



Foothills Forage & Grazing Association

2010 Annual Report

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

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Mission Statement

FFGA provides relevant unbiased sustainable forage and livestock information to producers in partnership with industry, government and the agricultural community. FFGA is a producer driven volunteer association leading the industry to long term sustainability through research and development.

2010 Board of Directors

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Staff
Manager
Laura Gibney
(403) 652-4900

Alex Robertson

Brian Roger

Chairman's Report

Happy spring (?) to all you FFGA members out there!! Although this winter has resembled one of those 'olde fashioned' winters of our youth, we must be mindful of the fact that we have a good bank of moisture built up and agricultural commodity prices have increased nicely in the past 8 to 10 months. During that same 8 to 10 month period, we at Foothills Forage and Grazing Association (FFGA) have been busy too. We've had our cows graze millet, corn, bales, tame grass, native pastures, straw and any number of annual and perennial forages you might name. We've had agricultural gurus such as Brenda Schoepp of BeefLink; Jim Gerrish of Grazing Land Services in Idaho; Dylan Biggs, of animal husbandry fame; as well as a number of our own members/operators speak at our field days and seminars. Here at FFGA, we continue to stay ahead of the curve, not only with local tours and field trips, but 2010 marked the first time that we have ventured into international affairs with a trip to Brazil. This trip entailed stops at various agricultural venues throughout the country; with some time set aside for leisurely holiday activities as well. The Brazil trip was such a success, that we are planning another overseas trip to New Zealand in November of 2012. Closer to home (and closer on the calendar; November 2011 to be exact) is an Ag Tour tentatively scheduled for the southeastern U.S.; with the main focus being Mississippi. We have Gordon Hazard, retired veterinarian, author of *Thoughts & Advice from an Old Cattleman* and expert on Profit Strategies with Stockers, assisting us in our plans to explore the forage and beef industry there. We are always trying to think up ways to bring information to our members, or in some cases, take our members to the information!

This coming year, we are planning more forage/grazing tours, along with enlisting the services of world renown speakers such as Temple Grandin in January 2012, and Don Campbell at this year's AGM. (hint-hint; wink-wink). In the past 2 years, we have moved this association from being awash in red ink, to one that is operating very much in the black. We try to be forward thinkers with an eye on what (or who) might be of interest to the bulk of our membership group, all within a cost-effective framework. Thus far, I think we've done a pretty good job of that. Our membership is up. The number of producers/members attending our events is up. Interest in what we are doing is up. Cattle prices are up. Things are looking up!

I'm very proud of the hard work and dedication of each director on our board, as well as (and perhaps, especially) the hard work of our manager, Laura Gibney. I truly hope that 2011 is a great year for all of our members and I look forward to seeing you at our AGM on Tuesday March 29th at the Highwood Auction Mart, or at one of our many field days throughout the year!!

Always an honour to serve,

Morrie (Getch) Goetjen

Manager's Note



Laura Gibney

2010 was a great year for FFGA as we worked hard to ramp up our level of activity and continued to build partnerships. FFGA was directly involved in 12 events throughout our region with over 400 producers attending. Looking at a variety of things from business management through off-farm income and risk management to reducing production costs through grazing management, pasture health and winter grazing to environmental stewardship and production efficiency through off-site watering, weed management and low-stress cattle handling. 2010 saw a series of knowledgeable dynamic speakers including Andy Sirski, Brenda Schoepp, Jim Gerrish, Kathy Voth and many more at informative, innovative field days. FFGA has been working to stay in touch with its members, partners and the forage industry through events, our website and monthly newsletters.

Our partnerships with industry and counties have grown and strengthened over the last year. Our corporate sponsorship program has been successful in working with industry players to share cutting edge technology and examine current issues we face together. By working with industry and counties FFGA is able to more effectively serve its membership while encouraging the sharing of knowledge, concerns and issues between several levels of the beef and forage industry. We appreciate the contributions of these groups both through their time, resources, expertise and their financial support which plays a large role in matching our government funding sources. 2010 found FFGA in the black while developing further potential funding opportunities for the future.

2011 promises to be another active year for FFGA as we continue to plan more field days, workshops and demonstrations. As Morrie mentioned our international agriculture tour to Brazil was a huge success providing insightful information on the global forage and beef industry through the eyes of a global leader in beef exporter. We are looking at hosting an agriculture tour every year. Keep watching for information on our upcoming tour to Mississippi this fall and potentially a trip to New Zealand in 2012.

Thank you to the board members for the time, energy and ideas that they dedicate to the association; they are a huge part of the growth FFGA has experienced in the past two years. Thank you also to the FFGA membership; it is what keeps this association strong and thriving with the drive to bring producers information, research, tours, workshops and seminars that are valuable and pertinent to them. If you would like to become more involved with the association through the board, committees, demonstrations or just to give feedback and suggestions please contact me (403) 652-4900.

Stay connected for another great year!

Laura Gibney

A year in review...

Message from the Executive Director

2010 was a weather event for Alberta producers and particularly those in the Peace River area with a severe drought. That posed a significant challenge for our Associations serving farm clients in the Peace. Early fall moisture provided additional stress with getting the crop harvested.



The **ARECA Board** of Directors was restructured at the AGM in March, 2010 to a seven member Board with two non-voting representatives from the Associations and a non-voting Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development representative. The **Governance structure**, bylaws and policy manual were ratified by the Board as well as the vision, mission and mandate. Our Board is now seven directors with 2 representatives from the Managers and an ex-officio Alberta Agriculture representative.



The **ARECA website** was revamped and launched this past summer. Our readership has continued to grow especially since it includes important announcements from Associations about emerging agricultural issues in Alberta. You are now able to easily reach each Association's web site by typing "brrg.areca.ab.ca".

Close to 300 participants from across western Canada gathered in Vermilion Regional Centre December 1 and 2, 2010, to participate in the **Western Canadian Grazing Conference** and Trade Show. Keynote presentations, select-a-sessions, and a tradeshow and hands-on lab sessions across the road from Lakeland College were featured.



Advanced Agronomy Conference attracted Crop Advisers, farmers and industry partners for the latest crop production ideas and techniques in the agriculture industry today. Participants learned what it takes to be the Guinness World Record holder for wheat yield, find out how Australian farmers are getting the most out of their challenging soils, and the latest research from our Associations (presentations and posters) in Western Canada and on Alberta farms.

Cattle producers grow ever increasing amounts of annual crops for feed (silage, greenfeed and swath grazing). The **Regional Silage Variety Trials** are in their second year and the results will be posted in the Alberta Seed Guide and the ARECA web site. Six nutritional categories were reported including Crude Protein and Total Digestible Nutrients which is an estimation of energy. The trial is sponsored by the Alberta Beef Producers.

The **Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program** assists producers in improving their forage operations through training. Experienced grazing mentors work directly with producers to develop a grazing plan tailored to the needs of the producer. Funding provided by the Growing Forward initiative with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.



The **Alberta Forage Industry Network (AFIN)**, a unified voice for Alberta's forage industry, is now embarking on a membership drive. Current membership fees range from \$50 to \$250. The first Annual Meeting of AFIN will be held at the Lacombe Research Centre on March 15, 2011. For more information, contact Doug Wray, AFIN Chair, 403-935-4642 or visit AFIN's website at www.albertaforages.ca

This past winter ARECA and its Associations offered **Variable Rate Technology (VRT)** training workshops to Alberta farmers at Lethbridge, Coronation and Peace workshops and a **VRT Resource Manual** were made possible by funding (<http://www.areca.ab.ca/images/stories/Files/vrt%20resource%20manual%202010.p>) Provided by Growing Forward through Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.



Precision Tools for On Farm Research is a study being collaborated with six Associations who work with producers to do field scale research to assess the influence of topography on phosphorus and nitrogen nutrients. On farm research needs to be understood and documented so producers can implement field scale research and data collection with modest training.

Farmers in Alberta used **70 million litres less diesel fuel** in 2006 than in 2001. That means a **reduction in CO2 emissions** equivalent to **taking 35,000 cars off the road**. Alberta farmers, the Government of Alberta and ARECA are committed to improving fuel efficiency and reducing CO2 emissions through the adoption of direct seeding on all acres of Alberta; improved management of precision farming and VRT; improved equipment design; and improved match between tractor and equipment. Sod and interrow seeding demonstrations and fuel meter recordings were initiated by BRR, CARA, GRO, LARA, PCBFA, PARDA, SARDA, SARA and NPARA.



With the dedication of the ARECA Board and Associations, we are able to bring sound science and sustainability to Alberta farms. As we go forward in 2011, I wish to thank everyone for their enthusiasm and hard work in 2010.



Ty Faechner, Executive Director

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association Events & Demonstrations

Knowing Your Options Workshop

In February FFGA hosted a one day seminar focusing on the farm as a business as well as off farm income and investing ideas. Meyers Norris Penny shared information on risk management for farms and ranches. Andy Sirski of StockTalks gave insight into selling covered calls on stocks as an option for revenue outside of the farming business. This was a new area of interest for FFGA and we were happy to have a turn out of over 110 people for the day. FFGA gained several new members and targeted a slightly different audience with this event. Thank you to all who came out and for the feedback you provided.



Annual General Meeting, March 2010

FFGA had our Annual General Meeting on March 18th at the Highwood Auction Mart. This was an opportunity for the Board to share with the membership many of the changes that occurred in 2009. Graeme Finn, the past President, gave a report on the projects, events, corporate sponsorship program, funding and other going ons of FFGA in 2009 and plans for 2010. Sean LaBrie, FFGA Treasurer, gave a report on the 2009 year-end financials. He reported that FFGA was in a stable financial situation at the end of 2009 and that funding was looking promising for 2010. The manager's report covered the day to day happenings at FFGA, some of the challenges we face and future plans.

Doug Wray stepped down from the FFGA board after serving several consecutive terms. On behalf of the FFGA members I would like to thank Doug for all of his help, support and ideas over the past several years. He has contributed a lot of time and energy to FFGA and played a large role in influencing our direction, we would not be where we are today without his dedication. We welcomed Phil Rowland and Brian Rodgers to the board and now they have served their first year of a three year term and they have been great additions to the board. Following the AGM the board met for a brief meeting in which Morrie Goetjen was elected as President, Ian Murray was elected as Vice President and Sean LaBrie was re-elected as Treasurer, we appreciate their commitment and support throughout 2010.

Following the AGM two excellent speakers joined us to discuss the beef and forage industry and what the future may hold. Lee Gunderson, editor of Albert Beef, joined us to share some insight on the industry as it moves forward and the challenges it faces. Brenda Schoepp of Beeflink shared her experience on grazing management and forage production. She then gave an exciting presentation on where the opportunities lie in the beef industry and reminded us that "there is always money in the beef industry!" if we utilize available opportunities.

It was a great day in which FFGA reflected on where we've been and where we are going as well being an information packed day! We were happy to have over 40 people attend including some of our Corporate Sponsors and representatives from the various MDs/counties we are working with. Thank you to Ken & Wendy who run the restaurant at the Highwood for the great beef on a bun lunch! And a special thanks to all the folks at the Highwood Auction Mart for continuing to accommodate us and provide our office space!



PowerFlex Grazing Conferences, April 2010

PowerFlex and Jim Gerrish provided an excellent traveling Grazing Conference that worked with many of the Agriculture Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) associations across the prov-

ince to bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise on grazing management to producers across Alberta. They joined FFGA in Nanton and then again at Jim and Barb Bauer's near Acme. Thank you to Jim and Barb for hosting one of these conferences!

Jim Gerrish shared ideas and tips for grazing management through the growing season and into the winter. Jim emphasised the importance of knowing your pasture inventory. By assessing the available forage in your pasture you can determine the number of days your livestock can graze a given area while maintaining a healthy pasture. Some of the key points involved taking your pasture inventory every couple of weeks to keep track of where you are at and predicting how things will be as you move forward. In order to be successful you need to know the number of head that will be grazing an area, for how long and the paddock size. It is important to look through the pasture after you have moved the livestock on, in order to evaluate if you met your grazing target. This will help you train your eye to visually assess your forage inventory. Knowing your critical levels of forage is important in maintaining a productive grazing system.

To design a grazing system you must keep in mind that the more control you want the more subdividing of your pasture you will need to do. By dividing your pasture into smaller units you have more management control and flexibility.

Why it works:

- Pasture Reset
- Quality Control
- Grazing Efficiency
- Feed Budgeting
- Nutrient Cycling

Following Jim's discussions David Krider, PowerFlex president, gave an overview of the history of PowerFlex, their products and development.

Doug Shaffer discussed powering electric fences and some of the options and advantages of different energizers. He discussed the importance of grounding wires, how to do it and be effective with your electric fence system.

Marvin Jackson shared innovations in solar and wind powered watering systems. He discussed a variety of systems included their advantages, costs and how they work.

Rob Davidson concluded the day with a presentation on the history of PowerFlex and their direction as they move forward, specifically in the Canadian market.

It was a day full of grazing information and tools. The producers who attended gathered valuable information and shared their thoughts, concerns and questions. In Nanton about 25 producers attended and the conference at Jim Bauer's had a great turn out with 45 people attending. Thank you to PowerFlex and Jim Gerrish for their time and expertise.

Ladies Livestock Lessons, June 2010

In 2010 Ladies Livestock Lessons was held at the Salvation Army Camp at Pine Lake. 40 ladies joined us for two days of knowledge, education and a chance to catch up with other women in the ranching industry. Despite the wet June we managed to avoid any major storms and even caught a few rays of sunshine.



The ladies were interactive and enjoyed the many information sessions held. Many left feeling rested, re-connected and with their minds full of pasture and livestock information to incorporate at home.



Time was spent in comfortable classroom sessions on livestock genetics, manure management, livestock handling, beef herd health and sustainable stocking rates. The speakers were energetic and eager to answer the many question asked and guide the resulting discussions.



Outdoor field sessions allowed for a hands-on interactive approach to riparian and range health, xeriscape gardening, weed identification, electric fencing, solar watering systems and stock dogs. This combination of new interesting events along with revisiting past ideas and trouble shooting ongoing ranching topics provided a dynamic learning environment for everyone.

An evening to socialize was highlighted by a presentation from Operation Grassland Communities with their special guest Napi, the Burrowing Owl. He was definitely a highlight of the retreat! Napi was followed by a film festival of Alberta stewardship stories from Cows & Fish which touched the hearts of many of the women attending as they shared in their love of the land, stewardship and the ranching lifestyle.

Thank you to all who attended and made another enjoyable retreat. We hope to see you again this year at Camp Kindle west of Water Valley on June 15 & 16!

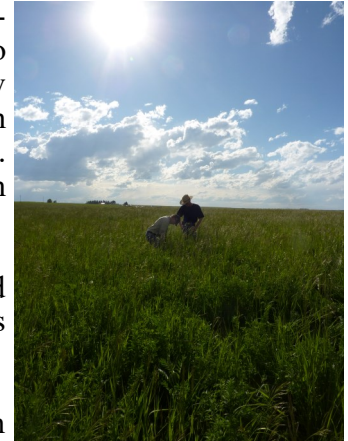


Peace Region Bus Tour to



Central Alberta

The Northern Peace Applied Research Association, Peace River Forage Association of BC and the Peace River Forage Seed Association joined together to bring northern forage producers down to central Alberta to see how we grow and manage forages in our region. It was a three day tour based out of Olds in which we were able to join the tour for one day and host them for a BBQ dinner. It was a great chance to meet and share ideas with like-minded producers from the north. They were an enthusiastic and fun group to tour with!



The morning began with a tour of the Bar Ag timothy compression plant owned by Barry Schmid. We got to see the compression process first hand as well as learn about the market and how the industry operates.

Next we visited the Jorvick family to see one of only a handful of bale driers in Canada. This family uses the bale drier to target foreign markets as well as for their own use on their commercial cattle ranch. They hosted us for a delicious lunch and a chance to visit and learn about their operation.



Touring the Thorlakson's feedlot and composting facility was a great example of thinking outside the box and expanding a business based on beef production to a wider market and second end product; compost and planting soil. It is interesting to see how people are finding other opportunities within the industry to expand and diversify.

A visit to Dan & Todd McKinnon's was a great example of land stewardship and management that is sustainable for the producer as well as the grass. Looking at how producers can maintain their livestock and land in a profitable way is always a good thing.

We wrapped up the day with a tour by AgrowPlow. FFGA Director and AgrowPlow manager, Graeme Finn, hosted the group for a pasture rejuvenation and grazing management tour. Which was followed by a field BBQ. Despite a brief rain and hail storm there was a lot of laughter, fellowship and great information shared among producers from different regions. FFGA enjoyed being part of such a fun and productive day.



Acme Grazing School with Jim Bauer

Jim and Barb Bauer hold a grazing school every summer with a renowned reputation. This sum-

mer I was able to attend the first day of the two day course. Jim started the day off with a warm welcome and introductions. Then had the group set to work learning about pasture inventory. How to measure what you've got; before you can decide how long to let the cows in for you need to know how much is there. Jim walked us through the process of clipping, drying and measuring the amount of the grass. We then went through the process of determining the number of acres we would need of that height and variety of forage to feed his steers for half a day. The group then went out the pasture and moved the fence for the steers. At the end of the day we went back to evaluate our initial decision and provide the steers their allotment for the night. This was a great activity which ties together the knowledge so many of us pick up a various schools and conferences and how to apply it.



That afternoon we discussed pasture health, grazing strategies, rest time, species, soil types and much more. Jim and Barb provide a comfortable and friendly atmosphere in which people are encouraged to ask questions, share ideas and network. Jim has a wealth of knowledge through years as a cattle producer as well as insight into projects and research from his time as the manager of Grey Wooded Forage Association. This school provides a chance to bring things together, it was a unique opportunity to learn the concepts and try them out all in the same two days.



International Mountain Section Society for Range Management Summer School, July 2010

The Society of Range Management held 2010's summer tour at the Chain Lakes Provincial Park. From the

park the group toured south through the region to the Waldron. It was a great day with the main focus on rough fescue in the foothills region.

The day began with oil site reclamation. The group was able to learn about projects and research on rejuvenating grazing land after disturbance. The process involves several years of re-planting/seeding the grasses and periods of controlled rest and grazing.



Following lunch we visited part of the 56,000 acres owned by the Waldron Grazing Cooperative where the MD of Ranchland did a harvesting rough fescue seed demo. They have been using the harvester to gather seeds for the past few years to use at reclamation sites.

We then toured some of the pasture area with the Waldren Ranch manager who showed us their new solar off-site watering system. We also toured their water system which includes a series of dugouts and natural ponds which they have designed with a run-off and dam system that is gravity fed and kept healthy through riparian and grazing management.

The Waldren Ranch is also using sheep to graze leafy spurge as a mechanism of controlling this undesirable plant. The Waldren Ranch was awarded the Alberta Beef Producers “Environmental Stewardship Award” for 2010 and it was a great chance to see what they have been doing to improve their grazing system.



Training Cattle to Graze Canada Thistle, August 2010

Great speaker! Great group, the time for questions and openness for discussion were great! Was just one of the positive comments following our Training Cattle to Graze Weeds day in Strathmore.

Specialist Kathy Voth with Livestock for Landscapes from Colorado was a dynamic, energetic speaker that had us thinking outside the box. Many of those who attended the day were sceptical that this could possibly work. Kathy spent a few hours explaining how it was possible through science, livestock behaviour and her experience with it. If this wasn't enough FFGA Director, Rod Vergouwen and his family did a trail to train 12 of their replacement heifers to graze Canada thistle. And it worked!

Rod explained the 7 day training process they went through to introduce the heifers to new feed stuffs. They trained them in a corral setting. While providing free choice hay they introduced ground barley, oats and eventually thistle to the cattle in tubs. The heifers responded well, coming to sample something new each time the tubs were filled.



Following this corral training period Rod and Beth moved their heifers out to the pasture setting. Rod was still somewhat surprised, but pleased, to find that his heifers and bull were starting to nip the tops of the thistles their first day on pasture.

On our tour, only 3 days after the cattle had been put out to pasture, made a trip to the pasture to see how things were going. We were able to walk through and see where they had been sampling not only the thistle, but also the rosebushes and the buck brush! The evidence is clear that cattle can graze some weeds in a pasture setting and will chose to do so even when there are other forages available for them to graze.

After the Vergouwen's heifers proved to us that cattle can be trained to graze weeds with only a week of training and minimal effort on the producers part we took a look at some other weed control options. Candice Manshreck with Dow AgroSciences had sprayed a plot of their product Reclaim on a piece of that same pasture. We were able to see how the chemical had knocked back the thistle, and other woody weeds.

All in all it was an exciting and informative day. Many of the producers who attended were excited to learn about, understand and see this process in practice. It provides a sustainable and inexpensive way to control weeds in pasture. While it will not eradicate the weeds it will help to keep them under control and help the grasses compete and maintain healthy pastures.



A special thanks goes out to Wheatland County for hosting us as well as Dow AgroScience for providing the Reclaim plot. Thank you to Rod and Beth Vergouwen for going through this process and taking the extra time to explain what they did, how they did it, their experience through the process and inviting us to tour their pasture.

For anyone who is interested in learning more about this process or trying it in the future please contact me at the office. FFGA has purchased DVDs, a book and a training package from Kathy Voth to help you get started. We can also put you in touch with Kathy and other producers who have done it. We would like to see many of you try it but also want to provide you with the tools to be successful. This is an exciting and new alternative that will be interesting to try and observe over the next few years.



Training Cattle to Graze Canada



Thistle

Trial: August 2010
Rod & Beth Vergouwen, Strathmore Alberta
Training methods of Kathy Voth with
Livestock for Landscapes

Day 1: Morning: Ground Barley
 Evening: Ground Barley

Day 2: Morning: Ground Barley
 Evening: Ground barley & Whole Oats

Day 3: Morning: Whole oats, corn & molasses
 Evening: Corn, alfalfa cubes & molasses

Day 4: Morning: Alfalfa cubes
 Evening: Alfalfa

Day 5: Alfalfa cubes, corn, thistles & molasses

Day 6: Thistles, molasses & ground barley

Day 7: Thistles & molasses

Day 8: Turned out to pasture



Low-Stress Cattle Handling Tour, September 2010

Despite the cold, wet weather during our two-day Low-Stress Cattle Handling Clinic in September featuring Dylan Biggs was a success! 20 participants braved the weather to learn about handling and moving cattle in a controlled, effective and timely fashion. We began the 2 day clinic at the Wheatland County Office where Dylan discussed cattle behaviour and handling techniques. Later we headed out to Rod



and Beth Vergouwen's were Dylan demonstrated moving a group yearlings in a pasture setting. Over the two days the participants got to watch and try moving the yearlings in a pasture and coral system.



The discussion amongst the group was indepth as producers exchanged ideas and inquired about various classes of animals and situations, from loading bulls in pasture to moving cow-calf pairs, tagging calves, settling weaned calves and more. It was a great two-days! Thank you to Rod & Beth Vergouwen for hosting us and the Wheatland County for the use of their office space!



Winter Watering Systems Tour, November 2010

Despite the cold weather and the first snow storm of the season we had an informative tour on November 16. After meeting at the Mountain View County Office we headed out to Sean and Holly LaBrie's to view two of their water-



ing systems in action. The first was a motion sensed system from SunDog Solar. It runs off of a wet well and pumps water up to the animals when movement is detected. It runs off of solar energy and has a drain back system so it does not freeze in the winter. The second system at the LaBrie's runs off of the Dog Pound river running through their pasture. With funding support from Growing Forward and Mountain View County Sean and Holly have fenced off the creek and installed another SunDog Solar watering system. It is a portable system with a removable winter cover that pumps water up from under the ice on the creek. Cody Tippe with SunDog Solar joined us and between him and Sean we got a great idea of how these two systems work.



Next we visited a site at Olds College where they use a Frost Free Nose Pump to water their cattle. Jim Anderson of Frost Free Nose Pumps was able to explain how it worked and the basic principles behind it. The neat thing about this pump is that after the initial set up costs it operates completely by itself. In this watering system the cattle do all of the work, they pump their own water up from the well so no source of power is needed, no wind, solar, electric or propane.



thing about this pump is that after completely by itself. In this watering system the cattle do all of the work, they pump their own water up from the well so no source of power is needed, no wind, solar, electric or propane.



After a hot lunch at the Mountain View County Office we visited Wil Bosomworth's near Crossfield. Wil and Jason Wright, owner of CAP Solar, showed how this solar powered system works off of Wil's dug out. Jason also had a newer system there for us to view and see some of the improvements CAP Solar has recently made. The cold snowy weather made it a great day to see all of these systems working in winter conditions but unfortunately deterred a few people from making it out. Thank you to the producers and companies that shared their experiences and information with us and Mountain View County for partnering with us on this event.



Agriculture Tour to Brazil, Nov - Dec 2010



The Foothills Forage and Grazing Association recently returned from a 15 day agricultural tour of Brazil. Laura Gibney (FFGA manager) presented a lively talk at the Highwood Auction Mart at the FFGA Christmas Party in December to share what the tour group discovered.

“Brazil's cattle herd is around 190 million head with a human population of some 192 million. They produce grass finished beef mostly on imported grass varieties. With a land mass the size of the United States, their summer season (hot and rainy) runs from December to March. Their forage has a dormant period, as does ours, which decreases it's nutritive value, not unlike Canada's seasonal cycles.



“Brazil is the number one global beef exporter, where Canada places fifth. About 43 million head of cattle are slaughtered each year producing some 9,000 million tons of beef annually as Brazil does not export live cattle. Their cow herd has increased some 22% over the past 16 years. Cattle are finished on grass and are typically slaughtered at 550 kgs at three to four years of age. Brazil has a significant amount of arable land which is, as of yet, undeveloped. Their agriculture industries thus have huge growth potential.

“Foot and Mouth Disease is one of Brazil’s market barriers so all cattle in Brazil are vaccinated for the disease in November and 2 year old cattle are vaccinated a second time in May. This vaccination protocol for FMD is monitored by the government and a veterinarian must sign off that vaccinations have been administered. Rainfall varies by region and elevation but 60-75 inches per year is typical in the areas we visited. Of the 554 million acres of pasture land in Brazil 70% has been cultivated since the native vegetation mainly consists of shrubs and brush in pasture regions. The main grass species are the African Brochiaria and Panicum. Brazil has 1,100 agricultural research scientists engaged in all forms of intensive crop and livestock work including feeding crop residues and rotational grazing.

“The main cattle breed in this country is comprised of Nelore cattle which originated in India, this breed shows up in 80% of Brazilian beef cattle. Matto Grosso, the main beef producing state in Brazil has 35 slaughter plants alone, of which three are USDA approved and eleven are EU approved. Typically cattle are sold in auction facilities at night and are not presorted. Cattle brought in by one producer will be sold together therefore cows, calves and steers are often sold together. Cattle handling and sorting is generally avoided during the daytime due to heat. One ranch we visited had a calving percentage of 88-92% which the producer feels is fairly good. Ticks and other parasites, snakes, jaguars, electrical storms and disease are the main causes of loss for Brazilian ranchers (taking 4% of live calves, 3% of cows and 1% of the heifers). Nelore and Nelore crossed cattle are hardy in this climate as they have the ability to sweat and shiver (twitch the skin to shrug off insects) and deal with the heat, we did see several Brangus (brahma angus crosses) being used in an effort to increase gain and finish cattle earlier. The cost of gain in Brazil is approximately two thirds of the cost of similar gains in Canada though it takes them up to three or four years to achieve their gains.

“While Brazil has many natural advantages for livestock production heavy rainfall, insects and native diseases are challenges they face. Heat, high moisture, disease vectors and a maintaining organic matter in the soil can decrease production. They are lucky in this country to be able to plant two crops a year; for instance, soy can be followed by corn; or cotton will follow soy. However their red Basalt soil and high requirement crops bring certain limitations; high levels of phosphorus are needed for this intense level of production. Crop farmers import ag inputs and add ap-



proximately 180 kgs of phosphate per hectare to the soil in order to maintain productivity, this of course is expensive.

“Fence posts in Brazil tend to be made from Eucalyptus trees and smooth wire is utilized so as to minimize cuts and scratches which can lead to skin infections and bug infestations. Meat yield on fat heifers is 50% while fat steers typically yield about 53%. Profits on large, efficient cattle operations are typically 35% of the gross take on the cattle. Brazilian ranchers experience a lower cost of production due in part to year round grazing



and low labor costs as labor is plentiful and cheap in Brazil. Livestock production is a more lucrative, profitable business in Brazil than in North America despite lower yields and higher mortality: Brazil's cattle exports remain extremely competitive against the North American business model.

Alex Robertson, a director on the FFGA board, and his wife Carol attended the tour and found that, “Cattle typically gain $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pound in the winter and $1\frac{3}{4}$ lbs in the summer. Their cattle are slow to finish and are typically slaughtered at four years, down from a previous slaughter age of five years. They are presently trying to lower this overall age of slaughter to three years. Brazil has a lower cost of production because of the absence of winter feeding. Their beef is delicious and their slaughter plants are efficient. However, Alex believes that Canada's quality and uniformity results in a far superior product. Our cattle have steady gains throughout their lifecycle without weight loss due to nutritional stress which Brazilian cattle experience when their grasses go through the dormant stage. Our native grasses go a long way to meeting nutritional demands year round; with a bit of protein supplement we can balance out the rations. We cannot compete with Brazil on cost of production but we can compete on quality.”

Robertson also adds that Brazil vaccinates little for prevention of livestock diseases, though they regularly use Ivermectin and do use FMD, Brucellosis and Clostridiosis vaccines. Tick damaged hides are an issue for packers. Nor, he adds, do they implant cattle for gains. Beef grading in Brazil is almost non-existent. “While we curse a -25 degree day with wind chills to -40, it does seem an overall benefit in killing parasites and insects and very probably eliminates the need for such concerns here.” Robertson notes we pale in comparison to Brazil's beef production on sheer mass but our great grass and our grain finished beef, combined with excellent health standards enable us to compete with Brazil on a quality basis.

Brazil's largest boxed beef customers are China and Russia. However, full EU access is limited by Foot and Mouth Disease status. Most Brazilian states have FMD free status but it is still mandatory to vaccinate in all of Brazil. There are quarantine regulations between states to control FMD spread. However FMD free status likely will never become national as they share borders with Argentina and Paraguay, countries that do not have FMD vaccine protocols. Across border FMD spread is a constant concern.

Doug & Linda Wray of Irricana are FFGA members who also enjoyed the trip to Brazil. They run 250 pairs on their operation and Doug adds, “Agriculture here in Canada is huddled on the 49th parallel. We cut our risks here by cutting input costs through creative grazing options. We have to cut our input costs and grow tonnage to keep our numbers up and the tonnage of beef we produce to be competitive. Though beef producers do play a lower risk game than grain producers when it comes to the cost of inputs and the reward (profit margin). We are a no frills operation. While we don't run cattle from horseback as in the days of the prairie and the cowboy, we do move our cattle every two or three days. We graze our cattle intensively and work hard to stay profitable.”



Wray continues, “Canadians average about 60% carcass yield. In Brazil it’s more like a 50% yield. They came through a 40 year era of expansion from the 1970’s and are heavily committed to ag science and research to keep on the leading edge of production. Another disadvantage they have is a four month breeding season. As well, to expand further they have to clear a lot of brush and add lime and potash to create their soils. Expansion is expensive for them whereas we can break ground and normally seed right into it. Would I trade my operation for one in Brazil? Up until now I would have said yes. I hate winter, but down there they have a double whammy with all that rain, heat and marginal feed coupled with high mortality and low gains. They have a different set of problems to deal with than we do. After this trip our beef production model in Canada does not look so bad. I’m estimating the Brazilian cow herd must be about 60 million head given slaughter numbers, death losses and the long time it takes to get a heifer or steer to market (3-4 years).

“It’s hard for us to imagine back to back crops in one year: corn followed by soy or wheat etc. It does look good from the outside. And they also have some amazing co-operatives which give producers advantages we can only dream of: they pool crops for selling to get extra profit margins; they market (in some cases) products ready for the retail stores; and they pool their buying power to get the lowest cost on farm inputs. Brazil seems to have good social and agricultural policies as well as leadership. The ranchers in general seem content with the agricultural future, research and policies that are unfolding. I sensed they are confident and ready to invest for the long haul knowing they have a secure global share of the beef market. Their reality is a far cry from where we have come in the past eight years. We’ve had producers leave the industry, feedlots close, we’ve had closed borders, crashed markets and bickering at every level of representation. It would be nice if Canada’s smaller livestock operations could join forces for political power and marketing options. Some farm co-ops in Brazil have 10,000 members. It shows me that there are other ways of doing business. That our business model, the way we buy and sell our inputs and crops, could be improved.”

These three perspectives give a fair picture of the Brazilian beef industry. Of course nothing beats a personal visit. FFGA is committed to sharing grazing perspectives, enriching forage options and enhancing communication between all players in the beef industry, especially producers. They are a forward looking group who are among leading edge organizations poised to help improve our beef industry in the 21st century. Their tours, demonstrations and information sessions are fun and full of information you can readily put to good use.

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FFGA Christmas Party, December 2010

We had our Christmas Party on December 17 at the Highwood Auction Mart. It was a great evening that included an energetic and interactive presentation on the FFGA Agriculture Tour to Brazil, fellowship and refreshments. It was a chance for FFGA members to kick back, relax and discuss the past year while speculating what 2011 might bring. Those who were unable to attend the tour to Brazil got the chance to hear about our adventures and some of what we learned about Brazil as a global agriculture player. Those who were on the trip had a chance to share what they learned and reflect on how the global beef market affects Alberta beef producers and how Canada fits into the picture.



FFGA Strategic Planning Session, December 2010

In December the FFGA board of directors met in Airdrie to spend the day going through a strategic planning session with facilitator David Rudd. The board spent sometime reviewing who we are and what our mandate before examining our strengths and weakness over the past few years. After a day deliberating ideas, strategies and the future of FFGA we have a solid foundation to work with over the next three years. Our current strategic plan includes four key focus areas for the next few years. The key focus areas will guide the board, staff and membership in developing strategies to improve FFGA in these areas. They are:

1. To effectively communicate to our target audience

To maintain and increase an engaged target audience

To involve the next generation

Develop effective communication strategies with producers, corporations, education institutions and government

2. To ensure an effective organizational structure for the future

Maintain and enhance an active and engaged Board of directors

Determine staffing needs to maintain and grow FFGA

Promote Board development through training and education

3. To Identify and implement new and innovative sustainable ideas and communicate findings

Continue to develop innovative demonstrations and field trials

Identify ways of discovering and implementing new ideas

4. To maintain financial stability of FFGA

Explore new/additional revenue streams

Maintain a sound financial plan

Expand relationship with industry partners, counties, and post secondary institutions.

FFGA has grown in leaps and bounds the past two years and these four areas will help FFGA to continue to move in a purposeful direction. Thank you to the board members for all of their time and effort to keep this association leading the way in forage innovations in southern Alberta.

Acme Winter Grazing Corn Project 2010 - 2011

Background

Winter feeding is the largest cost in maintaining a cattle herd. There are many ways to extend the grazing season in Alberta through the use of stockpiled forages, crops and crop residues to reduce production costs. There has been growing interest in the value of grazing standing corn as part of a winter feeding program.

Objective

To determine if grazing corn in central Alberta can be a nutritionally, economically and logistically effective part of a winter feeding program.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people and corporations participating in this project:

Ian Murray - Producer Co-operator
 Kevin Shaw - PickSeed
 Chuck McNeil - Crop Production Services (CPS)

Methods

CPS planted 14 acres of corn seed provided by PickSeed on Wednesday May 12, 2010. Three varieties of corn were planted; 2219RR, 2230RR and 2501RR at a seed depth of 1 1/4 inches with 6 inches between seeds. The 2010 growing season was cool and wet in central Alberta with frost hitting the corn in early September. This was a poor year for corn production as it requires higher levels of heat. Hybrid 2230 had the best cob development but overall maturity in all three hybrids was lower than had been expected due to the poor growing conditions. In February Ian turned 154 cows into the corn for 14 days.

Feed Tests

December, 2010

| Hybrid | 2230 | | 2219 | | 2501 | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Analysis | As Re-ceived | Dry Matter | As Re-ceived | Dry Matter | As Re-ceived | Dry Matter |
| Moisture (%) | 70.11 | | 70.04 | | 68.76 | |
| Crude Protein (%) | 3.15 | 10.55 | 2.81 | 9.38 | 3.09 | 9.9 |
| Calcium (%) | 0.04 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 0.19 | 0.06 | 0.16 |
| Phosphorus (%) | 0.07 | 0.22 | 0.05 | 0.16 | 0.05 | 0.21 |
| Magnesium (%) | 0.06 | 0.21 | 0.08 | 0.28 | 0.07 | 0.26 |
| Potassium (%) | 0.43 | 1.43 | 0.39 | 1.29 | 0.08 | 1.15 |
| Sodium (%) | < 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.07 | 0.36 | 0.03 |
| Nitrates (%) | 0.04 | 0.15 | 0.04 | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.05 |
| Acid Detergent Fibre (%) | 9.61 | 32.17 | 10.81 | 36.06 | 13.06 | 41.81 |
| Neutral Detergent Fibre (%) | 17.17 | 57.45 | 18.34 | 61.2 | 22.23 | 71.18 |
| Non Fibre Carbohydrates (%) | 6.34 | 21.2 | 5.58 | 18.62 | 2.53 | 8.11 |
| Total Digestible Nutrients (%) | 18.56 | 62.1 | 18.02 | 60.15 | 17.89 | 57.28 |
| Relative Feed Value | | 103 | | 92 | | 74 |

To maintain a cow in mid pregnancy feed should contain 7% crude protein and 55% TDN. For late pregnancy feed should contain 9% crude protein and 60% TDN and after calving feed should contain 11% crude protein and 65% TDN (Yurchak 2004).

Based on crude protein and TDN of all three corn varieties in this study would provide suitable forage for cows during pregnancy but would need a supplement to be adequate for cows with a calf at her side. Variety 2230 has the highest feed quality as it matures more quickly than the other two.

Cost comparison between corn grazing, cereal swath grazing and traditional winter feeding

| Cost | Oat/Barley Cereal Mix | Corn Initial Predicted | Corn Actual |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Fertilizer | \$45.88 | \$56.29 | \$56.29 |
| Preseed burnoff (chem + Spraying) | \$12.31 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Seeding | \$20.00 | \$30.00 | \$30.00 |
| In crop Roundup (Chem + Spraying) | \$0.00 | \$8.60 | \$8.60 |
| Seed Corn | \$0.00 | \$78.00 | \$78.00 |
| Seed Oats @ 1 Bu/Ac | \$4.50 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Seed Barley @ 1.5 Bu/Ac | \$13.13 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Crop Insurance | <u>\$8.40</u> | <u>\$9.64</u> | <u>\$9.64</u> |
| Total Inputs | \$104.22 | \$182.53 | \$182.53 |
| Land Rent Value | \$50.00 | \$50.00 | \$50.00 |
| Swathing Cost | | | |
| 16 hrs time @ \$25.00/hr / 125 Ac | \$3.20 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Repair & Depreciation of 1974 Versatile 400 swather | <u>\$3.20</u> | <u>\$0.00</u> | <u>\$0.00</u> |
| Total Cost per Acre | \$160.62 | \$232.53 | \$232.53 |
| Grazing Days/Ac | 200 | 350 | 150 |
| Cost per cow day | \$0.80 | \$0.66 | \$1.55 |
| Feeding Time 1 hr every 3 days - @ \$25.00/hr /462 hd (154*3) | \$0.05 | \$0.05 | \$0.05 |
| Total winter feeding cost (per cow/day) | \$0.85 | \$0.71 | \$1.60 |

Cost of traditional feeding

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Hay @ \$75.00/ton – 35lbs = | \$1.31 |
| Yardage: - Tractor @ \$70.00/hr at 2hours to feed 154 head -1 mile from home -pulling stings off bales | <u>\$0.91</u> |
| | \$2.22/cow/day |

Conclusions

This project shows that grazing corn can be utilized in central Alberta and that the nutritional quality is adequate to support cows in mid to late gestation. Despite its high input costs in this case grazing corn at \$1.60/cow/day was more cost effective than the traditional winter feeding of hay at \$2.22/cow/day, however it was less cost effective than swath grazing at \$0.85/cow/day. FFGA will be continuing this project in 2011 in cooperation with producer Ian Murray and with the support of Pickseed and CPS. With a warmer longer growing season we expect to get more grazing days from the corn and therefore see it as a more viable winter grazing option. Using a variety of winter feeding strategies allows producers some flexibility in the case of a poor growing season and enables them to better manage their operation in varying winter conditions.

Additional Comments

- There is a risk of Acidosis or bloat if cattle get too much grain at once
- While corn maintains its value well into the winter months high winds can cause snow to pack into the corn rows, making it more

CPS planted the corn on May 12, 2010



FFGA Summer Tour, September 2010



Collecting Feed Samples, November 2010



FFGA Winter Grazing Tour, February 2011



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