FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
July 2023

Chairman's Note — Daniel Doerksen

Howdy folks,

As we are just about to wrap up June, we are finishing up calving and are in the process of getting some brandings done; helping friends and neighbours with theirs. It's been a very busy spring here. I keep telling Kim we just need to get though this week and next week will slow down. I have used that line for about 2 months now and will use it again this week, I'm sure.

With all the fog we had this spring I was anticipating a wet start to the year and an abundance of grass to add to the joys of these incredible cattle prices. However, that has not been the case here. We have had just over an inch of rain here this spring to the end of June, and it does not look like anymore is coming any time soon. We are very fortunate in this part of the world to have irrigation. While our native grass is burning up fast the crop land looks very good. We usually don't start haying until end of June but this year we will be done first cut this week. The hay really grew this year with all the heat.

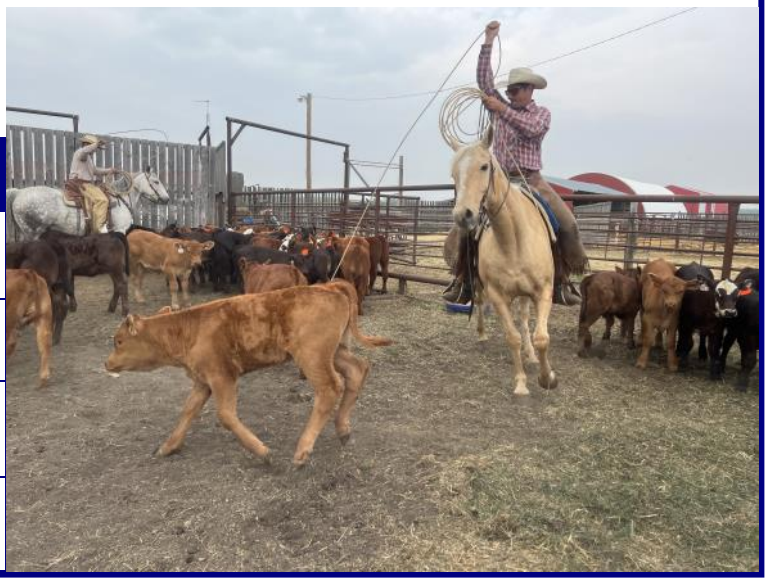
This is going to be another interesting year for sure. With these high cattle prices and what looks like another year of high feed prices will producers hang on or take the opportunity to get out in this high cattle market. I still have hope rain is coming and some of the cropland that cant be harvested will get a second growth to create some grazing opportunities.

At FFGA we have a full slate of events planned for the summer. Please take the time to check out our website and browse though the events we have planned. Laura, Kayla and Sonja always do a bang-up job putting these events on. As I write this, I am planning on heading off to Jumping pound in the morning to the Lazy J Ranch to take in the field day with Greg Judy. Its going to be a great day of learning and networking.

I hope to see many of you at some events this summer.

Daniel

(Photo: Daniel heeling at a neighbours branding)



IN THIS ISSUE

MANAGED GRAZING STRATEGIES ON NATIVE GRASSLAND FIELD TOUR

GEM HALL & GEM COMMUNITY PASTURE

16 AUGUST 2023
11:45AM - 4:00PM

Topics include:

- Producer Funding update
- Considerations when grazing Native Grassland
- Rotational Grazing Strategies
- Tour of the Gem Community Pasture
- *Optional tour of pasture grazing under pivots at Gemstone Cattle Co after the event*

Speakers include:

- Mike Roberts, Manager of the Waldron Ranch
- Daniel Doerksen, Gem Grazing Association

Cost (includes lunch) :
FFGA Member: $15 / Non-Member: $20

www.foothillsforage.com/nativegrassland

On the Cover: Greg Judy at the Kumlins during the Grazing School. Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!

Cow patties help shed light on pasture health


Photo: FFGA

You can tell a lot about the health, biodiversity and status of a pasture and its cattle from digging into cow patties and looking at bugs.

Kevin Floate, an Agriculture Canada researcher in Lethbridge, wants to help you do that. His just-published book, Cow Patty Critters, is richly illustrated, written in layperson's language, is scientifically rigorous and available free to download.

In the book, Floate explains why the insect life in and around cattle manure is worth understanding and studying, what the various poop-loving (coprophilous, to be precise) bugs are, what they do and reveal about a pasture and its animals, and how to best find them.

In Cow Patty Critters, readers will also find Floate to be a passionate illustrator of the fascinating worlds-in-dung that lie mostly hidden within every cattle-hosting pasture.

"This is the guide I wish I had when I started my career," said Floate, who has studied the area for decades.

"If I have done my job right, readers will find it informative, interesting and enjoyable."

The guide contains many photographs of the main types of cow patty bugs, including members of the famous dung beetle family, as well as different families of beetles, flies, larvae and creepy-crawlies that visit and reside within Canadian cow manure.

While it is written to be accessible to ranchers and pasture owners, it also aims to be scientifically rigorous, carefully laying out the distinctions and proper designations of the various bug families, and clearing up confusing names and recently updated classifications of dung insect families.

Floate's personal passion for dung insect ecology runs throughout the book from its first sentence:

"Hopping, flying, squirming and digging — cow pies are crawling with critters," writes Floate.

"More than 300 species of insects are found in cattle dung on Canadian pastures, mating, eating dung, laying eggs and eating each other — a veritable beehive of activity changing in composition on a daily basis."

Floate explains the differences between various forms of beetle dung-living, including those that are "dwellers," "tunnellers" and "rollers." Dung-eating and egg-laying flies and the disturbing parasitic wasps that exploit them are detailed.

The photographs and descriptions could inspire fascination, practical learning or nightmares, based upon a person's outlook and squeamishness. Dung insects clearly view "the good life differently than humans and most mammals.

"The larvae (of hover flies) are often present in large numbers on farms and livestock facilities where they breed in wet areas rich in organic matter," says one of many descriptions of dung insect life.

"Suitable habitats include water tanks, sewage lagoons, rotting carcasses, the edge of silage pits and the base of composting piles of manure. To allow them to develop in these wet environments, the larvae have a long posterior siphon that functions as a snorkel and which gives rise to the common name rat-tailed maggot."

Floate provides step-by-step instructions and photos for those wanting to extract the insects from patties, with some methods using buckets, liquid and separation.

Gaining an understanding of cow patty critters is worthwhile, Floate said, because some provide environment-improving actions, others are pests and vexations for livestock, many help break down manure and feed its nutrients back into the pasture, while others reveal the underlying health of the soil and animals.

Insecticides and chemical treatments given to cattle can impact dung insects, which Floate details.

Cow patties are "playpens for researchers," and Floate has clearly spent much time in the playpen with fellow researchers and university students.

Throughout the book, "Faecal Factoids," which provide little known realities of dung life, pop out from the heavier text.

For example, did you know that dung beetle larvae are like cows in using bacteria to digest their food? Or that dung beetles can roll their poop balls in incredibly straight lines because they can use the sun, the moon and even the Milky Way galaxy for orienteering?

Whatever a person's interest in Canadian dung insects, Floate has striven to produce a previously unavailable primer that offers the knowledge and instruction anybody could use to become a fellow explorer of the worlds of cow patty critters.

Author: Ed White

Original Article: https://www.producer.com/livestock/cow-patties-help-shed-light-on-pasture-health/

Are you ranching for practice or profit?


Photo: FFGA

For many cow-calf producers, the thought of not raising cattle just seems foreign. As livestock producers, most of us have built a life around our cattle, not the cattle around our life. For better or worse, there seems to be an unexplained gravitational pull that will not let a rancher walk away from their cows.

I started as a financial officer with Compeer Financial in 2018. Readers might recall that it was not a glamorous time to be in the cattle industry or raising row crops. Early on, I sat in on a discussion with a financial officer and credit team about how to help a financially-challenged client get his operation back on track. Someone suggested the option of selling the cows. His financial officer quickly shot down the idea, saying that the client might rather give up his wife than the cows. Of course, this was a joke, but I share it to illustrate that as cattlemen, we are drawn to this lifestyle. And if the cows aren't going anywhere, we might as well do our best to make them a profitable part of our business.

State of the markets

As of early June, the cattle business is sitting in a good position. This week at my local sale barn, top of the market for fats was $1.935/lb USD. and feeder prices are behaving accordingly. Honestly, it would be hard not to make a profit with the current dynamics, but if history is any indication, these good times won't last forever. Herd liquidation over time led to a lack of beef supply, and then a dramatic rise in prices. If we remember back to the good times of 2014 and 2015, we know those high prices didn't stick around too long. Just like in the past, our beef supply will start to increase, or demand will pull back until profits reach more normal levels. Many years these normal levels mean break-even or negative profitability in the cow-calf industry. When you're making long-term financial decisions and investments in herd expansion, facilities or land acquisition, keep the fluctuations of the markets in mind and remember those high prices might not be here to stay.

Pursuit of profitability

Sitting in the sale barn bleachers and watching the calves you raised cross the scales near the top weights of their group sure makes for some good bragging rights. What's even better is knowing the profit margin on that group of cattle and having that satisfaction of positive revenue. The two aren't mutually exclusive, but it doesn't always happen that way.

Think about what it took to have a heavy group of calves cross the scales. If you had 1,800-pound cows, massive amounts of creep feed, while feeding our cows hay for 6-plus months a year, how big were your profit margins? That question can be answered differently on every operation, but at the end of the day, it boils down to the real numbers behind the business you are operating.

Calculating the break-even price or cost of production in a cow-calf enterprise may be more difficult than with corn or beans, but it is no less important. Without knowing the true numbers on a per head basis, your long-term decisions will always sit on a weak foundation. With the amount of dollars that get traded in this industry, shooting from the hip is not a plan that will typically result in long-term success. Knowing your numbers will allow you to take the emotion out of decision-making and help you confidently adjust accordingly. This is especially important to the young generation just getting started or looking to grow their operation.

Since I was old enough to walk, my life has been largely consumed by the cattle industry. So, I get the passion that comes with it, but I also know the hours and sacrifice it takes. Study the numbers and true economics of your individual operation diligently. It will lead to more informed decisions on a daily basis. After years of the daily grind, you've had enough "practice" but let's make sure to keep working towards positive long-term margins so you can move from practice to profits.

Author: Jacob Postin

Original Article: https://www.beefmagazine.com/news/are-you-ranching-practice-or-profit

Technology & Forage for High Performance - Field Tour

July 12, 2023
Madden Community Hall

- Coffee & Registration: 9:30am
- Lunch (provided): 12:00pm
- Wrap-up: 4:00pm

Cost:

- FFGA or GWFA Member $25
- Non-Member $30

Topics include:

- Olds College technology adoption to improve rotational grazing
- Specialty forage blends for higher performance and gains
- Field tour at Olds College Pitstra site
- Alberta Grass Sampling Project update

Register at: https://www.foothillsforage.com/fieldtour

Foothills Forage and Grazing Association
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Rocky View County
Municipal District of Bighorn
Blue Rock Animal Nutrition

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ULTIMATE STOCKMANSHIP CHALLENGE

Silver Slate Arena, Nanton Alberta

July 12- July 14, 2023

- Stockmanship School
- Handling Presentations
- Dance & Social

Speakers include:
Steve Cote, Dr. Joyce Van Donkersgoed, Dr. Desiree Gellatly, Glenn Stewart, Dawn Hnatow, Malcom Maclean

Cost for all 3 days:

- $400 incudes participating in school portions and spectating clinic presentations

Or

- $1000 includes participating in school portions, and participating in the arena clinic presentations

July 15, 2023

- Stockmanship Competition
- Tradeshow
- Awards Presentation & Judges Feedback

Cost for the Stockmanship Competition:

- $250 to participate in the competition (either on-foot or horseback)

Or

- $20 includes admission to Friday night dance, and to spectate the competition (10 & under are free)

Judges include:
Dylan Biggs, Paul Kernaleguen, Glenn Stewart, Marty Gardner, Dawn Hnatow, Dr. Desiree Gellatly

For more details and to register, contact Malcom or Jenny at ultimatestockmanship@gmail.com or (587)- 227-5827

@ultimatestockmanship

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FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

COUNTRY VETS

Rebuilding or replacing forage stands

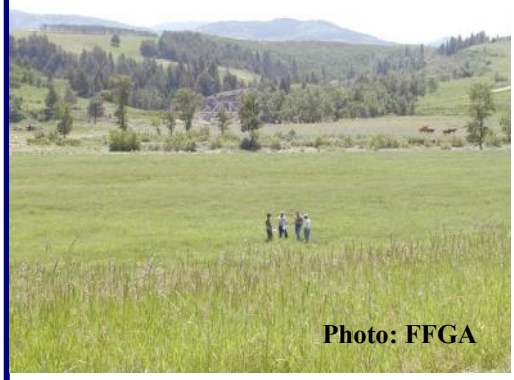

Photo: FFGA

Before attempting to rejuvenate or replace pasture, we must evaluate the pasture or hay field that is in poor condition.

Start by determining the plant species that are present and the number of plants per square foot. Collect information from 10 different locations within the pasture to get a good overview of populations. Also, record the number and types of weeds that are present along with an estimate of the percentage of open soil.

Take 20 soil samples across the field to identify any nutrient deficiencies. At a minimum, split the cores into depths of zero to six inches and six to 12 inches and collect them separately as subsamples for the field. Depending on geographic location and soil type, you may want to take a third core from 12 to 24 inches and include it as the third part of the subsamples to improve the accuracy of the results.

Split the 20 samples into three groups. Combine one-third of the soil samples into a bulk sample. That reduces the cost of having three composite samples analyzed. When the soil sample results are obtained, the information can help you decide whether to rebuild or replace the forage stand.

The big question

Plant productivity declines when plants are under stress. This is reflected by lower plant populations which reduce yield, increased weed encroachment and presence of invasive species such as Kentucky blue grass (Poa pratensis L.) and quack grass (Agropyrons repens L.).

Evaluating why a pasture or hay field has reduced productivity is the big question. Usually, the problem is caused by multiple factors.

Insufficient amounts of trash or litter on the soil surface result in higher soil temperatures and more evaporation. It also reduces the recyclable nutrients available for plants to use.

Insufficient amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur reduce plant growth and production efficiencies. Reduced yields, stand longevity, lower protein content in the forage and increased susceptibility to diseases can occur.

There are visual symptoms for top growth that help us diagnose these deficiencies. Tissue sampling during the growing season may also provide answers. It provides a snapshot of what is happening with the plants that are sampled at that point and may not be reflective of what is occurring in the entire field.

A pasture in poor condition. There are usually several factors that affect plant productivity, but management decisions and production practices can cause a slow decline.

Evaluating the root system is also important. Healthy roots should be white. Brown or yellow roots indicate problems exist. Dig out roots, dissect vertically and evaluate their condition.

Drought or a lack of available moisture reduces plant metabolism and photosynthesis.

More abscisic acid slows photosynthesis by closing stoma to reduce water loss from the plant. To compensate for a lack of water availability, root growth accelerates towards areas of higher soil moisture to increase water uptake.

There are usually many factors associated with the decline in pasture and hayland health and productivity. A disease can cause rapid deterioration. But, more commonly, it is management decisions and production practices that cause a slow decline over several years.

Management considerations

Plants should be at least at the three-leaf stage when cows are turned out in the spring. Planning turnout by leaf stage is more accurate than plant height because crested wheatgrass can be four to six inches tall and brome grass eight inches tall at this stage. Turning cows out a day early in the spring reduces fall grazing by three days.

Calculate the carrying capacity of the paddock. Overestimating yield affects the grazing plan and negatively affects stand health due to overgrazing which can damage plant crowns and vegetative tillers that are the starting point for next year's production. Underestimating yield allows forage to become over-mature which reduces forage quality. Using a grazing stick to estimate the available forage improves accuracy.

Know the weight of the animals that are on pasture. On average, cows can consume 2.5 per cent of their body weight in dry feed per day. With high-quality young forage, intakes can be higher than this. Plants in the three-leaf stage contain approximately 85 per cent moisture. A -pound cow can consume

Author: Barry Yaremcio

Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/crops/forages/rebuilding-or-replacing-forage-stands/

Alberta Pasture Grass- Nutrition throughout the grazing season

Blue Rock Animal Nutrition, in collaboration with the Results Driven Agricultural Research, Alberta Forage Industry Network, Lakeland Agricultural Research Association, Foothills Forage and Grazing Association, Grey Wooded Forage Association, and West Central Forage Association are conducting a project looking at pasture nutrient levels throughout the province of Alberta. We have split the province into 9 regions (Nanton, Hanna, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Rocky Mountain House, Mayerthorpe, St. Paul, Manning, La Crete) and samples are being taken in June, August, and October to assess how the nutrient content changes throughout the season. This project will run for 3 years to account for variability in moisture and weather.

Mineral content of pasture is directly related to the content of the soil, which can be highly variable depending on the geographical region, history of the land, and surrounding activity (oil and gas processing, open pit coal mining, etc.). Both deficiencies and toxicities have negative consequences on health, reproduction and when severe, can be life threatening. In addition, grass species, and weather causes further variability in the mineral content of the pasture. Knowing the grass mineral content is beneficial to the producer and the nutritionist to prevent deficiencies or toxicities, help in identifying antagonistic minerals, and potentially reduce the mineral cost by eliminating supplementation when it is not required.

Energy, protein, and fiber content is highly dependent on the weather, the amount of direct sunlight, heat units, and moisture are highly correlated with the nutrient density of the plant. We are all starkly aware that no two years are the same in terms of weather, however by taking samples over 3 years, we will have a good idea of what the energy, protein, and fiber content of the grass is at in any region of the province. This will help us answer producer questions surrounding supplementation such as the use of protein tubs or pellets for producers who graze into the late fall and winter. Grass species is also a critically important factor that contributes to the macro nutrient content of grass, while we are not recording each species of grass found within each pasture, we are recording whether the pasture is native, tame, or a mix.

We have preliminary data from the first year of sampling, and found some interesting results, some of our preliminary findings are below:

The Manning region may have the greatest risk of downer cows due to Cal:Phos imbalance in the early grazing season due to very high phosphorus, there may be a benefit to feeding a high calcium mineral early in the grazing season. As well, Manning and Mayerthorpe regions were the only two that tested "at risk" for grass tetany in the early grazing season.

Producers are keenly aware that selenium is low, particularly in the western parts of the province. We found this to be true, however in the Red Deer region, selenium tested surprisingly high, particularly for the June and October sampling periods. We are looking forward to seeing if this will continue for future samplings and investigate why selenium may be higher in the Red Deer Region.

Molybdenum is an important antagonistic to copper, we have found the Rocky Mountain House area may be higher in molybdenum than other parts of the province.

It is important to remember that these are preliminary findings, and the data may change as we continue to sample through 2023 and 2024. Upon completion of the project, the results will be shared with producers in detail through the participating Forage Associations, and the nutritionists at Blue Rock Animal Nutrition.

Author: Abby-Ann Redman,
Blue Rock Animal Nutrition
https://bluerocknutrition.com/

BLUE ROCK
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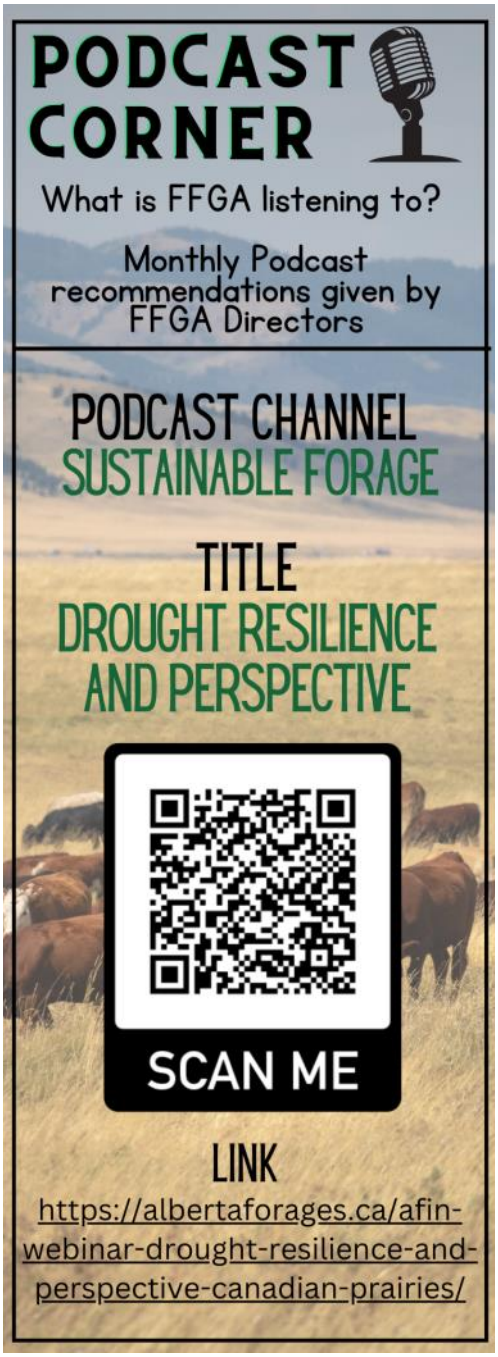

SOUTH AFRICA AG & SIGHTSEEING TOUR

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

January 19 - February 4, 2024

Experience the nature, rich history, and culture of South Africa. There will be opportunities to take in the culture through a visit to the Blyde River Canyon, a mango sub-tropical farm, open land rover safaris and game drives as well as indulging on a traditional Boma Dinner. We will visit the Kruger National Park, Boulders Penguin Colony, House of J.C le Roux, , Boschendal Wine Estate, Abalone Tour, Table Mountain, and V & A Waterfront. We will also get the real agriculture experience by visiting to the Inyoni Crocodile Estate, Embryo Plus Centre, Beefmaster Alliance, Scientific Bonsmara crossbreeding programme & Eragrostis Pastures. We will visit sheep, cattle, corn, soybean operations and much more!

Package Pricing includes: Land Travel & International Flights

Prices vary depending on group size!

Twin prices will vary from $8742.00 - $9473.00 per person

For Full Itinerary: https://www.foothillsforage.com/events

To Book, Contact Lawrence Rowley
(403) 764-2044 or lawrence@leadertours.ca

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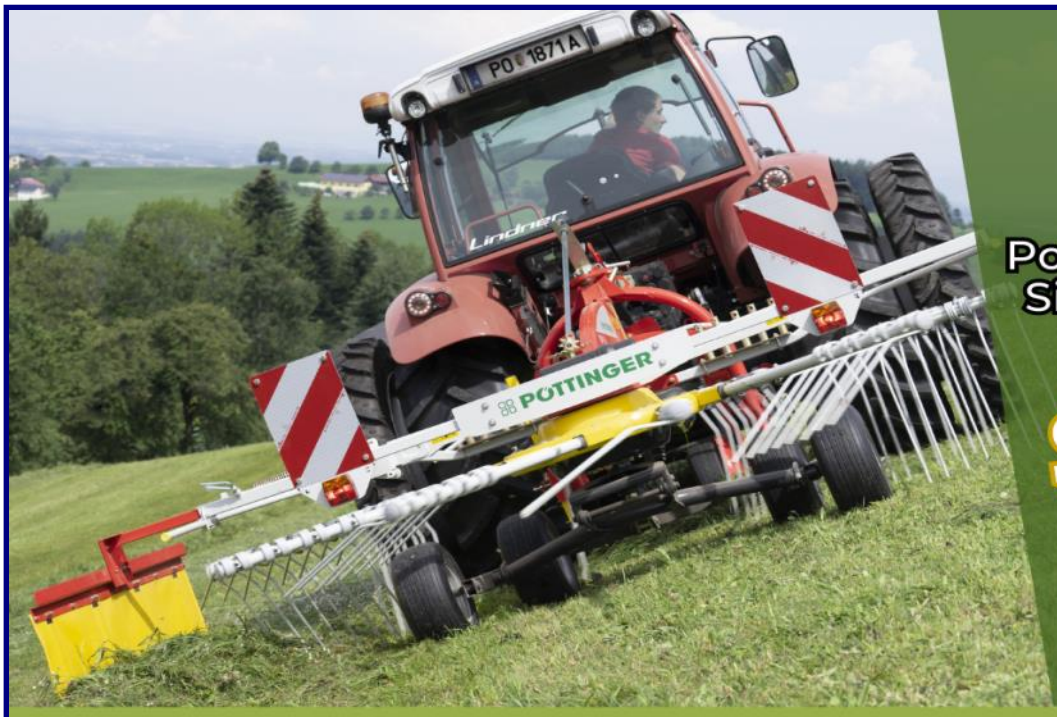

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ALBERTA PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

2023-2027 Strategic Plan

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

Our Mission

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

Our Vision

A global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

Renowned and Impactful Soil, Forage and Grazing Extension	Thriving, Innovative, and Dynamic Organization	Cohesive, Engaged, Forward-Thinking Board and Staff	Experts at Measuring our Impact and Telling our Story
Key Initiatives			
• Pilot Grazing Event in Starland County • Host Ranching for Profit School • Host Grassfed Exchange Conference • Pilot Youth Field Day • Firmly Establish OFCAF Program and Host Events • Firmly Establish Living Labs Program and Host Events • Investigate Producer Funding Application Resource • Confirm and Implement Testimonial Strategy	• Design and Execute Brand Awareness Campaign • Develop 5-Year Financial Forecast and Funding Plan • Integrate Podcast Technology • Confirm Subject Matter Expert Contacts	• Implement FFGA Manager Annual Performance Review • Implement Board and Staff Orientation • Implement Annual Plan Review	• Build Impact Measurement Capacity and Capability • Confirm FFGA Influencer Strategy and Plan • Develop Proposal for Improving Consumer Perception • Share Strategy and Gap Funding Requirement with Key Funders
Success Measurers			
• Well attended events • Meaningful, positive feedback and testimonials • Respected and sought out by peer Associations, partners, funders, and sponsors • Recognized and sought out by respected speakers	• Robust and growing, highly engaged membership • Extensive partnership and subject matter expert network • Financially sound, with a positive outlook • Provide leading-edge, pertinent, and timely information	• High Board and staff attendance • Energized, longer-term staff • High transparency and two-way respectful communication • Dedicated, contributing, energetic Board • Competition for Board seats with great candidates!	• Solid foundation; highly credible • Strong, enduring relationship with funders (stable, increased funding year over year) • Positively impacting consumer perception • Influencing beyond our region and membership

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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.

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

RDAR Results Driven Agriculture Research

FFGA is a proud member of AFIN Alberta Forage Industry Network, ARECA, CRSB Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef