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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS September 2026

Director's Note—Martina Wade

Greetings FFGA Members

When Kayla reached out to ask if I could write the Director's Note for the September issue of the newsletter, I was quite excited to share what we have been getting up to this summer, with the ample June moisture we grew the best hay crop we have ever had in the Dalum area, one field made almost 6 bales an acre. Between baling hay, breeding cows AI and rotating pastures we have had a very busy July and August. As with most of the southern province it turned hot and dry and crops started maturing quickly, and everybody is gearing up for harvest.

On August 26th with a big hot southeast wind blowing, we had what everyone fears this time of year, smoke on the horizon. The fire originated at a power pole and quickly spread into the pea crop that was ready for harvest and headed straight towards the house and stackyard a ½ mile away. The local fire departments were quick to respond as well as all the neighbors, we stopped it from heading toward the yard but couldn't keep it out of the bales. Through tireless help and intervention, we managed to pull some bales out of the stack as it was burning down. In the end, we only lost feed and crop, no people or animals were harmed. As hard as it was to watch all that time and effort burn in very short order, I am extremely grateful for the community and the industry that we live in, where no matter what we're doing we will stop and work till the end whenever we are needed.

The adage to never have all your bales in one stackyard rings especially true for us because thankfully

only half of the bales were in that stack. Some things we learned that were surprising is that a pyramid stack of bales burns very quickly vs single rows. I know I will find a better home for the hammer strap for the tractor because it was not easy to find in a hurry, and finally there is a reason we pay that insurance premium year after year. I know the firefighting skid and the discer will stay hooked up for the foreseeable future as harvest gets into full swing. We are so grateful that we had a big hay crop because although we lost around 750 bales, we still have more than enough feed for the cows this winter. We are so thankful to all the people who have reached out with offers of feed, (literally two more as I am typing) we are tired and smoky, but we are all ok. From my family to all of yours we wish everyone a safe and productive harvest.

Martina Wade



Photo: Martina Wade

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On the Cover: FFGA's Virtual Collar Fencing Field Day—Cattle with the Gallagher collars. Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!



Don't skimp on nutrition when growing replacement females



Photo: FFGA

For the better part of the past decade, beef producers have faced one challenge after another. Widespread drought forced difficult culling decisions, shrinking the U.S. cow herd to its smallest size in decades. At the same time, record-high weaned calf prices have increased the value of every calf born, making the decision to retain a replacement heifer more significant than ever before. Today's beef market sends a loud signal: Every productive female matters. When each retained heifer represents thousands of dollars in future revenue potential, getting her development right is no longer just good management; it's an economic necessity.

A properly developed heifer should reach puberty early, get bred easily, yet also calve unassisted and rebreed on time the following year. Proper nutrition during development influences these sensitive biological processes and sets your herd up for long-term success. While fresh, clean water and adequate energy levels are vital parts of your nutritional program, I'm always asked about protein levels and their importance in developing heifer diets. Proteins are the building blocks of life, and it's important to understand the "how" and "why" of protein nutrition for the young, growing heifer. Protein supports muscle and skeletal growth, organ and reproductive development, and immune function. Protein is usually discussed in terms of quantity but not quality and timing. Obviously, deficiencies early in development can delay puberty and reduce breeding success generationally.

Once a heifer is weaned from her dam, she can no longer rely on mom for supplemental nutrition, so we must provide adequate protein levels (12% to 15% crude protein) up until breeding. The rule of thumb for replacement heifers is that they should weigh 60% of their mature weight at their first breeding service. If adequate protein is limited, puberty is delayed, pushing her further back into next year's calving window. We all know the loss in lifetime revenue from our herd when heifers go into production late in year one. It makes continuing her development as a pesky 2-year-old even more challenging, so think about the generational impact of improper protein levels early in the developmental phase.

Crude protein (CP) is the gold standard in which protein quantity is measured, but it's a crude measurement that doesn't tell the whole story about protein nutrition. CP can be divided into two parts: the protein that's broken down by the microbes in the rumen (rumen-degradable protein, RDP) and the protein that escapes the rumen (rumen-undegradable protein, RUP). We all know the importance of microbes for ruminal fermentation, but they also break down proteins. Once they reach the end of their lifespan, they serve as a source of protein for the heifer. As they pass through the digestive tract, they are metabolized in the small intestine just like bypass protein. Good RDP sources are found in forages, soybean meal and nitrogen sources like urea. When adequate RDP and energy in a developing heifer diet is fortified with a prebiotic designed to stimulate microbial growth and enhance protein digestion, we can maximize the efficiency of protein metabolism.

That's not to say that undegradable, or bypass, protein sources aren't important, too. I always recommend testing your feeds and forages and balancing the diet for adequate levels of both. Quality, balanced protein nutrition can not only improve body condition and breed-ups; they can subse-

quently improve weaning weights and long-term productivity.

One way to provide a quality prebiotic to stimulate microbial growth and enhance protein digestion is to include it in a mineral program that maximizes energy and forage utilization for successful production and contains prebiotics that enhance digestibility. A reproductive success study conducted by our team at BioZyme shows that cows on a good program like this had a 94% conception rate, compared to the national average of 91%.

Going above and beyond isn't always the right method when it comes to supplementing protein. The obvious reason is that sources of protein can be expensive and add unnecessary cost to your bottom line. You need to make sure adequate energy is available to the microbes as well, or they won't be able to convert RDP into something the heifer can use. Nitrogen can build up in the rumen and cross into the bloodstream, causing early-term abortions, which can be detrimental to your developmental plan. Protein is important, but just like your genetics, don't single-trait select. If energy isn't balanced with your source of protein and vitamin/mineral levels are out of whack, you may not get the bang for your buck that you invested.

Well-developed heifers become productive, long-lived cows. Get ahead of the game and think of the long-term implications of protein restriction on the most challenging group of females in the herd. The proof is in the pudding. Heifers that fail to calve early their first time don't stay in the herd long. Provide your heifers with adequate, quality protein that's balanced with energy and give the heifer all the nutritional tools she needs to maximize her genetic potential.

Author: Chris Cassady

Original Article: <https://www.agproud.com/articles/63934-dont-skimp-on-nutrition-when-growing-replacement-females>



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Pasture PowerUp

What happens when you have enough pasture for your operation, but you can't access portions of that pasture due to weedy or brush encroachment? Should you look at purchasing more land? With today's land prices, this isn't a simple, easy or realistic option for many people. Should you look at destocking and ensure you can manage your herd based on the carrying capacity of your pastureland? That is an option that may fit your ranch, but isn't always a desirable route if you are looking at maintaining your herd or even growing? What about controlling those pesky invasives to open those "missed opportunity" acres?? What would it take to make this option viable? Do you mow, graze, or spray, or a combination of all those options? How would you even start to explore these options?

If this sounds like you, you are not alone! With so many unknown variables, it's hard to know what the best option for your ranch is. That's where the Pasture PowerUp project and tour comes in. Back in 2025, conversations between Austin Wiebe with Newell County and Sonja Bloom with Foothills Forage & Grazing Association around this topic began. We asked the question, "if you could open up more grazing opportunities in your current pasture, can you reach your ranching goals without having to purchase/rent more land"? Knowing this is a multi-faceted question, the answer wasn't easy and the financial implications of discovering what options are the best, are not something that everyone is able or willing to take on. So, we decided to do it for you!

What is the Pasture PowerUp Project?

What is the most viable option to combat invasive weed and woody encroachment in your pasture? Is it mowing? Is it spraying? What would you spray? How do you change your grazing management after control work has been done to maximize your results and prevent the return of these unwanted invaders? What does this cost producers? How do they connect with experts for support? We had the same questions and so they formed the foundations of the Pasture PowerUp project.

In spring of 2025, Austin and Sonja met up with 2 producer partners who agreed to work with us on this project.

Brad's irrigated tame pasture was battling a Canada Thistle invasion, and Krista's native rangeland pasture was overrun with brush, (mostly Silver Buffaloberry and Snowberry) and Downy Brome. We wanted to show the difference between spraying herbicides that have seasonal control, one year of control and multi-year control, and the cost associated with each herbicide.

With Brad and Krista on board, the Pasture PowerUp project was ready to begin.

Using a boomless, pull behind sprayer from Newell County, 9 plots were sprayed in 2025, with the Canada Thistle and brush plots happening in late June, and the Downy Brome plots sprayed in August. A note that this sprayer is available for Newell County residents to rent at \$50 per day. So what was sprayed and what did we observe?

Canada Thistle Plots



Plot 1 saw an application of 3.4L/ha of 2,4-D 700 Ester with 1% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 300L solution/ha. Cost for this application was quoted at \$35.70/ha or \$13.80/ac. This is the heavy rate and is a non-residual herbicide. In the growing season after application, we noticed the Canada Thistle plants were burnt back to the point that none could be found in the plot. In the fall, small rosettes could be observed and by August 2026, some Canada Thistle plants could be found in the plot. There were fewer and they were smaller than the Canada Thistle found in areas that were not sprayed. While this combination provided season long control of Canada Thistle, most of the Canada Thistle had some signs of regrowth. This is expected with this combination of herbicide, and the grass in the plot is growing

better than areas that were untreated, making it a more desirable area for cattle grazing.

Plot 2 saw an application of Restore II at 1.4L/ha with 1% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 300L Solution/ha, which is the light rate and should have 7 months of residual effect in the soil. Cost for this application was quoted at \$65.00/ha or \$26.31/ac. In the growing season, it was observed that the Canada Thistle was burnt back to a point where none could be found in the plot. This plot was heavily grazed in the summer, and we noticed some small Canada Thistle rosettes popping up in the plot. By August 2026, Canada Thistle plants could be found throughout the plot, with denser areas having lots of regrowth of Canada Thistle and areas with less density having a substantial reduction in Canada Thistle population. It was observed that the cows preferred to graze this plot versus areas that did not have this treatment. The low rate of Restore II provided season long control of Canada Thistle.

Plot 3 saw an application of Tru Range at 167g/ha with 1% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 300L Solution/ha, which again is the light rate of this product. This product provides up to 24 months of residual control. Cost for this application was quoted at \$80.00/ha or \$32.37/ac. Over the growing season, it was observed that the Canada Thistle plants in this plot were brown and dead with no signs of regrowth. It was noted that the month after application, it looked like the grass had also been burnt back and was affected by the application. August 2025 this effect had completely reversed, and the grass was green and actively growing. In August 2026, it was observed that there were no actively growing Canada Thistle plants in this plot and that there was a definite line showing where the plot ended as the Canada Thistle growing outside this plot was thriving! Tru Range showed excellent season long control, and the residual effect of this product was behaving as expected this year, offering solid control of Canada Thistle 12 months after application.

Brush Plots (Silver Buffaloberry, Snowberry)

Plot 1 saw an application of Tru Range at 334g/ha, 0.25% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 475L Solution/ha. Cost for this application was quoted at \$160.00/ha or

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\$64.75/ac. Over the growing season, it was observed that the leaves on the brush appeared dead and that the grass under the snowberry had browned slightly and appeared to have burnt back. By September that year, the grass recovered, the snowberry plants were dead, and the buffaloberry plants that were fully covered in the herbicide had also died. The buffaloberry plants that were not fully covered were still alive and attempting to recover. In August 2026, it was observed that yearly control of Snowberry and Buffaloberry had occurred and all of the Snowberry plants remained dead. The grass has reclaimed a large amount of land, allowing for more grazing to happen in the sprayed area, as long as the cows were happy to graze through the skeletons of the dead brush.



Plot 2 saw an application of Reclaim A at 230g/ha, Reclaim B at 1.7L/ha, 0.25% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 475L Solution/ha. The quoted cost of this application was \$136.00/ha or \$55.00/ac. Over the growing season, we observed that plants that were fully covered in this application had died and that the grass was starting to recover and grow through the brush. Plants that were not fully covered were beginning to recover but were noticeably stunted and struggling. Lots of Snowberry & Buffaloberry skeletons can be found in this plot. It is important to ensure that the entire plant that you are looking to control is covered in herbicide to ensure you are getting even coverage that will kill all parts of the plants.

Plot 3 saw an application of 2,4-D Ester 700 at 3.4L/ha, 0.25% Ag Surf adjuvant, at 475L Solution/ha. The quoted cost of this application was \$35.70/ha or \$14.44/ac. It was observed during the growing season that the leaves on both Snowberry & Buffaloberry appeared to be brown, curling and dying. The grass was healthy, growing, and showing signs of competing with the brush. By August 2026, we observed that the top $\frac{3}{4}$ of the

Snowberry & Buffaloberry plants were dead, but that a large amount of regrowth was coming from the crown of those plants. This rate provided season long control by killing the top growth of these species, but that by 2026 the grass was being pushed out and outcompeted by the regrowth of the brush.

Downy Brome Plots



Plot 1 saw an application of Rejuvra at 375mL/ha in 475L Solution/ha. Rejuvra controls annuals by creating a 3-5cm layer in the soil that prevents the germination of annual seeds in the spring for up to 36 months. The cost of this application is \$118.00/ha or \$48.00/ac. Application happened in August 2025 and we observed a large reduction in Downy Brome in this plot this spring with some plants still actively growing. It has been found that some Downy Brome can germinate before the Rejuvra is able to create the layer in the soil that prevents germination. Observations in the next 2 years will be helpful in assessing Rejuvra's ability to control Downy Brome long term.

Plot 2 saw an application of Rejuvra at 375mL/ha and Tru Range at 167g/ha in 475L Solution/ha. The quoted cost for this application was \$198.00/ha or \$80.37/ac and should provide up to 36 months of residual control. It was observed that this combination was able to control Downy Brome but not kill every plant. In the lower areas of the plot, there were large patches of Downy Brome actively growing. This could be due to germination occurring before the Rejuvra was able to establish its barrier. There was no visible difference between using Rejuvra with Tru Range versus using Rejuvra alone.

Plot 3 saw us try something different. We applied Focus at 336mL/ha in 475L Solution/ha. It needs to be noted that this product, Focus, is NOT REGISTERED for use in Pastureland at this time. The

quoted cost for this application is \$59.75/ha or \$24.00/acre and should provide up to 12 months of residual control. Over the growing season, it was observed that Focus at 336mL/ha sprayed in August 2025, did not provide any visible control of Downy Brome as there was no visible difference between the plot we sprayed and the area that did not receive any treatment.

The Grazing Connection

Part of the project was to discuss how managed grazing strategies can add to, or take away from, your control work. With increased pasture available to graze, how do your grazing strategies fit into the picture? With overgrazing, we expect desirable species to be removed from a pasture which gives invasives a chance to establish and take over. When you can manage your grazing to ensure that overgrazing isn't happening, we are able to provide a bit of buffer against encroaching invasive species which should give us a chance to stay on top of these challenges before they become a larger problem. Graydon Garner gave us a great presentation on how managed grazing strategies using sheep can work within a larger, integrated control strategy to help a farm or ranch meet its goals!

Conclusion

Now that you know what the Pasture PowerUp project was aiming to achieve, and now that you know what, how and when we did the work, we hope that you feel a bit more knowledgeable and empowered to embark on a Pasture PowerUp project on your own ranch to reclaim grazing areas that are currently being overrun with invasives. This project wasn't set up as a research project and all of our work and observations are not replicated or published. The next steps for this project are to continue observing the results, provide updates to producers and to see if other, similar projects might be viable. If you would like to discuss this project in more detail, please reach out to Sonja Bloom at

enviro@foothillsforage.com or Austin Wiebe at

wiebeau@newellmail.ca

and we would be happy to discuss with you!

Author: Sonja Bloom
Photos: FFGA

Virtual fencing or better management? Asking the right investment questions



VIRTUAL fencing is one of the most exciting developments in grazing management in decades. Advocates point to a range of benefits including improved pasture utilisation, greater grazing flexibility, labour savings, increased stocking rates and improved animal performance.

These are attractive outcomes and, in some situations, they may absolutely justify investment. However, there is a question that deserves more attention: Are virtual fences creating value, or are they simply helping managers capture value that was already available?

The distinction is important because profitable businesses do not maximise production. They maximise return on capital.

A Simple Investment Case for Virtual Fencing

Consider the following conceptual investment analysis involving virtual fencing collars across a herd of 1000 pregnant females. In this herd progeny are grown to feedlot entry weights of about 450kg liveweight.

The analysis assumes virtual fencing facilitates a 15pc increase in stocking rate, equivalent to approximately 150 additional breeding females. Additional livestock (cows, calves and bulls) are purchased at current market values and generate a gross profit of \$4.50/kg of liveweight produced. The assumption is that collars are fitted only to pregnant females and the cost is about \$110 per collar per year inclusive of labour cost to fit and adjust.

Under these assumptions, the investment generates an internal rate of return of approximately 15pc over a five-year discounted cashflow period.

Given the relatively low biological and operational risk associated with carrying additional livestock where feed is available, this represents a reasonable investment outcome.

Scenario 1: Virtual Fencing Plus Additional Livestock

Measure	Virtual Fence + Livestock
Livestock investment (\$)	\$567,572
Relative lift in stocking rate	15%
Increase in annual net return (\$)	\$199,500
Collar and labour cost (\$/yr)	\$110,888
Net Present Value (\$)	\$113,255
Internal Rate of Return	15.2%
Payback Period	5 years
Discounted Payback Period	5 years

Now consider a second scenario. The same business achieves the same 15pc increase in stocking rate, not through virtual fencing, but through improved management discipline, more deliberate grazing decisions, regular feed budgeting, increased monitoring and greater management confidence.

Scenario 2: Additional Livestock Through Management Improvement

Measure	Livestock Only
Livestock investment (\$)	\$567,572
Relative lift in stocking rate	15%
Increase in annual net return (\$)	\$199,500
Collar and labour cost (\$/yr)	-
Net Present Value (\$)	\$541,108
Internal Rate of Return	35.1%
Payback Period	3 years
Discounted Payback Period	4 years

The difference is striking. The livestock-only strategy generates almost five times the Net Present Value and more than double the Internal Rate of Return.

This comparison forms the basis of an important investment question: How much of the value is being created by the technology, and how much is being created by carrying more livestock?

The Benchmarking Perspective

Agrista benchmarking has consistently demonstrated substantial variation in stocking rates and feed utilisation between businesses operating in similar environments. Farms with comparable rainfall, soil types and enterprise structures often carry markedly different livestock numbers and generate substantially different levels of production per hectare.

The implication is straightforward: Many businesses are not operating at the

stocking rates required to optimise feed use.

This is not a criticism, nor does it imply every business should immediately increase livestock numbers.

It does suggest, however, that many businesses still have unrealised production potential before infrastructure becomes the primary limiting constraint.

In these situations:

- The feed is already being grown.
- The land resource already exists.
- Livestock systems are already established.
- The opportunity may simply require a different management decision.

Separating the outcome from the tool

Many virtual fencing business cases are justified using outcomes such as:

- Increased stocking rates
- Improved feed utilisation
- Higher production per hectare

These are valuable outcomes. But they are outcomes, not technologies.

Virtual fencing is simply one potential pathway to achieving them.

This distinction matters because one of the most common mistakes in investment analysis is attributing value to a tool when the value is actually generated by the underlying management change.

The critical question therefore becomes: Could a meaningful proportion of this improvement have been achieved through management action alone?

If the answer is yes, then virtual fencing may be helping unlock value, but it is not necessarily the primary source of that value.

The most important comparison

Figure 1 shows the difference in earnings and return on investment between a production benefit achieved through increased stocking intensity with and without a virtual fence. Without the investment in the virtual fence, the net cumulative earnings and return on investment are \$427,800 and 20% higher respectively without the virtual

This does not prove virtual fencing is a poor investment. It demonstrates something far more important.

The majority of value is being generated by carrying more livestock.

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The collar itself is not generating profit. The livestock are. The technology only earns its keep if it creates benefits that cannot be achieved through management improvement alone.

Why the evidence often overstates the technology

There is a second reason the published returns to virtual fencing often look better than the returns a producer will actually experience.

Most published results come from product-funded trials or product-facilitated demonstration farms.

- The farms selected to trial new technology are rarely average operators.
- The trial period usually coincides with far closer monitoring of paddocks, stock and data than normal business-as-usual.
- The published gain reflects the combined effect of the collar, the closer attention, and the manager selected for the trial – not the collar in isolation. This is a recognised pattern in technology adoption research, sometimes called the technology halo effect or co-intervention bias: crediting a tool for gains produced by the management and monitoring that arrived alongside it.

A related effect, documented in workplace studies, is that people change their behaviour simply because they know they are being observed, regardless of the tool involved. A closely-watched paddock during a trial is not the same paddock the rest of the year.

None of this means the published results are wrong. It means they usually answer a different question to the one a producer actually needs answered. Not “did this technology work on a demonstration farm,” but “will this deliver a return over and above what closer management alone would achieve on my place, without the collar.”

The psychology behind technology adoption

If the economics can favour management action, why does technology often

attract so much enthusiasm? The answer is behavioural as much as economic.

Technology feels like progress.

A producer investing more than \$100,000 in collars, subscriptions and infrastructure receives immediate evidence of action. There are collars, demonstrations, dashboards, apps, maps and support teams. The investment is tangible.

Management improvement is far less visible. It requires:

- Confidence
- Discipline
- Feed budgeting
- Monitoring
- Risk management
- Continuous decision making

Technology provides a visible solution, whereas management improvement is often invisible.

As a result, producers may become more willing to implement difficult management changes once technology is installed. Ironically, a significant proportion of the resulting benefit may come from increased management focus rather than from the technology itself.

The expensive motivation problem

This creates an uncomfortable possibility. Virtual fencing may, in some situations, function as an expensive source of motivation. If benchmarking indicates that feed is already under-utilised and stocking rate could be increased through better management, then producers may be paying substantial sums to achieve outcomes that were already available.

The technology may still generate a positive return. But that does not automatically make it the highest-return investment.

The relevant comparison is not: Virtual fencing versus doing nothing.

The relevant comparison is: Virtual fencing versus the next-best alternative use of capital.

In many businesses that alternative may simply be carrying more livestock.

When virtual fencing may be exactly the right investment

None of this should be interpreted as an argument against virtual fencing. There are many situations where it may generate exceptional value:

- Expensive conventional fencing requirements
- Large paddocks requiring subdivision
- Difficult terrain
- Labour shortages
- Environmental management obligations

- Situations where infrastructure genuinely limits grazing control

In these circumstances, virtual fencing may unlock opportunities that management alone cannot achieve.

The test is straightforward: could the same grazing intensity realistically be achieved with conventional fencing and labour, at reasonable cost? Where the honest answer is no – because of scale, fragmentation, unmanned country or the need for night moves – the technology is solving a genuine physical constraint, not simply buying discipline the business could have exercised anyway.

The economics become much easier to justify.

A better question for producers

Before investing in virtual fencing, producers should ask:

- Am I already stocked at levels delivering optimum feed utilisation?
- Is infrastructure genuinely limiting feed utilisation?
- What proportion of the expected benefit comes from management change?
- What is the cheapest way to capture most of the opportunity?
- How does this investment compare with simply carrying more livestock?
- Would I make this management change anyway, even if the technology did not exist?

Could I trial the management change for one season, on existing infrastructure, and measure the result before committing capital?

These questions force attention back to the core principle of capital allocation.

Conclusions

Virtual fencing may well become one of the most important grazing technologies developed in recent decades. But technology should not be evaluated against today's performance. It should be evaluated against the **best management alternative**.

Analysis of Agrista's farm benchmarking data suggests many grazing businesses still have opportunities to improve feed utilisation and increase stocking rates through management action alone.

Author: John Francis

Original Article: <https://www.beefcentral.com/news/virtual-fencing-or-better-management-asking-the-right-investment-questions/>

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Jordie was raised on a mixed operation in southern Alberta. Jordie has attended various courses on stockmanship, livestock marketing, soil and forage. Since 2006 Jordie has taken numerous courses with Hand 'n Hand Livestock Solutions with Whit Hibbard and Dawn Hnatow. Jordie spent 12 years sorting cattle in auction markets before moving to the southern United States to operate a cow/calf program.



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Mission: Assisting producers in profitably improving their forages and regenerating their soils through innovation and education.

Vision: We envision a global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

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