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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS December 2025

Chairman's Note - Daryl Chubb

Greetings FFGA Members

Where has 2025 gone? It has been another interesting year to navigate as we weaved between the forces of Mother Nature, commodity prices, and politics. Just when we think the world can't get any crazier, it still finds new ways to surprise us.

We had a successful year, though not without its challenges. Like many areas, things were not looking very good this spring. With very little snow and minimal spring rains, pastures and crops struggled until the latter part of June, when the skies finally opened. We were blessed with over 12 inches of rain through July. Locally, grain and forage yields ended up at or near record levels—a huge relief as stockpiles were dwindling. We were able to grow plenty of winter feed and purchase hay and straw at reasonable prices. October also provided fantastic weather to complete all our fall work. We took advantage of strong calf prices early in the month and wrapped up a successful preg check.

As usual, the FFGA staff is in the process of planning many great events for this fall and winter. Environmental Farm Plan Workshops, Ranching Opportunities, and Ladies Livestock Lessons are just a few with planning underway. If you are interested in a guided trip through Uruguay, please call the office or check out the website for details. There may still be time to get registered. Our Christmas Party is coming up on December 5, with an afternoon event featuring several local legacy ranches who will share their history and stories of success. This panel will be moderated by Kelly Sydoryk.

As I write this, one of our biggest workshops—Sell/Buy Marketing with Doug Ferguson—is currently underway. It sold out quickly with a waiting list. If you were unable to attend this year, stay tuned to the website and future newsletters for

upcoming opportunities. Just a reminder the next Western Canadian Conference on Soil Health and Grazing will be in December 2026 in Edmonton.

This year, the board will see three directors term out. We will be looking to fill these positions at our AGM in March. If you are interested in learning more about becoming a director, please speak with any current board member or contact the office. We are also pleased to announce Shaun Haney from Real Agriculture as our keynote speaker. He will be discussing his journey and sharing insights on navigating farm succession.

This will be my final Director's Note as I complete my sixth year on the board. I began in the middle of COVID, during a time of online meetings—and to be honest, it sucked! The greatest benefit of serving on this board has been meeting new people, interacting with others, and learning together. I have truly enjoyed my time here and all the connections made. Laura, Kayla, and Sonja have made this volunteer role both easy and rewarding.

As I sign off, I want to thank the board, staff, and alumni. I can confidently say I have learned far more from this organization than I have given.

Merry Christmas

Daryl Chubb

(Photo: Daryl Chubb)



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*Merry
Christmas*

FROM THE FFGA BOARD & STAFF

On the Cover: Daryl and his family moving cattle. Photo: Daryl Chubb

Thank you for your support!



Beyond the Abstract: Does Bale Grazing Make Sense?

Photo: FFGA



With rising input costs, many cow-calf producers are looking for ways to reduce expenses and improve profitability. Because feed often accounts for nearly two-thirds of annual cow costs, finding ways to lower feeding expenses presents a major opportunity for cost savings.

In Canada and across the Northern Great Plains, bale grazing has become a well-established winter-feeding strategy.

However, adoption in Nebraska remains limited. Producers who practice bale grazing often point to lower feed delivery costs, reduced labor needs, and better nutrient distribution from manure and urine as key benefits.

Research Overview

Sedivec et al. (2018) examined the effects of bale grazing vs. summer grazing on forage production, forage quality, and soil health across four North Dakota ranches.

Sites included clay-pan, thin loamy, loamy, and shallow gravel ecological zones, and all treatments were applied to smooth brome hayfields and pastures.

Key Findings

Forage production: Eighteen months after grazing, grass yield increased at 0, 5, and 10 feet from bale centers compared to summer

grazing.

Forage quality: Six months after treatments, forage crude protein (CP) was higher within 10 feet of bale centers. Forage phosphorus was also greater at 0 and 5 feet.

Soil nutrient profile: Soil NO₃-N, phosphorus, and potassium were elevated 6- and 18-months following bale grazing compared to summer grazing. However, soil organic matter did not differ between grazing treatments.

Practical Considerations

Site selection: Avoid bale grazing on native range or newly seeded hayfields and pastures. Additionally, bale grazing can create “hot spots” of nutrients, so utilization on riparian areas is not recommended. Bales can introduce weed seeds or invasive species—focus instead on existing hayfields or improved pastures.

Bale type: Round bales are preferred for bale grazing due to less surface area exposed to the elements compared to square bales. While using higher quality hay may allow cows to gain condition, low-medium quality hay for bale grazing is favored due to increased trampling, fouling, and bedding use compared to bunks or bale rings.

Nutrient management: If soil fertility or productivity is already adequate, consider other winter-feeding options, such as windrow grazing for less concentrated nutrient deposition.

Bale spacing: Adjust bale spacing based on your nutrient goals. Spacing bales roughly 40 feet apart tends to provide relatively uniform nutrient distribution.

Weather management: In wetter climates, place bales on their sides to reduce nutrient leaching. In dryer climates, placing bales on end can reduce time re-

quired to unwrap bales prior to grazing.

Feed allocation: Use temporary fencing to ration feed, allowing cattle access to 2–5 days’ worth of feed at a time. This helps control waste and reduce labor.

Cow condition: Monitor body condition scores (BCS) throughout winter. Depending on bale nutrient content, weather conditions, and stage of gestation, cows may require additional energy supplementation.

Applications and Takeaways

Bale grazing can be an effective strategy to reduce feeding costs while improving soil fertility in low-productivity hayfields or improved pastures. Compared to feeding in drylots, bale grazing can be accomplished with less machinery and labor costs, while concentrating nutrients from manure and urine in the field.

When implemented on appropriate sites and under suitable winter conditions, bale grazing offers a practical, low-cost option for delivering feed to livestock and improving nutrient capture on soils where it can be utilized to grow additional forage for cow-calf operations.

Author: Brock Ortner and Aaron Berger

Original Article: <https://www.tsln.com/news/beyond-the-abstract-does-bale-grazing-make-sense/>

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USask study integrating cows, forage for better crop health



Photo: FFGA

When it comes to incorporating livestock and forage in cropping systems, one researcher is looking at whether soil health gains might be enough to sell more farmers on the practice.

Maryse Bourgault, an assistant professor and researcher at the University of Saskatchewan, has several plots at the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence. At the centre's field day in late June, the sun beat down on field day attendees as they walked through the plots examining the different varieties, which included both cash crops and forages.

Bourgault started at the University of Saskatchewan in 2020, and this research is one of the first studies she established. The goal is to see both how it can affect soil health and benefit the producer.

"In the long term, if you're looking at the economics of it, then maybe there's enough of those productivity gains to compensate for some of the lesser revenues that you might have when you have forages instead," Bourgault said.

Research

Bourgault's research focuses on agronomy and soil science. With reintegrating livestock into cropping systems, her goal is to improve soil health.

She initially got the idea for this research project when she was in Australia, and they were integrating livestock into a cropping system and cover crops.

"It took me a while to figure out exactly what we wanted to do with this (here), but the idea is to see how we

can reintegrate cattle, forages and perennials into the diversified cropping systems that we have and try to help us build soil organic matter," Bourgault said.

They are focusing on both cattle and perennials because they don't know if it is having animals on the land that improves soil health, or if it is the benefits brought by perennial crops through their root base system.

"The idea was to try and see, are there ways for grain producers to maybe put aside a little bit of that land ... have cows come over for a few years, maybe, or even on a more annual basis, if you have annual forages, so that we could try and build that organic matter in a way that was perhaps a little bit quicker than if we only use plants," she said.

According to Bourgault, soil health is the basis of productivity in agriculture, so focusing on soil health is beneficial to all producers.

"There's a lot of interest from farmers as well to try and make sure that the foundation, the soil, is in good health, so that it actually keeps producing and it's sustainable in the long run."

Forages and livestock

To conduct this research, they planted five different annual and perennial crops at the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence research site.

The first cropping system is diversified grain. Some of these crops include canola, malt barley, wheat and field peas.

Another cropping system introduces a serial forage mix every four years, and in another, the forage mix is introduced every two years.

The other two cropping systems are put to pasture for either three years or six years and then cultivated into grain crops.

"The whole idea is to see what will be the impact of these different cropping systems on crop yield as well as soil health," said Bourgault's PhD student, Mandela Alema, at the Livestock

and Forage Centre of Excellence field day.

Bourgault said they like to try out as many different crops as possible.

"For annual forages, we tend to do mixtures. So, depending on the system that we have and where they are in the rotation, we'll have mixtures of cereals and peas or cereals and pulses. But we don't want to have too much of the same crops."

Bourgault said they integrate cattle for a short period in July and, if they're able to, in September or October. They take soil samples once a week to monitor differences in all the different systems.

"We're taking measurements like yield and yield components, and we're also taking soil measurements on a fairly regular basis, as well, to try and monitor the changes that are happening and how quickly we might be able to see changes in some of the soil health indicators that we're looking for."

For the first grazing period, the cattle graze only the annual forage mixtures and the pastures. For the second grazing period in the fall, they graze after harvest.

"In every block we have a strip of exclusion zone ... we want to see what is the impact of the cropping system, with the grazing on soil health," Alema said.

Challenges and results

The study has been going for six years. So far, they have not seen significant changes in soil organic carbon in different cropping systems.

However, Bourgault associates this with their challenges with weeds and perennials that come back.

For example, they are having trouble with sainfoin because it is resistant to glyphosate.

"Preliminary results at the moment show that we actually have a decrease in yield getting out of those perennial systems, and we suspect that a big part of that is due to the competition from the perennial phase that hasn't quite

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died yet. So, we're still struggling with that. We're struggling a little bit with weed control as well."

She thinks the sandy soils at the research site may have something to do with that.

But Bourgault is excited for the next phase of the study. They are entering year six, which means soon, the pastures on a six-year rotation will be cultivated into a cash crop.

"We're going to start getting out of those longer perennials and starting to look a little bit at the differences between the treatments," she said.

Though there have been challenges with getting the results she ex-

pected, Bourgault said she is optimistic for the future of this research.

"I think sometimes you just have to stick with it for a little bit longer, and not get discouraged if things don't look exactly like you want them to do, because perennials are not going to grow like an annual does. So you have to give it a bit more time."

Author: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

Original Article: [https://](https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/news/usask-study-integrating-cows-forage-for-better-crop-health/)

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FFGA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MARCH 18, 2026- HIGHWOOD CENTRE, HIGH RIVER

- 11:30AM - REGISTRATION
- 12:00PM - LUNCH
- 1:00PM - AGM BUSINESS MEETING
- 2:00PM - KEYNOTE ADDRESS: SHAUN HANEY
- 3:30PM - WRAP UP

Please note, you must be a member in good standing to vote during the Business Meeting. Memberships can be purchased online at: www.foothillsforage.com/membership or at the door!

Are you interested in joining the Foothills Forage & Grazing Association Board of Directors? Email manager@foothillsforage.com or contact a FFGA Director for more details!

SAVE THE DATE



Shaun Haney is the founder of RealAgriculture, a leading North American ag media platform delivering news and insights on policy, agronomy, and farm management. He hosts RealAg Radio on SiriusXM's Rural Radio Channel 147 and RealAg on the Weekend across Saskatchewan and Alberta. Shaun is also a regular contributor to RFD-TV, Agritalk, and US Farm Report, and co-leads RealAgristudies, a farmer-focused market research initiative launched in 2019.

Registration Coming Soon!

Bull buying strategies among large cow-calf producers

Photo: FFGA



Canadian bull buyers typically focus on ranch goals and matching a bull to their environment. Traits such as feet and structural soundness continue to top the list of desires, no matter the operation size.

Bull buying strategies are a critical component of success for cow-calf producers across Canada, impacting herd genetics, productivity and overall profitability. With operations ranging from small family farms to large-scale commercial enterprises, an important question must be asked: Do purchasing tactics differ depending on the size of the farm or ranch?

The most recent Census of Agriculture (2021) pointed out that most of Canada's beef operations were small, with 61% having 47 or fewer beef cows, but these farms represented only 16% of the total beef cows. Farms with herds over 250 held 32% of the total.

"We sell thousands of bulls for our customers a year, but we don't really see a big variation in buying strategies on herd sizes for types of bulls," says Scott Bohrson, owner of Bohrson Marketing in Olds, Alberta. "Environment is the biggest factor; whether it's 50 or 500 cows, our buyers want bulls to fit their environment."

Focus on the endgame basics

Bohrson says typically, for customers running several hundred pairs, purchasing strategies are focused on the endgame. Most concentrate on producing large numbers of quality steers for sale. Others have a bigger budget, as they also retain females and are particular about the genetics they're adding to their programs. They desire specific phenotypes, sound structures, good feet and fertility driven by the strength of families. Many outsource replacements, counting on the premiums they bring.

Bohrson's customers continue to ask for the physical details they want in their bulls, with good feet and structural soundness topping the list.

"Most people's phones have pictures of their families, but mine is filled with pictures of feet," he laughs. "Feet are still key, as they're so important for longevity."

These features are followed by udder quality and actual data, including birth, weaning and yearling weights.

"Buyers are still looking to find cattle with what they see as the total package of phenotype, performance and the ability to leave a set of daughters sought after by the cow-calf producer," he says.

A smaller group of customers makes their selections based on carcass specifications, yield, quality and marbling traits. This group increases their bull investment budgets to reflect these values. Most are large commercial customers with larger herds that also finish their own animals.

Stretching herd numbers by building relationships

Ashton Hewson, president of the Saskatchewan Limousin Association, believes that due to the

lower beef cow inventory numbers and the older generation controlling most farms and ranches, larger herds remain dominant across western Canada.

"Years ago, most farms had at least a few cattle," Hewson says. "They needed grain and livestock to make things work, but with today's land and cattle prices, the industry is changing."

As commercial producers buy more bulls to match the slowly growing cow inventory numbers, he's noticed a trend, with many beginning their search for new sires earlier in the year than ever before, bypassing the typical March and April ranch sales. He believes this is largely due to more progressive owners wanting to take advantage of the best purchase opportunities.

"Loyalty is still the biggest factor in our Limousin association, and I think all across the industry," Hewson says. "The most successful farms, large or small, are repeat customers having a solid relationship with their seedstock providers. This relationship helps them gain a better understanding of what's available and what will work best for them."

Some owners place their bull buying parameters in the seedstock provider's hands, identifying desired traits such as colour, birthweights, weaning weights and calving ease expected progeny differences (EPDs). Hewson describes the typical buyer as discerning regarding the genetics, EPDs and specific traits they're looking for.

"I find the bigger operations – those running 200 to 1,000 cows – don't have as much time to babysit, and they dive in more with calving ease," Hewson says. "There are so

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many more knowledgeable producers who continually put us seed-stock folks to the test, which always keeps us on our toes with our own goals. It's crucial these days, as prices are this high and the extra numbers can deliver larger payouts than ever."

Goals with specific targets and tactics

Hewson believes goals, location, climate and selecting for terminal or maternal characteristics all come into play for buying strategies. Many large operators sell their entire calf crop and ask for terminal bulls to get the most bang for their buck. Many select them to breed their younger females and choose more maternal-leaning sires to mate with their older cows. By retaining replacement heifers from this group, they hope to solidify longevity and fertility.

"The proof is in the pudding for

the older animals," Hewson says. "Owners know they're adapted to the environment, and with the droughts we've had in recent years, feeding for 200-plus days is a long time, making efficiency crucial. We all enjoy the terminal cross cow with the hybrid vigour and big weaned, high-price calf, but in today's world, if she's eating too much and milking too hard, she won't stick around long."

Bohrson agrees and adds that farm goals are the deciding factor in how bull rosters are filled out.

"A challenging but enjoyable aspect of every phone call we get is they're all a little different with what people are looking for and how we can be of assistance," Bohrson says. "There's really no blanket answer, as every person and operation has a unique view and variable goals for what they want to accomplish."

"It's a tired statement that's

been said to death, but like so many things, including bull buying strategies, it's all a balance," Hewson explains. "The best thing about being a seedstock producer is seeing our genetics work and affect different herds. Sometimes it's positive, and sometimes we get a bit of a wake-up call when things don't work exactly as expected. Each owner has their own views of the market and what they think will fit their management and plans. All are unique, so year to year, it's always a challenge to meet those needs."

Author: Bruce Derksen

Original Article: <https://www.agproud.com/articles/62244-bull-buying-strategies-among-large-cow-calf-producers>

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