

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Unit 4A, 710 Centre, St. SE High River, AB T1V 0H3
Phone: (403) 995-9466 - www.foothillsforage.com
GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
November 2026

Director's Note - Cole Hughes

Greetings FFGA

That's it! I've had it; I'm donning the long johns at long last. Winter's finally struck a blow, and for the first time since April, I've been cold all day. Although I'm not sad to see the warm days go, it's easier to heat the house than to cool it.

Many of the fall jobs are out of the way; we've weaned, preg tested, picked up miles of frigging electric fence, and completed the always fun water lines blow out. For those of you who don't know, if you weaken for even a second while clearing those lines, you risk an ice snake shooting back at you fast enough to give you a black eye.

This year we're dealing with a new challenge on our operation. The developers that own a fair-sized chunk of ground we're on are moving on from us after 22 years. It's becoming more common these days, especially being this close to Calgary/Cochrane. It's always disappointing and sad to see; it becomes a warzone for the wildlife, and you get to see the soil you worked so hard to build piled up in a mound for construction.

The real challenge is that we've been here for so long. Meaning we have so much to move - troughs, pumps, buildings, sheds, last year's feed, corrals, and like 60 frigging gates (you'd think I was withholding some good information the way I'm 'gatekeeping'). A dumb joke, but seriously a sucky job.

Pro tip: tape the hinges into the gate. Unfortunately, I didn't think to do that with the first 20 and hated my life hauling them. It's been a lot of trips with the trailer already, and I don't think I'm even halfway done. If I could take the topsoil, I would.

By the time you read this, we'll have the cows moved to the home place, roughly half the herd. And you may be thinking, will these guys sell off cows? No! We'll try a new adaptation and capitalise on opportunities before we part with a cow. This isn't our first rodeo losing rented land to development; we've learned to pivot and keep our headcount stable. This time around we're going to adopt some new technology! Cow Collars! We're excited to partake in this new endeavour. With the herd coming together into 1 MEGA herd and being on less ground, we were faced with a tough hand. But we believe utilising the collars fencing capabilities, we can improve our summer grazing to hold more head, help to stretch our fall/winter grazing, and maximize our winter feeding (bale & swath grazing). It'll be quite the shift in how we've managed our cows, but we're up for the new challenge and curious to see how it shakes out.

So that is all; Keep your long johns by, socks dry & head high

Cole Hughes



Photo: Cole Hughes

IN THIS ISSUE

Corn fields emerge as good forage for overwintering beef cows	**3**
Genomic testing helps cattle producers select heifers	**6**
Getting more beef from every acre with better pastures	**8 & 9**

KLR MARKETING
GRASS | MONEY | LIVESTOCK
FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
CENTRAL ALBERTA FORAGE AND LIVESTOCK ASSOCIATION
Mountain View COUNTY



KLR
MARKETING SCHOOL
WITH GRAHAME REES & MEL KIEL

JANUARY 26-28, 2027
OLDS, ALBERTA

TOPICS INCLUDE:
- Identify overpriced and underpriced livestock
- Calculate your cost of carry
- Determine the true value of your grass
- Make confident buy and sell decisions
- Replace emotion with a proven decision-making framework
- Balance grass, money, and livestock for consistent profit

COST:
$1,650.00 CAD
for 1st person from operation
$1,350.00 CAD
for additional people from same operation

Limited Spots Available
Register Now!

FOR MORE INFORMATION & TO REGISTER,
CONTACT KAYLA AT FOOTHILLS FORAGE & GRAZING ASSOCIATION
(403) 995-9466
comm@foothillsforage.com

On the Cover: Visiting Mt. Sentinel Ranch during the Oldman Watershed Council and FFGA Bus Tour Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!

ROCKY VIEW COUNTY
M.D. of PINCHER CREEK
CARDSTON COUNTY
FOOTHILLS COUNTY
MUNICIPAL DISTRICT of BIGHORN
MD of Willow Creek
WHEATLAND COUNTY AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
Mountain View COUNTY
Vulcan COUNTY
Kneehill COUNTY
COUNTY NO. 4 NEWELL
MD of RANCHLAND NO. 66

Corn fields emerge as good forage for overwintering beef cows


Photo: FFGA

Corn fields grown especially for overwintering beef cows are a patchwork across our Prairies. Whole corn plants can provide substantial nutrition to maintain precious body condition of gestating beef cows.

Yet, nobody should open the gate to any field and allow cows to stampede into it. That's because there are still some issues in order to make grazing standing corn a good winter forage. I recommend that a mid-winter review of any such feeding program be made to assure all cowherd requirements for essential nutrients are met.

For example, the higher dietary energy of standing corn makes it nutritionally more attractive as compared to other common overwinter forages, as illustrated in the table here.

TABLE: A COMPARISON OF OVERWINTERING FORAGES.

	Standing corn	Corn residue	Swathed barley	Barley straw
Dry matter (%)	90	90	90	90
Crude protein (%)	8.0	5.5	11.0	5.0
TDN (%)	64	49	55	41
NDF (%)	51	65	52	73
Lignin (%)	6.0	10	5.0	9.0

I recognize that the nutrient requirements of mid-gestation cows need 52-55 per cent TDN and about eight to nine per cent crude protein on a daily basis to maintain an optimum body condition of 5 to 6 and an early-term fetus.

As they move into the last trimester of pregnancy (where 75 per cent fetal growth occurs), pre-calving cows need 56-58 per cent TDN and about 11-12 per cent protein. It seems to me corn grazing will cover both phases of dietary energy requirements.

Unfortunately, cows grazing standing-corn acres as their source of overwinter feed will barely meet crude protein requirements during mid-gestation and fail to meet them during late-gestation.

That's why there are many commercial protein supplements that help complement a gestation beef feeding program based on grazing corn fields. For example, many producers purchase protein range cubes/pellets, often made from high-protein distillers' grains or 20 to 30 per cent protein cattle lick-tubs, that can be placed for every 25 beef cows throughout the cornfield.

Supplementing protein to grazing corn seems like a straightforward fix; however, I've talked to many producers and they tell me there are other unique hurdles. Here are some of their experiences to overcome them.

Field acidosis

One producer moves his 150 black Angus cows, from one grazed paddock to a fresh paddock of 10 acres, every week. In this way, he prevents acidosis upsets, since palatable ears of corn are eaten first (two to three days), then the leaves and thin stalks (two to three days), and finally leftover hard stalks.

Mould and mycotoxins

During a particularly wet fall, I drove past a field of standing corn in which its leaves were literarily blue with surface mould. To prevent abortions possibly caused by potential mycotoxins, I formulated a mineral with mycotoxin binders that was fed to this cowherd grazing within its blue corn field acres.

Water intake

Many producers rely upon adequate snowfall throughout the winter to meet the natural water requirements of their grazing beef cows. In one particular case, there isn't enough snow, so the producer dug a water line and placed an accessible waterer along the corn field near his home farm.

Mineral program

Corn plants are notoriously low in calcium content. Since a beef cow requires up to 30 grams of calcium per day (as well as other macro- and micro-minerals and vitamins) a well-balanced high-calcium/modest phosphorus commercial mineral should be provided at 70 to 100 grams per head per day.

Cold weather

As the winter weather becomes much colder; the beef cows' dietary energy requirement, just to stay warm, increases by two per cent for every 1 C drop in temperature below 0 C. This means that when the outside temperature is -25 C, the cow's energy requirements increase by 50 per cent. To remedy this issue, many producers provide energy-enriched supplementary feeds.

One producer told me that he did not set aside and grow 200 acres of standing corn fields that he normally would have planted in the last 10 years. Instead, he planted and set up barley swaths (nutrient value also outlined in the table here).

The reason for the switch: three years of drought had led to not enough corn biomass on its own merit to overwinter his 350 beef cows.

The way this producer and other people still assess it, grazing standing corn is a good forage to overwinter beef cows. Its success depends upon how well its nutrition (and overcoming hurdles) keep the cow herd in good body condition until calving time — more specifically, when a healthy cow gives birth to a vibrant newborn calf.

Author: Peter Vitti
Original Article:
https://www.grainews.ca/cattlemans-corner/corn-fields-emerge-as-good-forage-for-overwintering-beef-cows/

SAVE THE DATES

Protecting the Farm and the Family: A Two-Part Transition Planning Series

Part 1: Dollars & Dirt - Clarity Before Equity
November 26, 2026 5:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Beiseker Community Centre

Learn about farm succession planning and transferring the business.

Part 2: Protecting the Legacy You're Still Building
January 7, 2027 - 5:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Acme Community Centre

Learn about estate planning and the transfer of assets

Cost/event: $40pp (includes supper) or $140 for a family of 4
*add individual tickets for more than 4 family members

with Annessa Good-Hassard of Peak Heritage Consulting Ltd.

Annessa's focus is to provide unique options, strategies, and outcomes that dive into the heart of family dynamics, business issues and estate plan ramifications.



More Info & Registration:

https://protecting-the-farm-and-the-family.eventbrite.ca

Contact:

Daniela Archer
Mountain View County Agricultural Services
Ph: 403-335-3311 ext. 204
Email: darcher@mvcounty.com

ROCKY VIEW COUNTY
Mountain View COUNTY
WHEATLAND COUNTY AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION



Thank you for our Corporate Partners

Gold Sponsors

COVERS & CO.

Millborn™

AB Alberta Beef — ALBERTA'S #1 BEEF MAGAZINE

BEEF illustrated

envu™

GEMSTONE CATTLE COMPANY

RANCH YOUR WAY

Unique Financial Services
AFSC
INSURANCE • LENDING • INCOME STABILIZATION

Silver Sponsors

BeefSmart CONSULTING INC.

BrettYoung™

CORTEVA™ agriscience

DUCKS UNLIMITED

BLUE ROCK ANIMAL NUTRITION

RAWEST IN!

I M
BIG SKY FEEDER ASSOCIATION

RANGE RW WARD

Genomic testing helps cattle producers select heifers

Photo: FFGA



Which heifers will make the best cows?

Producers in a one-year genomic testing project made their picks the way they normally would and then compared those choices with what the DNA said.

A blind test against the producers' own picks

Saskatchewan Agriculture livestock and feed extension specialist Chelsey Siemens recently wrapped up the Genomic Testing for Replacement Heifer Selection project involving three commercial beef operations.

The producers selected their replacements without seeing the genomic results, allowing the team to compare genetic scores with their usual selection decisions.

"We kept the results of the genomic testing a secret from the three producers that we worked with, and they chose their replacement heifers the way they would normally do it. Then we compared those results afterwards," said Siemens.

The project found that heifers selected through traditional methods tended to have higher genomic scores for growth and performance traits. The testing also provided information on maternal traits that are difficult to evaluate in young cattle, including longevity, pregnancy rate, calving ease and milk production.

Twenty years of mother looks and attitude

Ryan Blanchette, who runs about 140 cows near Kerrobert, Sask., has more than 20 years of experience selecting cattle. Before the project, he relied largely on what he could see in a heifer and what he knew about its mother.

"I just selected a lot, basically mother looks, attitude, being around them," said Blanchette.

The genomic results gave him information on traits such as longevity and fertility that he could not assess from appearance alone.

"It's predicting longevity and stuff like that. Fertility, a few things like that," said Blanchette.

Keeping heifers he would have passed on

Some of the genomic scores differed from what Blanchette expected. He kept several heifers he might not normally have selected because the scores suggested they could make good maternal cows with desirable milk production and temperament.

"I guess I'm going to throw the dice and try it," he said.

The longevity scores raised some questions for him. Blanchette has cows that have remained productive for a decade or more, yet some younger heifers received stronger scores for longevity.

"I don't know. I guess only time will tell then," he said.

A tiebreaker for the last 20 per cent

Joel Kampen, who runs a 200-cow operation near Kindersley, Sask., sees the technology as a tool for resolving difficult decisions rather than replacing his own judgment.

He traditionally selects heifers based on appearance, disposition and the qualities of their mothers.

"I think where it's going to come down to is in the last 10 or 20 per cent," said Kampen.

When two animals are difficult to separate, he sees value in having genetic information to make the final choice.

"If there's a tie between two, then you can go to the data and pick on the DNA data over your eye appeal," said Kampen.

Seventeen traits and a parentage check

The Neogen Igenity Beef test used in the project assigns each animal a score from one to 10 for 17 traits, including calving ease, stayability, heifer pregnancy rate, docility, milk, feed efficiency, growth and several carcass traits. Animals also receive maternal, production and terminal index scores.

Testing covered 67 heifers on one ranch, 74 on another and 32 on a third. Herd bulls were also included on two operations.

Bull testing provided another piece of information through multi-sire parentage, which identified the sire of individual heifers.

Kampen sees parentage as an important part of the test.

"The most valuable thing is just knowing the parentage," he said.

With several bulls running together, identifying the sire of each daughter allows producers to compare the performance of females from different bulls.

Scores against actual weaning weights

The project also provided a comparison between genomic predictions and actual performance. On one ranch, individual weaning weights generally increased as genomic weaning-weight scores rose from three through seven.

Siemens said the results do not mean producers should abandon traditional selection.

The report notes that genomic data should not be the sole criterion for selecting replacement heifers. Structural soundness and actual performance remain important, while genomic testing can provide information that is difficult to assess early in a heifer's life.

Is it worth the cost

Siemens and her team also wanted to know whether producers found the information useful and practical.

"We want to see, are those results useful for the producer? Are they easy to evaluate? Are they customizable for the operation and, bottom line, is it worth the cost?" she said.

Tissue samples were collected during existing cattle-handling events, and the project found the process could be incorporated into normal handling. The total cost for sampling supplies, testing and shipping was about $51 per animal in 2025.

Proving the genetics to buyers

Kampen said the information could also help him demonstrate the genetics of replacement heifers to buyers.

"If I can prove those out and get an extra, I guess, $50 an animal, then yeah, it's a no-brainer," he said.

He kept 61 heifers from the project so he can continue watching their pregnancy and longevity over several years. He would like to see longer follow-up to determine whether the early genomic predictions match how the cattle perform.

Blanchette plans to continue testing replacement heifers and compare the results with how those cattle perform.

"I don't think you could do it once and just be done. I think you have to do it repetitive," he said.

Author: William DeKay
Original Article:
https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/livestock/beef-cattle/genomic-testing-replacement-heifers-2/

OUR READERS. YOUR CUSTOMERS

With a combined circulation just over 17,000 mailed directly to home addresses, we are your doorway into Canada's largest beef producing region - **Alberta and Saskatchewan.**

Advertising has worked very well for our clients. In fact….

OVER 85% ADVERTISING RESPONSE RATES!



WITH **35 YEARS** OF PUBLISHING

you could say our longevity is a solid testament to effective, targeted, and cost effective advertising we bring to our clients.

Alberta BEEF MAGAZINE

BEEF illustrated

P. 403-250-1090 I E. beefmag@telusplanet.net I www.beefnews.com

Getting more beef from every acre with better pastures


Photo: FFGA

Canadian beef producers face no shortage of challenges, making efficiency and productivity increasingly important. Improving pasture productivity and forage quality is one of the most practical ways to enhance both economic and environmental performance. Better-quality forage supports higher weight gains, improved reproductive efficiency and more efficient use of feed resources.

Developing perennial forage varieties that deliver higher yields, better nutritive value and greater resilience to environmental stresses is an important opportunity for Canadian beef producers. Equally important is understanding how forage species work together in pasture mixtures, particularly the role of legumes such as alfalfa.

Legumes such as alfalfa contribute biologically fixed nitrogen, reducing fertilizer requirements while supporting soil health and grass production.

Before new forage varieties can be evaluated in large-scale grazing trials, researchers often use laboratory screening techniques to identify the most promising candidates. These preliminary evaluations allow forage yield, quality and fermentation characteristics to be compared before committing to costly and time-consuming grazing studies.

What the Saskatchewan research shows

From 2023 to 2026, a research team led by Drs. Gabriel Ribeiro, Bill Biligetu and Bart Lardner at the University of Saskatchewan's Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence (LFCE) near Clavet, Sask., evaluated several perennial forage varieties grown either as monocultures or in binary mixtures with alfalfa.

The project was led by visiting PhD student Gustavo Camargos from Brazil. The grasses evaluated included CDC Torsion meadow bromegrass, AAC Torque hybrid bromegrass, and CDC Salt King hybrid wheatgrass. These were paired with either Equinox alfalfa, an industry standard, or S914AF, a new alfalfa breeding line developed from populations selected from more than 15 long-term grazing sites across Western Canada.

VARIETIES AT A GLANCE

- **C**DC Torsion meadow bromegrass: steady yields in dry years, top digestibility, nine per cent less methane
- AAC Torque hybrid bromegrass: top yielder with good moisture, 21 per cent over Salt King in wet 2024
- CDC Salt King hybrid wheatgrass: lower digestibility but adapted to saline soils
- S914AF alfalfa: lower lignin than Equinox, about eight per cent more digestible yield in mixtures

A yield and consistency trade-off

Throughout the four years of evaluation, CDC Torsion and CDC Salt King produced similar biomass yields. AAC Torque, however, demonstrated impressive yield potential when moisture conditions were favourable.

In 2024, a year with above-average precipitation, Torque out-yielded Salt King by 21 per cent and Torsion by 17 per cent. Across the four-year study, Torque produced approximately 11 per cent more forage than Torsion and 12 per cent more than Salt King, although these differences were not statistically significant. For producers operating in areas with reliable growing-season moisture, Torque appears capable of generating substantial forage production.

Torsion, on the other hand, distinguished itself through consistency. During the drier years of the study, including 2023, 2025 and 2026, it maintained stable production and showed superior drought resilience. For producers managing risk in moisture-limited environments, this consistency can be just as valuable as maximum yield potential.

Digestibility and methane

Forage quality told an equally interesting story. Across the four years, Torsion consistently exhibited a higher leaf-to-stem ratio than the other grasses. This characteristic translated into superior digestibility of both dry matter and fibre during laboratory fermentation evaluations using rumen fluid.

Improved digestibility allows cattle to extract more nutrients and energy from forage, supporting weight gain and reproductive performance. Torsion also produced about nine per cent less methane per unit of digestible dry matter than the other grasses.

Salt King ranked somewhat lower in the laboratory digestibility assessments. However, it brings an important advantage that should not be overlooked: adaptation to saline soils. On land affected by salinity, where many forage species struggle to establish and persist, Salt King may offer significant production benefits not fully captured by this study.

New alfalfa shows promise

The alfalfa results were also encouraging. While grass-alfalfa mixtures did not produce dramatic differences in overall forage quality, the new S914AF alfalfa consistently demonstrated lower lignin concentrations and greater digestibility than Equinox. Pastures containing S914AF also tended to maintain a higher proportion of grass over time.

This may be related to the growth characteristics of S914AF. The variety appears to mature somewhat more slowly, helping preserve forage quality while allowing grasses to remain more competitive within the mixture.

Mixtures containing S914AF produced, on average, approximately eight per cent more digestible dry matter yield per acre

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

than mixtures containing Equinox, although differences were not significant in every year of the study. Nevertheless, the trend suggests potential for greater carrying capacity and improved pasture productivity.

Looking ahead

These plot-scale and laboratory results provide valuable insight into forage varieties that may help improve the productivity and resilience of Western Canadian grazing systems.

Among the grasses evaluated, AAC Torque demonstrated exceptional yield potential under favourable growing conditions, while CDC Torsion combined strong production with excellent digestibility, lower methane production and drought resilience. The new S914AF alfalfa also showed promise as a companion legume capable of supporting productive, high-quality grass-based pastures.

The next step is to move these promising forage combinations into grazing studies, where cattle performance, stocking rates, pasture persistence and whole-farm productivity can be evaluated under real-world conditions.

For producers, the takeaway is clear: improving forage systems is about much more than producing more grass. It is about producing more digestible forage, improving animal performance, supporting healthier soils and making better use of every acre. When pasture productivity, animal performance and soil health improve together, profitability and sustainability tend to follow.

Author: Gabriel Ribeiro, Gustavo Camargos
Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/nutrition/forage-varieties-pasture-trial/



Western Canadian Grazing Conference

WESTERN CANADA
Conference on Soil Health

Western Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing

RELEARN | RESTORE | REGENERATE | RENEW

DECEMBER 8 - 10, 2026

DOUBLE TREE BY HILTON WEST EDMONTON

Guest Speakers Include

Michael Thompson

Jill Clapperton

Cynthia Kallenbach

And many more.....

REGISTRATION FEES

PRODUCER	$ 550.00
FARM UNIT	$ 1000.00
ONE DAY REGISTRATION	$ 350.00
STUDENT	$ 450.00
STUDENT (ONE DAY)	$ 250.00
BANQUET TICKET	$ 85.00

BANQUET TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED SEPARATELY

DON'T DELAY, SEATS ARE LIMITED!!

VISIT WWW.ABSOILGRAZING.COM TODAY

The Red-Bow Ag Partnership Presents

Ranching Opportunities

Featuring Kit Pharo

February 4, 2027

- NEW LOCATION -

Acme Community Centre

Brought to you by:

Lakeland College

Kneehill County

Foothills Forage and Grazing Association

Rocky View County

Municipal District of Bighorn

Mountain View County

Wheatland County

Clearwater County

Millborn

CAFLA

Central Alberta Forage and Livestock Association

Full Agenda & Registration

redbowag.com

Ladies Livestock Lessons

January 14, 2027
Madden Community Hall

Breakout Sessions hosted at W.A. Ranches at UCalgary

Register at:
https://www.redbowag.com/

Topics Include:

- Farm Succession Planning
- Diversification in Agriculture
- Neonatal Calf Care at W.A. Ranches
- Cattle Injection Clinic at W.A. Ranches
- Cattle Handling at W.A. Ranches

Board of Directors

Chairman
Sarah Green
(403) 603-8722

Vice-Chairman
Graydon Garner
(403) 325-3117

Treasurer
Dave Sammons
(403) 934-0940

Directors
Wolter van der Kamp
(780) 335-3249

Angela Kumlin
(403) 803-9190

Laura Buss
(780) 289-3757

Ben Campbell
(403) 803-9190

Martina Wade
(403) 820-1715

Matt Malyk
(403) 836-0655

Brandon Toews
(403) 850-8249

Cole Hughes
(403) 827-0920

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

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

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

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

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.

This Publication is made possible by our major funder - Results Driven Agriculture Research

FFGA is a proud member of