a second livestock species is a great way to change the management to help prevent the weeds from coming back. Sometimes they are the right management tool for all parts of the farm."

'Sheep are not tiny cows'

Key findings

Weed control: Sheep and goats eat leafy spurge and other forbs cattle avoid — turning a liability into feed.

Parasite break: Rotating cattle and sheep through the same pasture disrupts gastrointestinal parasite cycles in both species.

Income stability: Cattle and sheep market cycles don't move together, smoothing revenue across years.

Soil and carbon: Rotational grazing with adequate rest stores more soil carbon than continuous grazing or no grazing.

Biggest cost: Adapting handling facilities to contain smaller livestock — not the animals themselves.

(Continued on page 7)

(continued from page 6)

Small ruminants prefer different plant species than cattle. Goats prefer grazing on woody plants, sheep eat grass and clover, the same as cattle, but nibble differently on the plants and are not competitors with cattle.

Though these differences in behaviour seem small, they are enough to add up. Each animal's different plant preferences can be useful in managing weeds, but also in the way plants are chosen or ignored.

"The mixed species grazing systems work is because of subtle differences," O'Reilly says.

"Sheep are not tiny cows."

Unlike cattle, sheep are very susceptible to gastrointestinal parasites, and there is only one active ingredient labelled for use in Canada. Rotational grazing a pasture alongside cattle is a potential way to combat this problem. It can break the parasite life cycle, giving producers another tool in controlling parasites in both cattle and sheep.

"By rotational grazing and alternating with cattle, it can make a massive difference on the sheep side. The sheep are providing the same effect on the cattle."

Introducing a second livestock species forces producers to look at their grazing management practices. The additional species will help control weeds, but something about the previous grazing system allowed the weeds to get a foothold, O'Reilly says.

Multi-species grazing is an opportunity to solve that issue.

Shrinking the spurge at Waldron

Christy Goldhawk, general manager of the Waldron Ranch Grazing Co-operative, says the addition of sheep to their cattle operation a few years ago to control leafy spurge has been a useful tool on the southern Alberta ranch. This spring, they will bring in about 300 young lambs to graze unwanted plants for three months.

By using a combination of biological and chemical control, rotational grazing of both cattle and sheep, the ranch has managed to control and shrink the unwanted weed population.

"We don't run them together in the same fields but rotate the cattle and sheep through pasture so we can keep our range health going well."

Goldhawk has no plans to expand the sheep herd to extend their multi-species grazing plans beyond weed control to other parts of the ranch.

"Right now, our target weed species aren't expanding, so we're okay with keeping that monitoring and where we are at. The benefit of it doing a good job is we don't need to expand it," says Goldhawk.

"It has been working for the ranch for years. We have been able to decrease from what it used to be."

"It is okay to be a rancher with small ruminants."

Author: Mary MacArthur

Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/features/multi-species-grazing-sheep-goats-beef-cattle/

Drone technology can be used to determine cattle preferences

Photo: FFGA

Precision ranching is about putting the right animal in the right place at the right time, says Edward Bork, a professor in the Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environment Sciences at the University of Alberta.

The grazing pasture management specialist told the recent Ag Drone Summit in Camrose that the practice optimizes the level of productivity and profitability.

Bork's talk was about cattle, but he said the same principles were applicable to any kind of livestock. He said researchers included post docs, colleagues and PhD and master's students.

"Our job in livestock husbandry is trying to make sure that the right animal is in the right place at the right time, both to optimize their nutritional intake, but also to make sure we're utilizing the pasture sustainably, (that) we're not underutilizing some areas or overutilizing other areas," said Bork, who is also director of the Rangeland Research Institute and the Mattheis Chair in Rangeland Ecology and Management.

The goal is to control where, when and how herbivores graze, to optimize economic and environmental outcomes.

"That's what every single producer does on their ranches when they're trying to make management decisions," he said.

Technology is advancing so quickly that virtual fencing is a viable option.

Habitat selection

Identifying animals with an improved ability to select habitats available on a ranch can make a difference in animal productivity.

"If you're in the boreal forest and 80 or 90 per cent of what you're grazing is bush pasture, you might want an animal that is able and willing to utilize your aspen forest more effectively," he said.

Those animals can be identified by their dietary or habitat selection.

"These are the ones we're going to keep, and we're going to try to cull out the other ones," said Bork.

Habitat mapping

Bork spoke about habitat mapping at the Kinsella research ranch.

Most conventional satellites are equipped with multi-spectral scanner data, which is basically RGB imagery.

"We can put those platforms onto drones, or UAVs, and we can collect a lot of information on that. However, we also have the advantage with drones to be able to collect light detection and ranging data. This is essentially laser-based data," he said.

The laser-based platform can provide a three-week contour of the surface of the ground and everything above ground. This can be used to develop high resolution digital elevation models, which can be used for habitat mapping, or potential of disturbance.

"If you increase stocking rate or if you leave animals in for a longer period of time, you could potentially map out changes in forage biomass," he said.

Using LIDAR and multispectral data, Bork and his associate Jason Su were able to produce a high-resolution map of the Kinsella research ranch. The map showed eight or nine different habitat types.

(Continued from page 8)

Drones can be used to fly over an area to produce high resolution habitat maps that can determine grazing capacity or structuring grazing patterns to look at habitat behaviour patterns on the landscape.

Habitat diversity and animal welfare

Bork said he has been working with researchers to see how habitat diversity contributes to animal welfare.

The project ran for three years, using low tech GPS collars.

"While we use low tech collars here, we have subsequently learned that the Nofence collars give us GPS data that is every bit as good at roughly one-fifth of the cost," he said.

In the future, Bork intends to use only virtual fencing collars.

The study looked at cows and heifers during summer grazing and fall grazing regimes. Data was analyzed from a cluster of data points taken from the GPS collars and superimposed on the high-resolution habitat map.

The researchers could compute whether animals avoided or preferred different habitats.

Bork said the team measured habitat electivity response, which measures if animals are seeking out a habitat and using it at a higher level than they would if they were using that habitat randomly. If electivity is around zero, it means the habitat is randomly selected. If the electivity is below zero, it means cattle are actively avoiding the habitat.

Preferred habitats

Bork said the data showed cattle at the Kinsella ranch preferred the uplands, grasslands and wetlands.

"It makes sense. Those are the most productive areas. There's a lot of herbage in there. Forage efficiency is going to be high. It makes sense that those are the areas that they prefer, but those are the areas targeted largely in the summertime," he said.

In the fall, even though animals were moved to a new pasture, they still preferred the wetlands. They also gravitated to the open shrublands.

"They started exhibiting some changes in their habitat selection patterns. There was no difference between cows and heifers," he said.

"Wetlands were the only habitat that was consistently preferred, which is one of the reasons why grazing management specialists always talk about making sure you manage your wetlands carefully because they're going to be targeted over and over," he said.

Tracking the animals through early July, late July, early August and late August determined that they changed their preferences over time. They gradually reduced their use of the upland grasslands and wetlands and gradually increased their use of the open shrublands.

"They're gradually changing over time, likely in concert with changes in phenology and biomass availability," he said.

Heat and cold stress

The researchers wanted to see what habitats cattle preferred during heat stress, conducting the study in 2021, when there were 16 days warmer than 30 C in central Alberta with several of the heat events lasting four or five days.. There are normally only two days warmer than 30 C near Edmonton.

Author: Alexis Kienlen

Original Article: https://www.producer.com/livestock/drone-technology-can-be-used-to-determine-cattle-preferences/

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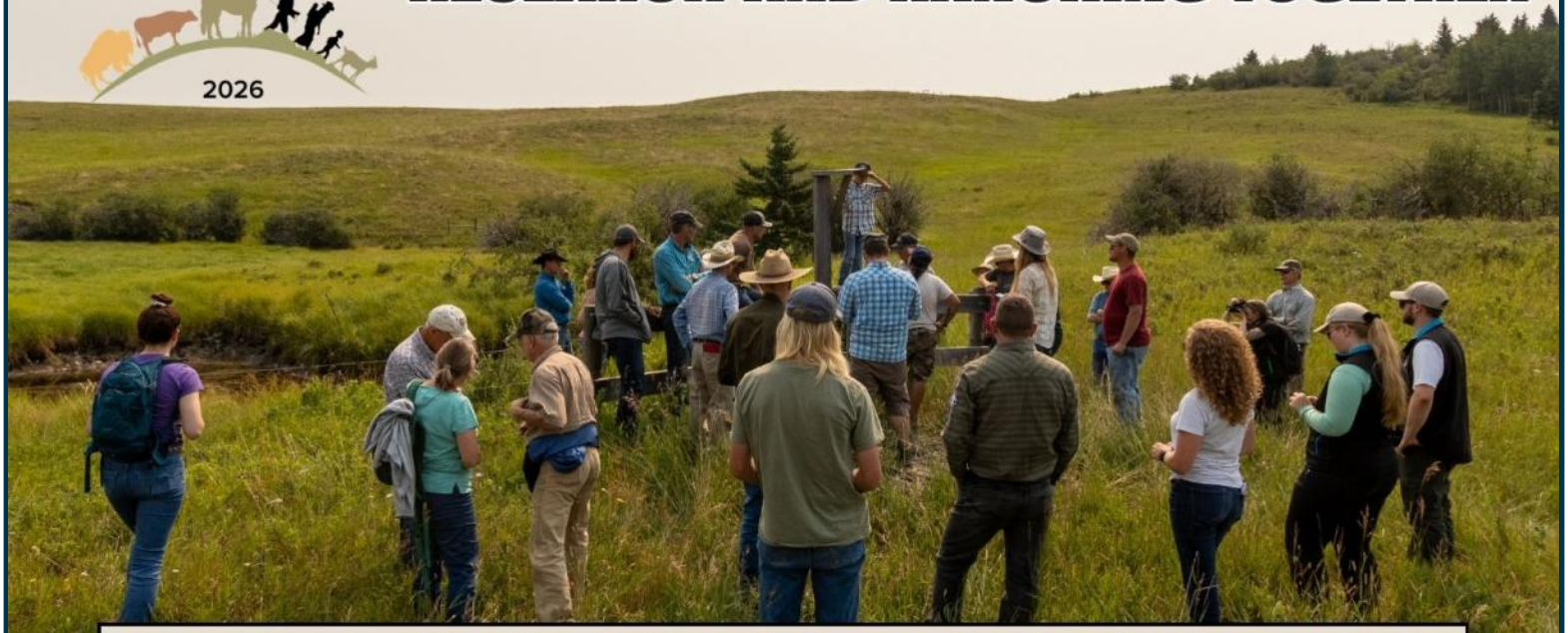

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Brandon Toews
(403) 850-8249

Staff

Manager:
Laura Gibney
manager@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 998-4687

Communications Coordinator:
Kayla Giles
comm@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 682-7116

Environmental Coordinator:
Sonja Bloom
enviro@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 612-7204

Regional Extension Coordinator
Lori-Anne Forbes
extension@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 808-2223

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