



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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# GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS February 2024

## Director's Note — Dave Sammons

#### Hello folks,

As I write this, it is a beautiful, sunny afternoon and the temperature is +6 degrees. The snow that we received after Christmas is quickly melting. Just two weeks ago, we hit a low of -39C at our place (just north of Gleichen). A 45 degree swing in temperature is certainly bizarre. I do not mind the temperature reprieve at the end of January but, like everybody else, the shadow of drought crosses my mind and I find myself wishing for a foot of wet snow.

I had to start bale feeding my cows two days ago. In a year with typical rainfall, I can usually swath or corn graze until the end of March. This year's grazing was 40% of where it should have been. Considering this year's rainfall was 4 inches - only a third of our typical rainfall - I should be happy with the grazing that we were able to get.

This year marks the end of my first year in the Executive Link (EL) program which is available for graduates of the Ranching for Profit School. With the program, you choose a chapter that you wish to join. Within the chapter, you are assigned to a Peer Advisory Board, with five other operations. Members of the EL program commit to 3 meetings a year. Two meetings are in the chapter location and the summer meeting is held at the ranch of one of the board members. Each board is geographically diverse so you don't end up on a board with a neighbor or business associate. Every business comes with an agenda of three things that they want to address with the board. Financials and the day to day issues that come with running a ranch or farm are discussed. Mission and vision statements are emphasized. Many conversations occur that deal with family/employee communication and dynamics, grazing plans, winter feed strategies, succession planning, and the list goes on. The entire board brainstorms ideas of how you can address your agenda items. After each business has had the same opportunity to present, discuss and brainstorm, all six businesses work together to develop an action plan for each others businesses. In four months it happens all again.

At first, I wondered how I could afford the time away from our operation. Seven and a half days in meetings, plus the travel time to drive to Billings and back, and the time spent at home preparing for the meeting. How was I going to justify that? ...pulling down your financial pants in front of 10 other people who barely know you. Who wants to do that?? It made me wonder what I was doing. Why was I joining something that was going to make me leave my comfort zone.

I quickly learned the most valuable part of the process is looking at other businesses and seeing how their experiences relate to your own. And then, when it is your turn, you have 10 other people working on your business - offering advice, sharing similar experiences or just brainstorming solutions to problems. This collective knowledge is power and it offers a fresh perspective on your operation. Belonging to the board forces me to spend regular time Working On the Business in a structured way. It has helped me keep my finances up to date and it has forced me to be accountable with my action plans.

Another positive of belonging to the EL program is the recharge I get at each meeting. Our board is an amazing collection of people from across North America and there are at least another 90 people in the chapter who I have the opportunity to get to know. The networking is amazing with the diversity of people and operations represented. At home, it's so easy to fall into the day-to-day routine of Working In the Business. These meetings get me off the ranch and I come home without the blinders that come from the day-to-day routine. What I am doing and who I am doing it for becomes more clear. I highly recommend the EL program if you are looking to take your knowledge from Ranching for Profit to the next level.

#### Dave

(Summer EL (Executive Link) Meeting in Montana.)

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Member Renewal 2024

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association Membership is \$50 (+GST). Membership is per operation and covers family & staff of each operation.

FOR DETAILS: https://www.foothillsforage.com/membership

On the Cover: FFGA Ag & Sightseeing tour to South Africa. Photo: Laura Gibney (FFGA tour leader)

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### Calving ease top priority when selecting heifer bulls



When it's time to choose a heifer bull, expected progeny difference for calving ease tops one beef producer's list.

The birth weight expected progeny difference (EPD) is accurate but it's simply an average, says Travis Olson of Ole Farms at Athabasca, Alta, For example, two bulls could have an average birth weight EPD of 75 lbs. But Bull A's calves might consistently fall between 65 to 85 lbs., while Bull B's calves could range between 55 to 95 lbs. Bull B's average birth weight looks good, Olson concludes, but he has less consistent calving ease.

Olson and his family raise commercial and purebred Angus. Olson says that 15 years ago he paid more attention to birth weight but now he finds that calving ease is a better yardstick.

"It takes into account inconsistent bulls that have a good average but still sire occasional big calves," he says.

A calving ease EPD is also more important than assessing a bull visually, he adds. "Some producers think a bull will work well on heifers if he has a narrow head and shoulders. There's much more to it than that," says Olson.

Olson says the breed associations have identified the genetics behind calving issues. A calving ease EPD takes into account multiple factors, he says, such as age and size of the cow, calf shape, gestation and the bell curve.

When buying an unproven bull at a sale, look at repeatability in the pedigree, Olson adds. "I get nervous when I see a bull whose calving ease numbers are acceptable but there are a few animals in his pedigree that weighed 95 lbs. at birth," he

Olson looks for a few generations of high calving ease EPD when buying heifer

"If you have at least three generations of high calving ease EPDs stacked up, your and the mature old cow who goes long on

want a calf to throw back to a greatgrandsire who happened to be a cow-killer, siring huge calves," Olson says.

Selective breeding allows people to move away from undesirable traits like heavy birth weights, he adds, but these traits may still be lurking in the background. If certain genes line up, those undesirable traits can be expressed.

#### Importance of calving ease

The biggest factor that determines profit or loss in western Canadian beef herds is the percentage of calves weaned out of cows exposed to a bull, Olson points

"This takes into account the cows that didn't get pregnant, cows that had calving problems and their calf was born dead, and calves that died out on pasture," Olson adds.

A herd's pregnancy rate may be high, but if some of the cows or heifers lose calves at birth, it cuts into profit, Olson adds. Labour costs drop if a producer doesn't have to pull calves and if the calves are bouncing up at birth, getting colostrum, he says.

"They don't have a swollen nose and they don't have the stress from a difficult birth," says Olson. "Their mothers are not overstressed from hard labour and they can get up and mother the calf. All these factors make calving ease extremely important."

Olson says it's also important to consider breed when selecting a heifer bull.

"Even though I feel there is more variation — especially in things like birth weight — within a breed than between breeds, some breeds do not have a reputation for calving ease," he says.

Those breeds have other merits, he adds, and can provide great terminal crosses when bred to mature cows.

"It's also important to be able to trust the information from the bull producer," says Olson. "Not every seedstock breeder is always up front with accurate information."

Over the years, Olson has noticed a few examples of this, such as the breeders whose catalogue lists every sale bull as having a birth weight of 76, 78 or 82 lbs.

"If you have 100 calves, there will be more range than that," says Olson. Most of the calves in their own program are in the middle, but there are always a few outliers, he says. That includes a few light calves, rate of success will be far better. You don't gestation and births a 105-lb. calf with no

problem, he says.

Another issue is that some seedstock producers breed for power, then use a heifer bull on their heifers. "They'll state in the catalog that all those resulting offspring are good for heifers. But if a bull was 86 lbs. himself, out of a heifer, he's not really going to be a heifer bull," says Olson.

Olson adds that a heifer's first calf is usually lighter than the calves she'll have as a mature cow.

"I'd rather use an 80 lb. birth-weight bull on heifers if he was born out of a cow, than a 75-lb. bull born out of a heifer,"



(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

says Olson. Birth weight alone doesn't give talented bull will shift most of his weight to you the whole picture, he adds.

#### Which one is your best heifer bull?

While calving ease EPDs are crucial to Olson, he considers other factors, such as scrotal circumference and fertility.

Some people waffle on heifer bull traits and end up getting one with a little more growth and muscling, says Olson.

"This can get them into big trouble. I am prepared to sacrifice some muscle shape, etc., to get a bona fide heifer bull with true calving ease," Olson says.

Others only use a bull on heifers for a year before moving him in with the mature cows.

"You don't need to do that, and should also keep in mind that a good heifer bull is not always what you want in the cow herd," says Olson. Typically, a good heifer bull is lighter-muscled, finer-boned, and won't have as much growth as terminal bulls or powerful maternal bulls, he says, although there are exceptions.

Olson prefers to identify a good heifer bull and use him on heifers his entire life. A structurally correct heifer isn't likely to

be injured by a large bull, he says, and a his hind legs.

As for the possibility of inbreeding, most breed associations have identified recessive genetic disorders and most progressive seedstock producers have purged them from their herds. Olson suggests keeping heifer bulls that have proven calving ease.

"You might have an inbred calf that is 20 lbs. lighter than the group average, but you (will) have a much higher percentage calf crop, and this will be more profitable than having dead calves," he says.

Producers can often pick out a good heifer bull. But if, for example, a producer turned out three bulls with 70 heifers, it's hard to know which bull sired the easyborn calves and which sired the calves that had to be pulled. Olson says.

"In that situation it's wise to take DNA from those calves and see which bull was responsible," says Olson.

"DNA testing is inexpensive, and all it takes is a sample from that 90-lb. dead calf or the calf you had to pull. You can cut off a piece of the ear and send it to the lab,

along with a sample from each of those three bulls that were in that pasture," Olson

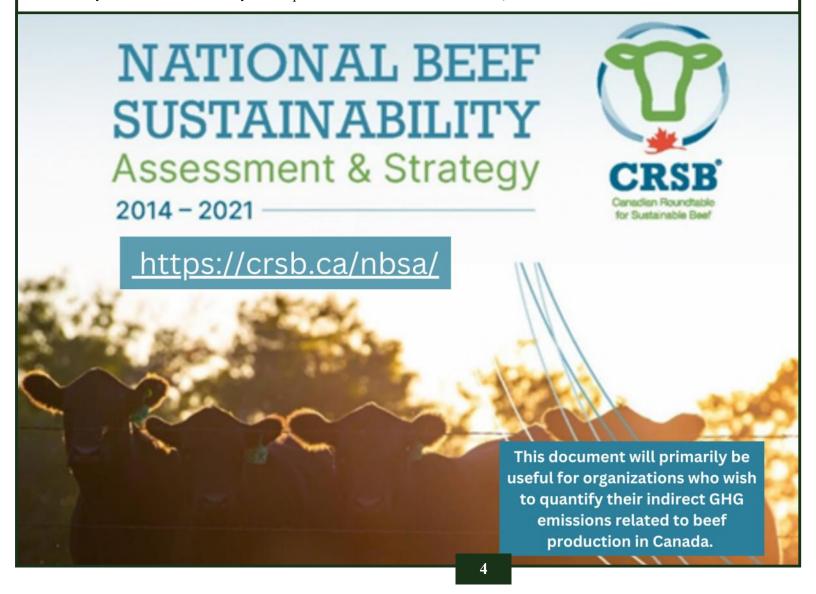
If 10 out of 50 heifers had difficult births, that's too many, says Olson. Some people cull the bull with the biggest head.

"In that situation, if you were using three bulls, you would be right about one in three times.

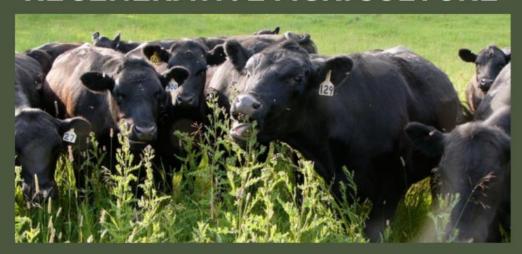
DNA testing might reveal that the same bull sired eight of those calves, he says. It's much cheaper than culling the wrong bull and having the same problem next year, he adds.

"Before the next breeding season you might decide to put that bull with the cows instead of heifers."

Author: Heather Smith Thomas Original Article: https:// www.canadiancattlemen.ca/features/ calving-ease-top-priority-when-selectingheifer-bulls/



# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN WEED MANAGEMENT IN REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



Understanding the complexity of weeds and why they are there helps in figuring out how to manage them. We will combine experiences and science, and explore this subject in a working system at this workshop.



February 28 - Fort Macleod Community Hall

March 5 - Cheadle Community Hall



11:45pm - 3:00pm (Lunch Included)

FFGA Member: \$20 / Non-Member: \$25



https://www.foothillsforage.com/weedmanagement



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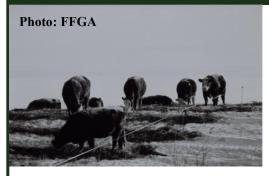








## Meeting Cow Requirements While Winter Grazing



The need to feed hay is not eliminated through winter grazing, especially during times of inclement weather and as spring cows advance in pregnancy. However, winter grazing can be used to reduce the amount of supplementation required via hay or other feeds. After weaning, the average nutrient requirements of a cow are about 50% total digestible nutrients (abbreviated as TDN) and 7% crude protein (abbreviated as CP). Typically, at the start of grazing, dormant grasses contain less than 6% CP. Protein is generally the mostlimiting nutrient during winter grazing, but energy is also important for combating winter conditions and increasing body condition score. A spring cow's nutrient requirements will increase throughout the winter as they advance into late gestation. As a result, cows should be provided with adequate protein, energy, and mineral supplementation throughout the winter grazing season in order to meet their nutritional reauirements.

## ASSESSING COW NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS.

In order to provide adequate nutrition to the cow herd, it is essential to assess nutrient requirements. An easy way to accomplish this is to evaluate the herd for body condition scores (abbreviated as BCS). For most spring calving herds, fall and winter grazing occurs after the calf has been weaned. As a result, cows will be at their lowest nutritional requirements of the production cycle. Therefore, this period between weaning and late gestation is the most-economical time to increase cow conditions if needed. Current BCS of the herd will determine what feeding, supplementing, and management strategies should occur. Ideally cows would be in a BCS of 5 at the time of calving. However, nutrient requirements for heifers and

younger cows are higher than for mature cows because they are still growing. As a result, younger cows may require more supplementation and ideally should be in a BCS of 6 at the time of calving.

One strategy is separating cows into groups based on their BCS. By managing the groups separately, supplementation can be provided according to the nutrient needs of each group. For example, one group could be made up of thinner cows (< 4 BCS) and young cows in order to provide more supplementation to achieve a higher energy and protein diet. In contrast, cows in a higher body condition (> 6 BCS) can be grouped together because they have more body reserves and are more resilient to lowquality diets. This group will require less supplementation and will be able to occasionally 'rough it' if necessary. However, caution should be used with this strategy by not allowing cows to lose too much condition prior to the calving season. Ultimately, winter grazing management should revolve around utilizing winter pastures as a feed resource, while ensuring cows will be in proper condition at the time of calving.

#### DOES WINTER GRAZING IM-PACT COLD STRESS IN COWS?

When temperatures are below their lower critical temperature, cows are forced to increase heat production to maintain their body temperature. In order to produce more heat, cows are forced to mobilize energy via body stores or diet intake. Thin cows are less-resilient to cold stress conditions, because they have less body stores available to produce heat and provide insulation from the cold. In order for thinner cows to not pull from body stores and lose condition, energy intake must increase.

The only way to get more energy from dormant forage is for cows to eat more of it. However, cow diets are limited by their rumen capacity. When forage quality is low, it is likely that the cow won't be able to consume enough forage to get the energy they need. In this case, they are physically limited by intake. As a consequence, cows will have to mobilize energy from their body stores and risk losing body condition. To

prevent losses in cow performance and condition, producers should provide supplemental energy to cows prior to and during cold stress events. By doing this, cows are able to increase both their energy intake and digestion of low-quality forage.

However, too much energy can cause digestive issues. For this reason, supplemental energy in the form of high-quality forage (for example, alfalfa) is a good strategy for shorter-term cold stress events. In the event of long-term cold events or extreme weather conditions, further manage-

ment considerations may be required, and diet density should increase.

#### WILL COW NUTRIENT RE-QUIREMENTS CHANGE THROUGHOUT THE WINTER?

Cow nutrient requirements change throughout the year as they enter different stages of gestation and lactation. The greatest nutrient requirements occur after calving and during peak lactation, while the lowest nutrient requirements occur after weaning, when lactation is stopped.

For spring calving cows, weaning typically occurs near the time that grasses go dormant for the winter. As a result, it is advantageous to utilize dormant grasses for spring calving cows during this period of lower nutrient requirements. However, as cows advance through pregnancy and get ready to calve again, their nutrient requirements are steadily increasing. Therefore, it is a good strategy to utilize winter grazing early on when nutrient requirements are lower.

Regardless of grazing strategy, it is critical that producers provide proper supplementation to allow cows to meet nutrient requirements throughout the winter grazing season.

Author: Kaylee Wheeler Original Article: <a href="https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/meeting-cow-requirements-while-winter-grazing">https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/meeting-cow-requirements-while-winter-grazing</a>



Your Ranch

**Designer Cows for** 

MARCH 1 & 2, 2024 Olds College, Olds

DAY 1

8:30 AM -5 PM



- FERTILITY OBSERVATION AND MEASUREMENTS
   Steve Campbell, Tailor Made Cattle
- RED SOLO CUP COW

  Steve Campbell, Tailor Made Cattle
- GENETIC TOOLS FOR SELECTION AND HYBRID VIGOR SCORES
   John Basarab, PhD, Livestock Gentec
- BETSY IDENTIFICATION AND RECORD TRACKING TECHNOLOGY FOR REPLACEMENT SELECTION
   Mokah Shmigelsky, One Cup AI
- COST EFFECTIVE HEIFER DEVELOPMENT

  Bart Lardner PhD, University of Saskatchewan

DAY 2

8:30 AM -1:30 PM

- TOPIC TBA
   Desiree Gellatly PhD, Olds College
- EPD'S FOR COMMERCIAL HERD IMPROVEMENT Jay Wildman, Select Sires
- PRODUCER EXPERIENCES PANEL

# \*OPTIONAL LIVE CATTLE DEMO WITH STEVE CAMPBELL

- Narration on cattle selection from pen
- Livestock Gentec sampling demo with "hidden" hybrid vigor score
- Betsy demonstrated cattle for identification and commercial applications.

\*space is limited, extra fee applies













## Tips for 'grafting' a new calf to a new mother



When fostering or "grafting" an orphan calf or twin onto a cow that lost her own calf at birth, some producers skin the dead calf and tie the hide onto the substitute calf. If the cow had a chance to lick and smell her dead calf before it was taken away, tieing its hide over the substitute calf can often trick her. Cows recognize their calves by smell; the hide of her own calf may make her think the newcomer is hers.

Other producers put various products on a calf to encourage the cow to lick it.

"There are many tricks, like using molasses or a product that smells like licorice," says Andy Acton, a veterinarian with Deep South Animal Clinic in Ogema, Sask. "Some guys swear by certain products, and these might work in some cases."

"One thing that works is a tip I learned from Dr. Joe Stookey at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine," Acton says. "Stookey suggests putting birth fluid over the calf. The amniotic fluid that surrounds the fetus in the uterus is very salty and tangy, and cows are usually interested in smelling and licking it off their newborn calf, which starts them licking and cleaning up the calf. If the cow/heifer has just calved, smear birth fluids onto the substitute before you bring him to her."

Producers probably aren't present for every birth, but if the circumstances work out they can collect the amniotic fluid when possible and then freeze it for later use. "If you are present during a normal birth or need to help a cow or heifer calve, have a clean towel handy, and when there's a lot of birth fluid, soak the towel in that fluid," Acton says. "Put the towel in something waterproof

like a plastic bag, and freeze it."

If you are later getting a cow to accept a substitute calf, thaw out that towel and rub the fluid onto the calf. This is useful if you need to foster a calf that might be several days old onto a heifer or cow that loses her own calf at birth. "The birth fluid doesn't have to be hers," Acton says. "She doesn't know the smell of her own calf at first until she's bonded with it and knows its smell."

If you use this fluid/towel trick, remove the dead newborn before the cow or heifer has a chance to smell and lick it, and she's more apt to think the substitute is hers because it smells and tastes like birth fluid.

"As long as everything is healthy and clean when you collect fluid from a calving cow or heifer, just soak a towel or two and have them frozen and ready to grab out of the freezer," Acton says. "Then you can simply thaw one out and use it to smear up another calf if you need to foster one."

#### If the calf is too lively

If the calf being grafted is particularly lively, this may startle or confuse the prospective mother. The bouncing baby might scare a heifer or make a cow suspicious that this lively youngster is not her newborn. Acton suggests tying the calf to the side of the stall/pen so it can't run around, or laying it on the ground and tying its legs together so it can't get up. This gives the cow/heifer a chance to sniff and start to lick it with-

out becoming alarmed or suspicious by overactivity. Once she starts licking the calf and mooing and mothering it, the calf can be untied.

Also as part of this grafting process, it's best to bring the calf to the mother when the calf is hungry. The calf will seek out the udder as soon as it is brought to the cow. The sooner it nurses, the better. Nursing triggers release of oxytocin in the cow, which stimulates motherly behaviour. If she does not let the calf nurse right away, you might have to put her in a head catch and let the calf nurse while she's restrained. Usually once the calf nurses, and if the calf smells and tastes like birth fluid, she will accept him as her own.

Author: Heather Smith Thomas Original Article: <a href="https://www.grainews.ca/cattlemans-corner/tips-for-grafting-a-new-calf-to-a-new-mother/#:~:text=When%20fostering%20or%20%E2%80%9Cgrafting%E2%80%9D%20an,calf%20can%20often%20trick%20her.">https-for-grafting-a-new-calf-to-a-new-mother/#:~:text=When%20fostering%20or%20%E2%80%9Cgrafting%E2%80%9D%20an,calf%20can%20often%20trick%20her.</a>



## Choosing the right mineral supplements can be daunting



What mineral supplementation do I need and when do I need it?

Beef producers might know they should supplement their herds with mineral, but trying to wade through all the choices at the livestock supply store can be overwhelming.

Commercial suppliers seem to make claims and offer something different, but with tubs and bags of every colour and price available, how do you know which one is right for your herd? What mineral does your cattle actually need and how is it best delivered?

In general, beef cattle producers should be supplementing mineral to their herds whether they are grazing or being fed a winter ration, said Megan Van Schaik, a beef cattle specialist with Ontario's Ag Ministry.

A host of variables can impact mineral nutrition and deficiencies in beef herds.

"They present in many different ways and alarm bells usually go off when we see reproductive issues," she said, adding mineral status can be linked to general health problems and even calf abnormalities.

Mineral deficiencies can also cause less obvious production losses that can be easily avoided with proper supplementation. A study that tracked trace mineral status of Prairie herds identified some key gaps, noting that up to 43 per cent of cows sampled were deficient

Why do cattle need mineral supplementa-

Beef cattle rely on at least 17 minerals which are categorized as macrominerals and microminerals (also known as trace minerals).

Macrominerals include calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), sodium (Na), chlorine (Cl) and sulphur (S). They are needed in relatively large quantities of more than 100 parts per million (ppm). Macromineral requirements are usually expressed on a per cent dry matter (% DM) basis in an animal's ration.

Beef cattle also need 10 microminerals, also referred to as trace minerals, including chromium (Cr), cobalt (Co), copper (Cu), iodine (I), iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), selenium (Se) and zinc (Zn). These are needed in small quantities, and as such are often expressed on labels as ppm (parts per million),

or mg/kg.

Minerals are required for several functions including skeletal development, immunity, production, nervous system maintenance and overall metabolism. Perhaps even more importantly, minerals interact with other minerals, vitamins and water or feed sources. This can limit absorption or availability.

The concentration of minerals in forages and feeds varies depending on soil, plant and management factors. While spring pasture growth looks lush, the reality is that few pastures — regardless of plant species — fully meet the mineral requirements of a lactating

Both macrominerals, such as calcium, phosphorus and magnesium, and trace minerals, such as copper and zinc, are in short supply in tame and native pastures and therefore require supplementation.

Also, as a cow goes through gestation, calving and then attempts to breed back, her mineral requirements fluctuate. Supplementation is necessary to keep her on track.

Drought conditions and water quality can complicate mineral nutrition, and different anti-quality factors will impact certain minerals and their absorption.

"The only real way to find if you have mineral deficiencies and antagonistic factors is to test feeds and water," said Van Schaik.

Include mineral analysis of forages and feed ingredients as part of regular feed testing. Testing for calcium and phosphorus will show the ratio present in the feed. The ratio of calcium to phosphorus in a diet should be between 2:1 and 6:1. Analyzing magnesium, potassium and calcium in feeds is important to ensure the ratio of potassium relative to calcium and magnesium combined is below 2.2, which will prevent tetany.

Feed testing is particularly important when producers may be feeding alternative feeds such as drought-stressed crops or canola forage, or when cattle may be drinking stock water that is high in total dissolved solids (TDS). For example, copper deficiency is a standard concern for many areas of Canada but in a drought situation, elevated sulphate levels in stock water can make a bad problem worse by tying up available copper. This can lead to a reproductive wreck which could be prevented with mineral supplementation containing appropriate levels of copper.

Author: Beef Cattle Research Council Original Article: https:// www.albertafarmexpress.ca/livestock/ choosing-the-right-mineral-supplements-canbe-daunting/

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

VIRONMENTAL FARM PLA



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY OFFICE MARCH 6, 2024

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- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring laptop or tablet
- Please bring information on your water sources & water bodies
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

\*Please register before February 29, 2024\*

**TO REGISTER VISIT:** 

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IDENTIFYING CATTLE EFFICIENCY

USING INFRARED AND GENETIC TECHNOLOGY



February 13, 2024

Klassen AgriVentures Linden, AB

OR



February 15, 2024 Lilybrook Herefords Claresholm, AB

#### Agenda:

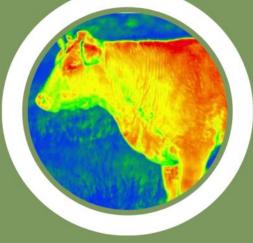
- 9:45am Coffee & Registration
- 10:00am Presentation & Cattle Demonstration with Dr. Al Schafer
- Noon Lunch (provided)
- **1:00pm** Producer Experience with Doug & Tim Wray
- **2:00pm** Genetic Technology presentation with Livestock Genetc

#### Cost:

FFGA Member- \$25 / Non-Member- \$30

https://www.foothillsforage.com/cattleefficiency







## **More details to come**



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 -

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