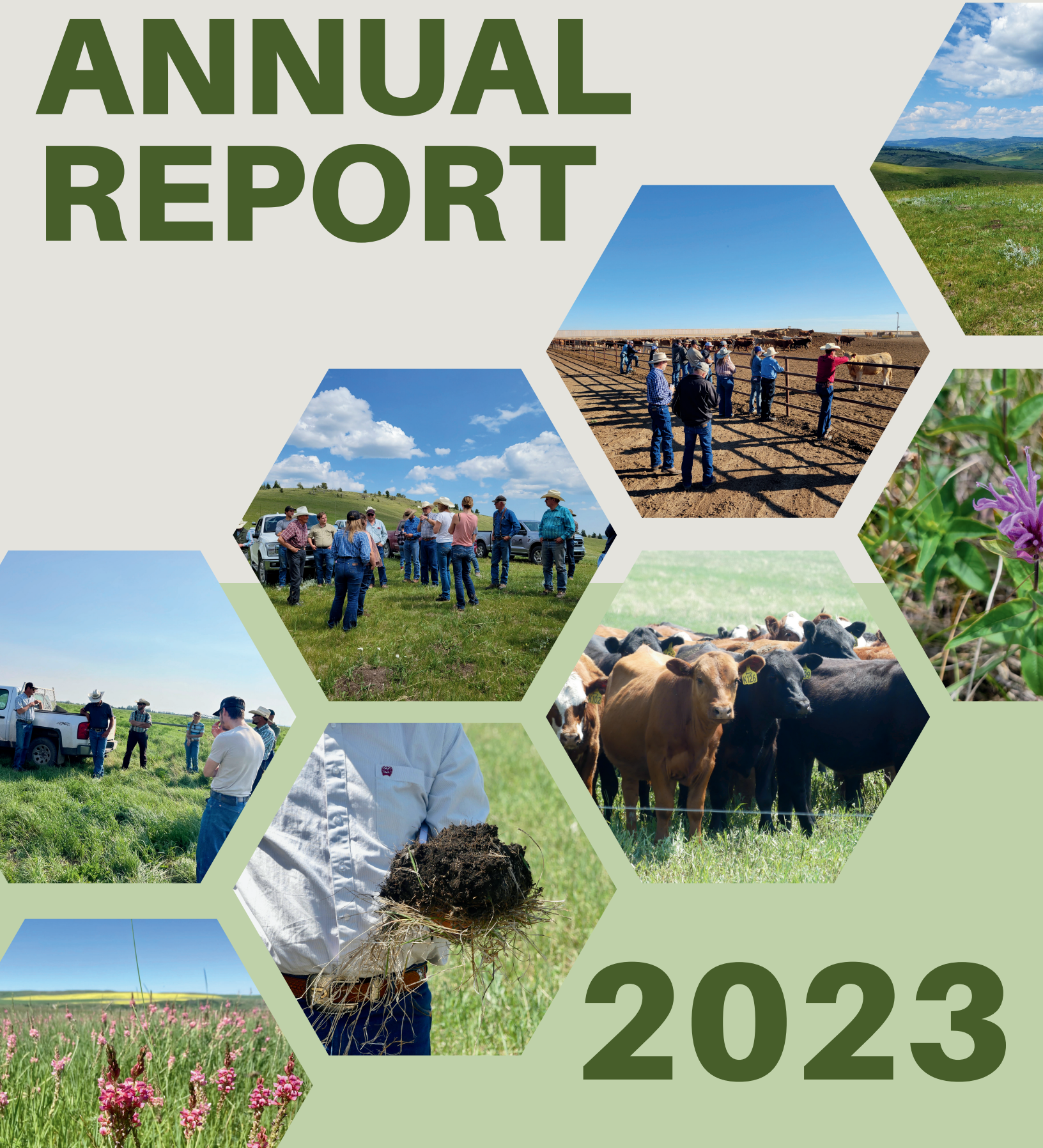


# ANNUAL REPORT



# 2023



# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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Phone: (403) 995-9466

Website: [www.foothillsforage.com](http://www.foothillsforage.com)



## Mission

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

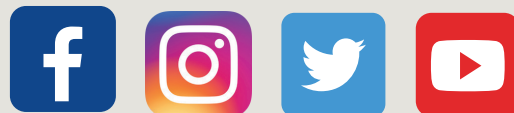
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## Vision

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

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**Find us on Social Media**  
**@foothillsforage**



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Longview

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# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## DANIEL DOERKSEN

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Welcome to the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association (FFGA).

It has been my privilege to serve as the Chairman for the last two years.

In my report last year, I started off talking about the drought that most of Alberta and western Canada was in. Twelve months later that is still the case. Other than a lack of moisture, the winter has been enjoyable. With temperatures warmer than normal it has helped the feed situation, allowing for a longer grazing period, and a reduced amount of feed needed to keep cattle warm. I remain optimistic that this season we will see more moisture and we can grow some grass. The cattle market continues to climb and find new highs. Last year at this time I had commented that 7wt steers were hitting \$3/lb and this year we have 1000 lb steers at or above \$3/lb. These are the prices that make the cattle business exciting to be part of, I just hope that the consumer will continue to choose beef as their protein source as prices on the store shelf also continue to climb.

In February we welcomed Sonja Bloom back from maternity leave, while keeping Kayla Minor and Laura Gibney on Staff. As FFGA continues to grow, the workload has also grown, and we are very fortunate to have three amazing ladies who keep our organization running. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to put on field days, seminars, applying for and reporting on grants, helping producers with Environmental Farm Plans, taking calls from producers, and much more. Please remember to thank our great team when you see them.

Once again 2023 was filled with great field days and seminars. One of the big highlights was having Greg Judy out for 2 days of workshops. We also hosted another sold out Ranching For Profit school in the fall. There continues to be a lot of interest in this school, and we look forward to hosting another one in 2024!



In the Fall of 2022 FFGA was approached and asked if FFGA would consider hosting the Grass Fed Exchange (GFE) here in Alberta, which is held annually in the United States. The GFE moves to a new state each year, and there is interest in bringing this conference to Canada. The conference is similar to our Western Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing (WCCSHG) with 2-3 days of speakers; however it is held during the growing season and the day before the conference there is a day of farm tours highlighting innovative producers of that area. FFGA was invited to attend the 2023 GFE to see if it might be a fit. In September a group of Board and staff attended the conference in Hershey Pennsylvania. This was a great trip and gave FFGA a lot to consider in potentially partnering to host this event in the future. For now, FFGA is continuing to put our efforts into the 2024 WCCSHG being held in Edmonton in December, as we found our conference to be of a similar, if not higher, caliber than the Grass Fed Exchange and we want to continue to support the success of this home-grown event.

I would like to thank our sponsors and members for continuing to support FFGA. As we move into 2024, we will be faced with many challenges. I believe FFGA can be a leader in education and practical solutions to keep agriculture profitable, as well as helping to educate consumers on the value that agriculture has to our economy and the ways regenerative agriculture can benefit the environment. Watch the FFGA newsletter, website, and social media channels for many upcoming events this year!

*Daniel Doerksen*

CHAIRMAN  
**Foothills Forage & Grazing Association**



# MANAGER'S REPORT

## LAURA GIBNEY

---

2023 came in dry with an early and severe start to the wildfire season, which led to destruction in fire areas, as well as a smoky spring and summer which seemed to affect plant growth in some areas. Later the moisture came in localized areas, some areas staying dry, while others flooded. This did allow for some decent cash and hay crops in some regions. The mild winter has been good for feed supplies, but we head into spring hoping for more moisture.

FFGA saw continued growth in 2023. Sonja came back from maternity leave at the end of January stepping into the Environmental Coordinator role. We were excited to be able to offer Kayla Minor a full-time permanent position as FFGA's Communication Coordinator. Working closely with Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation (AGI) and Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) FFGA's funding increased in 2023. FFGA has also worked hard to diversify our revenue streams in order to grow and enhance FFGA while we strive for stable revenue. Increased revenue along with increased demand provided the opportunity for FFGA to expand our staff by 33% in 2023. The board and staff worked hard on developing a 5-year Strategic Business Plan as well as reworking our staff roles to be a strong and thriving organization. This calculated growth has led FFGA to the position we are in today with a stable, capable, and energetic staff team, a cohesive and engaged board of directors, an active membership, thriving partnerships and a healthy financial position. 2023 also saw FFGA expand east due to demand from Newell and Starland Counties. Sonja being based out of Strathmore, has increased FFGA's activity and partnerships in the east country. We look forward to continuing to serve the FFGA membership across our entire region.

FFGA partnered on the delivery of 25 events and webinars with an attendance of 1,992 people in 2023. Our *Grassroots News & Views* newsletter continues to be distributed monthly to our members and partners. Currently FFGA has a membership of 155 Farm Businesses, 1,400 hits on the website monthly, 2,900 followers on Facebook, 1,400 on Twitter and 578 followers on Instagram. Through our producer members, online followers, and industry partners our impact on agriculture, the environment, and rural communities continues to grow.

As we move into 2024, we have been busy with our International Ag Tour to South Africa, writing grant reports, wrapping up the 2023 financial year, preparing for our AGM and continuing to deliver events. This spring we will take a moment to catch our breath and gear up for another active growing season of events.

We continue to deliver innovative, regenerative, and pertinent agriculture information to our members through workshops, conferences, field days, webinars, our monthly newsletter, and social media platforms. As always, I very much enjoy working with the innovative and passionate producers through the FFGA membership and board. It has been fabulous being back to in-person board meetings where the energy and ideas flow and create an atmosphere of excitement for the future. Thank you to all of our members and partners for staying connected and supporting us through another year, your support has been crucial as we build momentum and look forward to what the future brings!

*Laura Gibney*

MANAGER  
**Foothills Forage & Grazing Association**



# COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR'S REPORT

## KAYLA MINOR

---

In 2023 spring came early and warm with the dry conditions continuing into June. The early weather delayed growth for forage producers in the south. Another year of drought for many parts of Alberta, but the mild winter helped producers reserve winter feed. With many discouraged producers with the lack of moisture, cattle prices did continue to remain high across our region.

I have now been with FFGA for 2 years! The number of opportunities for learning and networking have been great for myself personally and professionally! I am excited to report that in 2023 we hosted and partnered on the delivery of 25 events and webinars with an attendance of 1,992 people in the FFGA region.

Highlights for 2023 include the second successful Ranching for Profit School with Dallas Mount and Dave Pratt that FFGA hosted in partnership with Ranch Management Consultants in Okotoks in late November. At FFGA we are excited to maintain the relationship with Dallas Mount and Ranch Management Consultants and will continue to make the Ranching for Profit School an annual event in our region.

Another highlight from 2023 included the Greg Judy Field Tours that we hosted in Rumsey and Jumping Pound. I heard Greg speak for the first time at the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing back in December 2022 but once the opportunity presented itself to have him speak at a couple FFGA events, we jumped on it! Greg Judy of Missouri runs a well-established grazing operation with many different techniques to manage livestock. Many people know him from his popular YouTube channel where he calls himself the Regenerative Rancher. The FFGA field tours that Greg spoke at included topics such as fencing and water techniques, how to think like a grazer, and how focusing on daily animal performance can reach you maximum profits.

Communications continue to be strong for FFGA. We currently have north of 5,000 followers on our social media channels. Our presence has grown significantly in the last year, with event posts and photos from the grassroots level. I am excited to have started working with Freshly Pressed Marketing Agency to continue to enhance our presence online that will appeal to our members, producers as well as benefit the consumer perception. I will continue to post relevant information on our social media channels such as articles, upcoming event, webinar posts, details from our partners as well as photos from the grassroots level. Our website sees around 1,400 visitors monthly with our upcoming events tab being the most popular. Our Newsletter, *Grassroots News & Views*, continues to be a favourable resource among our members and supporters and goes to 155 farms and ranches each month, as well as 60 companies, and 19 Municipalities.

I am excited to continue to grow the communication portfolio as well as advocate for our ever-evolving industry. I look forward to continuing to grow professionally and learn from the best! We have an exciting year ahead of us and hope to see you at our events!

*Kayla Minor*

Communications Coordinator

**Foothills Forage & Grazing Association**



# ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR'S REPORT

## SONJA BLOOM

---

2023 was a year to remember for FFGA! I returned to FFGA in the role of Environmental Coordinator at the end of January and jumped right in with both feet running. From OFCAF funding workshops, to guiding producers as they worked on their Environmental Farm Plans, to one of the busiest years I have had with FFGA; there was no “easy” transition from maternity leave to juggling working and raising a toddler. And while the year was busy, it was also the most fun I have had working with FFGA. In my Coordinator’s note in the December 2023 edition of the *Grassroots News & Views*, I mentioned that I would give an in-depth look into what the Environmental portfolio covers for FFGA which I will now do.

A large part of my role surrounds the Environmental Farm Plan. As a senior EFP Technician, I mentor new Technicians-In-Training. In 2023, I helped one Tech complete his training, and took on an additional Tech in training. I also sit on the EFP Operations Committee which is responsible for providing feedback on the online webbook from the producers’ perspective. Where I spend most of my time as an EFP Tech is in guiding producers through their workbooks and reviewing their action plans. In 2023, I worked with 55 producers on their plans which is the second busiest year that we have had. Demand for EFP grew in 2023 and remains strong with various funding opportunities requiring EFP as eligibility, as well as other farm management groups using the EFP to show their commitment to sustainable sourcing.

Producer funding opportunities became plentiful in 2023; particularly around the adoption of Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) that enhance ecological goods and services across our agricultural landscapes. While it is nice to see so many options in our funding programs, it is hard to keep them all straight. Between OFCAF, RALP, other SCAP programs and local funding opportunities through ALUS, Ducks Unlimited, Agricultural Service Boards, and many other opportunities, I was kept busy working with producers to help them decide which programs were the best fit for them. Knowing how complicated this is, we developed the Securing Success events that traveled to 5 different locations across our region this fall/winter and saw roughly 100 producers in attendance.

These workshops were a great way for producers to learn about the opportunities, then get help in small group settings on either the Grazing Plans, EFP's or on RALP application support.

Another project that I have been working on is around the Regenerative Alberta Living Lab. Laura and I have been leading this project this past year, but I also took on an additional role in creating a promotional video for the Living Labs. With this project I was able to tour some new, innovative operations such as Shipwheel Feeders, Ellis Bird Farm, and Burke Creek Ranch. Congratulations to everyone who is doing outstanding work in managing their operations in challenging drought conditions. The video should be ready to share early summer, be sure to watch for it.

With my family's recent move to Strathmore, FFGA has been able to secure resources to allow us to expand into Starland and Newell Counties. With this being our first full year working in these areas, it's been a fun and busy year with Greg Judy bringing his tour to Rumsey AB, and the Managed Grazing Strategies on Native Grassland workshop at the Gem Grazing Association with Mike Roberts. I am also building partnerships with local grazing groups like the Pallisar Grazing Club and the Grazing Associations in the Eastern Irrigation District in Newell County. We have some exciting ideas for workshops in these areas this summer and beyond, but if you have a topic that you would like to see us cover, send me an email and we can discuss.

I'm happy with the direction FFGA's Environmental portfolio is taking and am excited to be leading this charge. 2024 is already shaping up to be another busy year with many great opportunities for you all to join us at one of the many workshops, field tours, events that we are planning, including the return of the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing this December. Remember to follow us on social media to stay up to date on new funding opportunities, events and projects.

*Sonja Bloom*  
Environmental Coordinator  
**Foothills Forage & Grazing Association**



# ARECA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

## ALAN HALL

---

My compliments to FFGA for the excellent extension work you do for ranchers and farmers in your area. Having the capability and expertise of FFGA in your “back yard” is a treasure. The leadership and hard work that FFGA Board and Laura/Kayla/Sonja do serves you well. Our compliments on another successful year for FFGA.

One of the key responsibilities of ARECA, is to provide needed support services to FFGA and other Associations who are a part of ARECA. Over the past few years ARECA has struggled to provide strong support services. FFGA and other Associations set up ARECA a couple of decades ago to provide support to member Associations.

Each Association appoints a representative to the ARECA Board of Directors. Currently ARECA has 8 member Associations and thus an 8-member Board. In the past year both Farming Forward (west of Edmonton) and Chinook Applied Research Association (Oyen/Hanna area) have joined ARECA. ARECA Board and Association Managers regularly meet together to guide ARECA’s efforts. Wolter Van der Kamp is the current Vice-Chair of the ARECA Board. Wolter’s experience and leadership has been a critical factor in helping guide ARECA to get back up on our feet.

Over the past two years there has been a lot of effort put into improving and stabilizing a level of base funding for FFGA and other Associations. Associations, ARECA, RDAR and Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation worked together and have successfully doubled the annual base funding for Associations. A huge thank you to our Ag Minister, RDAR and Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation for their continued strong support.

The job is not finished yet as we are working to move to 5 year agreements for base funding rather than the annual agreements that have characterized the past. This will provide improved financial stability and hopefully reduce the rate of staff turnover that some Associations are experiencing. Through the renewal of the federal/provincial Ag Policy Framework funding programs and RDAR, FFGA and Associations have continued access to multiyear project funding that is over and above the base funding.

This improved financing coupled with other revenue sources that Associations have, is enabling Associations like FFGA to be able to step out with continued confidence in working with Commissions, ASBs, universities/colleges, research organizations like Ag Canada, and the ag business community to take on joint development and financing of projects and extension activities ranchers and farmers in your area want to see happen.



ARECA will be continuing to help with fund raising for Associations. FFGA, our other Member Associations and ARECA, with strong support from RDAR, have over the past year developed well thought out 5 year plans for continued growth and delivery of research, on ranch/farm projects and extension services to targeted priorities producers have. Out of this have been identified several new member support services that ARECA is developing to provide and assist FFGA and other Associations in providing their programs, projects and services to producers. These are currently being jointly developed with our members associations like FFGA.

These include assessing impact and value of the research and extension producers feel they are getting, enhanced marketing of programs, projects and services to producers in your area, training and coaching for Association staff and others around conducting research and extension, recruiting students and staff, assist in delivery of producer grant programs, fundraising, strengthening our partnerships/collaborations with Commissions, ASBs, Colleges/Universities, funders/investors, and securing specialist support. All of these will help Associations and FFGA in meeting the expectations of the producers they serve.

The other side of ARECA business is we manage and deliver the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) service, the AgKnow service that is focused on getting ranchers/farmers help in dealing with stress that at times leads to mental health issues; and the On-Farm Climate Action Fund (OFCAF) which is the producer grant program focused on helping farmers and ranchers implement advanced grazing system practices in their operations. Currently there are over 4,000 farmers with an EFP in Alberta, and because of supply chain interest, Commissions interest, government producer grant programs requirements, and help from Associations/ASBs, we are anticipating this doubling over the next 3-5 years.

Currently AgKnow is providing support to producers dealing with farm succession, depopulation of livestock due to disease outbreaks, coping with stress/resiliency, and breaking down barriers to “I am not alone” with my struggles. This includes individual farmer access to therapists who have farm/ranch backgrounds. The other part of AgKnow is focused on helping the mental health professionals and service providers to understand ranchers/farmers thus enabling them to more effectively build their relationship and credibility with producers in need. This has been a very popular aspect of AgKnow.

I close by again complimenting FFGA on the excellent work they do and the service they provide. It is an absolute privilege and pleasure to be able to work with FFGA and assist in any way we can.

*Alan Hall*

Executive Director  
**Agriculture Research and Extension  
Council of Alberta (ARECA)**





# EVENTS & WEBINARS

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- Ladies Livestock Lessons
- Producer Funding Opportunities Workshop
- Living in the Natural Environment
- Ranching Opportunities
- Tongue Creek Prescribed Fire Info Session
- Producer Funding Opportunities Workshop
- Management Alternatives for Soil Health
- Annual General Meeting
- RALP Opportunities for Grazing Reserves
- Pro's & Con's of Cover Crops Webinar
- Mountain View Day Aggie Days
- Greg Judy Grazing Schools
- Burke Creek Ranch Tour
- Technology and Forage for High Performance Field Tour
- Ultimate Stockmanship Challenge
- Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women
- Managed Grazing Strategies on Native Grassland Field Tour
- Cattle Handling Clinic
- FFGA Christmas Party
- Ranching for Profit School
- Environmental Farm Plan Workshops
- Securing Success: Funding & Grazing for Your Operation



# EVENTS

## LADIES LIVESTOCK LESSONS

*January 20, 2023 - Cremona, AB*

The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership was joined by 50 producers at the annual Ladies Livestock Lessons; this popular event designed for women involved or interested in the profession of managing livestock. It was developed with the goals of encouraging and educating women in the business and to facilitate the opportunity to expand their professional network. This year's event took place at the Mountain View County Heritage Centre near Cremona. Topics covered included; Nutrition Challenges, Community Connection with Wildrose Farmer Katelyn Dubin, Building a vaccine cooler, how to involve youth in agriculture and rangeland management in Alberta. The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership includes: Mountain View County, Red Deer County, Kneehill County, Clearwater County, MD of Bighorn, Wheatland County, Rocky View County, Olds College, Cows and Fish, FFGA and Grey Wooded Forage Association.



## PRODUCER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WORKSHOP (OFCAF)

*February 2, 2023 - Nanton, AB.*

Hosted by FFGA, MD of Willow Creek, MD of Ranchland, CFGA and RDAR. This workshop focused on producer funding opportunities at the Nanton Community Hall. Grant Lastiwka started our day by giving a presentation on Basics to Grazing Management: grazing principles, utilizing new and existing water sources, and post drought grazing discussions. He also gave an introduction on Cover Crops. In the afternoon we had Sonja Shank with CFGA give an overview of the Advanced Grazing Systems program and Karen Yakimishyn with RDAR on their OFCAF program. The day saw 45 producers in attendance.



## LIVING IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

*February 3, 2023 - Cochrane, AB*

Hosted annually by MD of Big Horn at the Cochrane Ranchehouse. Living in the Natural Environment brings together 100 to 150 members of the rural and small urban community, government, and non-agricultural rural residents together to initiate discussion. Presentation topics are intended to be thought provoking, interesting, relevant to the surrounding landscape and the people that live there. FFGA attended with a booth for their information tradeshow to showcase what resources and knowledge we offer to our members and interested producers. The presentations this year included Wildfire Effects on Eastern Slopes Watersheds: Source Water Protection in a Warmer World, and Wildfire Risk Reduction Strategies. The day saw 109 people in attendance.



## RANCHING OPPORTUNITIES

*February 9, 2023 - Olds, AB*

The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership was joined by 75 ranchers, farmers, students and industry members for the annual Ranching Opportunities at Olds College. Ranching Opportunities is a conference designed for producers involved in or interested in the profession of managing livestock. It was developed with the goal of promoting environmentally and economically sustainable livestock production. This year's event saw presentations including: Program Funding information with speakers from RDAR, CFGA, and AISC; Animal Handling, Deadstock Composting, Infrared and Genetics, How to Improve Legume Stands, and a producer panel on Integrating Cropland and Livestock. The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership includes: Mountain View County, Red Deer County, Kneehill County, Clearwater County, MD of Bighorn, Wheatland County, Rocky View County, Olds College, Cows and Fish, FFGA and Grey Wooded Forage Association.



## TONGUE CREEK RANCH PRESCRIBED FIRE INFO SESSION

*February 24, 2023 - Longview, AB*

Hosted by FFGA, Tongue Creek Ranch, University of Saskatchewan, Meewasin, Canadian Prescribed Fire Exchange and Foothills County. This info session focused on Forage Quality Post-Fire and Recommended Burn Frequency by Dr. Roy Vera and Dinyar Minocher. Rick Arthur gave a presentation on woody encroachment at Tongue Creek Ranch. Carter Sieben's shared the 2023 Tongue Creek Ranch prescribed fire plans and Will Scheerhoorn with Foothills County Fire Department helped answer questions about county permitting. The day saw 38 producers in attendance.



## PRODUCER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES WORKSHOP (OFCAF)

*March 15, 2023 - Three Hills, AB*

Hosted by FFGA, Kneehill County, Starland County, Rocky View County, Mountain View County, CFGA and RDAR. This workshop focused on producer funding opportunities at the Three Hills Centennial Place Arena. Grant Lastiwka started our day by giving a presentation on Basics to Grazing Management: grazing principles, utilizing new and existing water sources, and post drought grazing discussions. He also gave an introduction on Cover Crops. In the afternoon we had Sonja Shank with CFGA give an overview of the Advanced Grazing Systems program and Fiona Briody with RDAR presented on their OFCAF program. The day saw 23 producers in attendance.



## MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES FOR SOIL HEALTH

*March 20, 2023 - Champion, AB*

Hosted by FFGA, CARA, Vulcan County, R. A. West, Wheatland County, and Regenerative Alberta Living Lab. Topics for the day included How plants use soil bacteria to obtain nutrients by Dr. James White. Humic products and balancing mineral nutrients for soil health by Dr. Mir Seyedbagheri. Utilizing various soil health strategies to enhance production efficiency and quality by Rick Bieber. We also had Wayne Robinson share his producer perspective. We had 35 producers in attendance.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

*March 22, 2023 - High River, AB*

FFGA hosted our Annual General Meeting at the Highwood Centre in High River on March 22. There were 40 members in attendance, joining the Staff and Board of Directors. Our business meeting started off by being called to order by Chairman Daniel Doerksen.

An Election of Directors took place as Morrie Goetjen stepped down after service of 1, 3-year term. Emily Lowe had also stepped down. Successful candidates; Angela Kumlin and Ben Campbell joined the FFGA Board of Directors.

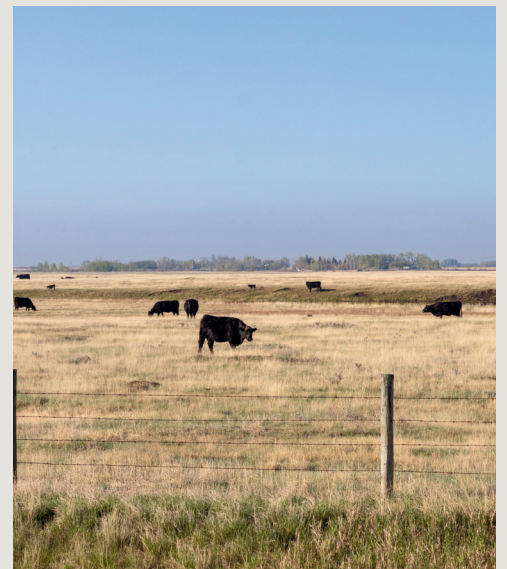
After the business meeting, attendees had the option to stay and listen to Keynote Speaker, Brian Sutter. Brian shared some stories on his time in the NHL as well as how growing up in agriculture has shaped who he is and why continuing to promote agriculture is importance for our youth.



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRAZING RESERVE ASSOCIATIONS

*April 17, 2023 - Brooks, AB*

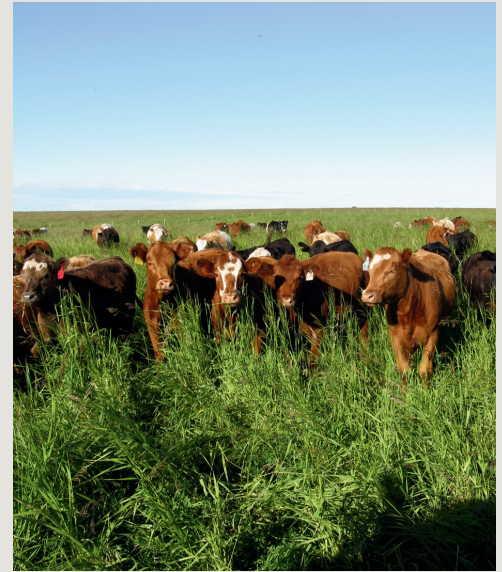
Hosted by FFGA, and Eastern Irrigation District. At this information session, FFGA and EID presented on the Resilient Agriculture Landscape Program (RALP) to the grazing reserves in the area and how they could benefit from these funding opportunities. The day saw 20 producers in attendance.



# PRO'S AND CON'S OF COVER CROPS WEBINAR

*May 9, 2023 - Webinar*

This virtual webinar provided information on the Pro's and Con's of Cover Crops. Presented by Graeme Finn with Union Forage who spoke on what to expect from your cover crops, what cover crops can do for your grazing operation and your soil, how you can keep the blends simple as well as problems to expect and the role of perennial pastures. This webinar was hosted by FFGA, and Union Forage with 46 people in attendance.



# MVC AGGIE DAYS

*June 9 & 10, 2023 - Cremona, AB*

FFGA joined Aggie Days hosted by Mountain View County with a fun, interactive booth that included games that students and the public had an opportunity to play and learn more about grazing and regenerative agriculture. The first day, we saw 400 students from surrounding areas, and on day 2 we saw 500 people from the general public.



# GREG JUDY GRAZING SCHOOL

*June 26, 2023 - Rumsey, AB*

Kent Holowath hosted our first Greg Judy Grazing School at his operation near Rumsey. This field tour led by Kent and special guest Greg Judy was well attended by 53 producers. Some topics Greg went over included: How to think like a grazer, fencing and water techniques for maximum profits, and the importance of focusing on daily animal performance. Partners included FFGA, CFGA, Newell County, Starland County, Wheatland County and Kneehill County.



## GREG JUDY GRAZING SCHOOL

*June 28, 2023 - Jumping Pound, AB*

This field tour was our most popular in 2023 and saw 73 producers in attendance. Hosted by Matt and Angela Kumlin at their cow/calf operation near Jumping Pound. The field tour was led by Matt and special guest Greg Judy. We looked at the Kumlin's grazing techniques and management, as well as their water sources and how they have improved them from the previous generations to their benefit including accessing on-farm funding to further develop their water systems and rotational grazing. Some topics Greg went over included: How to think like a grazer, fencing and water techniques for maximum profits, and the importance of focusing on daily animal performance. Partners included FFGA, CFGA, MD of Bighorn, Rocky View County, and Mountain View County.



## BURKE CREEK RANCH TOUR

*July 5, 2023 - Claresholm, AB*

Field tour hosts Rick Burton and daughter Kim Wachtler of Burke Creek Ranch walked us through their woody species encroachment challenges and management techniques, electric fencing used for rotational grazing, and water development. We also had Dr. Kris Nichols and Kim Cornish give an update on carbon mapping and the Regenerative Alberta Living Lab. The tour saw 38 producers. Partners included FFGA, Regenerative Alberta Living Lab, MD of Willow Creek, MD of Ranchland, and Deseret Ranches.



## TECHNOLOGY AND FORAGE FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE- FIELD TOUR

*July 12, 2023 - Madden, AB*

Hosted by FFGA, Olds College, Grey Wooded Forage Association, Union Forage, Mountain View County, Rocky View County, MD of Big Horn and Blue Rock Animal Nutrition. During the field tour Laio Silva Sobrinho of Olds College discussed how the College has increased their adoption of technology to improve rotational grazing. Graeme Finn with Union Forage discussed the specialty forage blends that the College is using for higher performance and gains. We looked at Olds College Pitstra site as well as received an update from Blue Rock Animal Nutrition on the Alberta Grass Sampling Project. The day was attended by 25 producers and industry members.





# ULTIMATE STOCKMANSHIP CHALLENGE

*July 12-14, 2023 - Parkland, AB*

The Second Annual Ultimate Stockmanship Challenge held at the Silver Slate Arena near Parkland include indepth topics such as Horsemanship with Glenn Stewart, Cattle Handling with Dawn Hnatow, and Low-Stress Doctoring with Malcolm McLean. Judges for the challenge portion of the clinic included Dawn Hnatow, Dylan Biggs, Dr. Desiree Gellatly, Paul Kernalguen, Glenn Stewart, and Marty Gardner. Partners included FFGA, Olds College, Cattlemens Corner, and Country Vets. The three days saw 30 attendees.



# SOUTHERN ALBERTA GRAZING SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

*July 26 & 27, 2023 - Longview, AB*

The Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women (SAGSW) was developed with the aim to provide ladies with information on range and grazing management that will help them manage their farm or ranch, and to give them hands-on skills that they can apply at home. This was the 20th year that the school has been offered. Topics in 2023 included; Grazing Principles and Practices, Soil Health, Hands-on Plant ID, Range Health Assessment, Livestock Handling, Managing with Wildlife, Riparian Health Assessments, Funding Opportunities, Benefits of an EFP, and Ranching Women Panel.

The SAGSW was hosted in the Longview area and had 58 producer and industry attendees. This school was hosted by; FFGA, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Natural Resources Conservation Board, MD of Willow Creek, Alberta Conservation Association, Starland County, Alberta Government, Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum, Multisar, Cows and Fish, and Chinook Applied Research Association.



# MANAGED GRAZING STRATEGIES ON NATIVE GRASSLAND- FIELD TOUR

*August 16, 2023 - Gem, AB*

Field Tour hosts Daniel and his brother Lorin Doerksen of Gemstone Cattle Company walked us through the Gem Native Community Pasture. With guest speaker Mike Roberts we discussed considerations when grazing native grassland, and rotational grazing strategies that promote the health and production of a grass stand. FFGA also gave an update on funding opportunities. The tour saw 55 producers. Partners included FFGA, Wheatland County, Eastern Irrigation District, Starland County, Newell County, Gemstone Cattle Company, and Vulcan County.



## CATTLE HANDLING WORKSHOP

*September 13, 2023 - Nanton, AB*

This workshop was held at Chad Lundberg's Feedlot near Nanton and was led by Instructor Mike Sears who demonstrated a hands on workshop in which attendees learned about low stress handling techniques such as flight zones, when to apply pressures and when to let off, how to work in a bud box and herd dynamics. The workshop had 18 producers in attendance. Partners included FFGA, MD of Willow Creek, and MD of Ranchland.



## FFGA CHRISTMAS PARTY

*November 17, 2023 - High River, AB*

FFGA Board of Directors and Staff celebrated a successful year with 68 members in attendance. We had a delicious dinner followed by Cowboy Poet B.J Smith who gave an enjoyable presentation. At the end of the night everyone got a chance to visit and discuss FFGA's successful year.



## RANCHING FOR PROFIT SCHOOL

*November 26-Dec 2, 2023 - Okotoks, AB*

The Ranching for Profit School, run by Ranch Management Consultants (RMC), is a program offered to producers who want to learn how to make their ranch more profitable. It's a one-week intensive school where producers learn about economics, finance, people, ecology, grazing and production. The school allows producers to face a paradigm shift on how to work in the business versus how to work on the business. The school we co-hosted for the second time in Okotoks and was sold out with 50 producers, and had a large waiting list! We are excited to host another Ranching for Profit School in 2024.



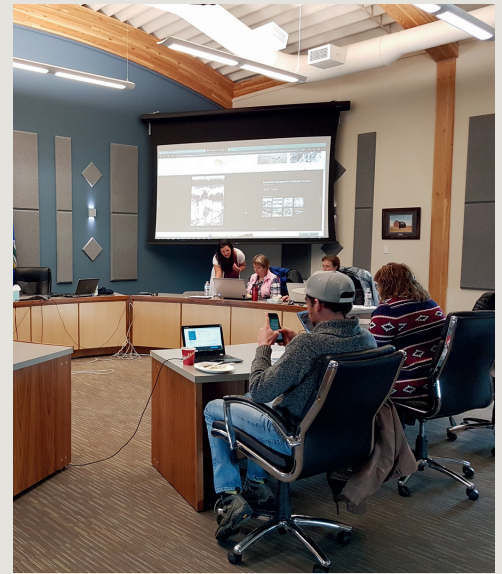
## **ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN WORKSHOPS**

*February 16, 2023 - Three Hills, AB*

*February 22, 2023 - Balzac, AB*

*March 1, 2023 - High River, AB*

Environmental Farm Plan workshops are designed to give producers a chance to work with an EFP Technician one on one. They are popular and most municipalities work with FFGA to host a workshops in their slow seasons to give producers more availability to attend. On February 16th, EFP Technician Sonja Bloom was joined by Kneehill County and 7 producers. On February 22nd, Sonja was joined by the Rocky View County, as well as 6 producers. The last EFP Workshop of 2023 was on March 1st with the Foothills County and 5 producers. For more information on the Environmental Farm Plan Program refer to page 28.



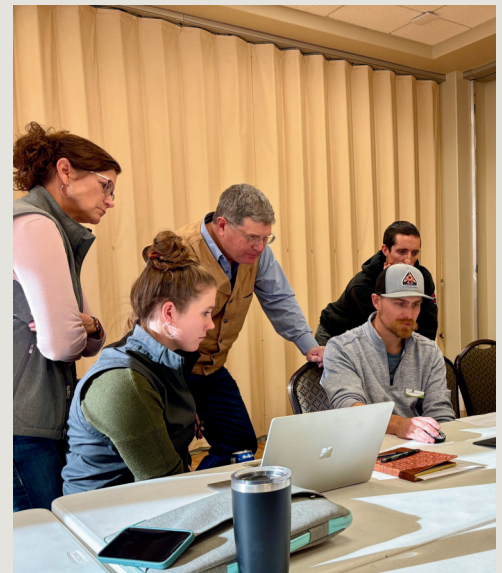
## **SECURING SUCCESS: FUNDING AND GRAZING FOR YOUR OPERATION**

*October 27, 2023 - Pincher Creek, AB*

*November 8, 2023 - High River, AB*

*November 21, 2023 - Cremona, AB*

The first workshop was held on October 27 in Pincher Creek with 18 producers and industry members. The second workshop was held on November 8 in High River with 35 producers and industry members. Our third workshop was held on November 21 in Cremona with 27 producers and industry members. Each workshop showcased local funding opportunities, with a chance for attendees to network with experts from the programs and other local organizations. In the afternoon attendees had a choice to work hands on with a technician on their EFP (Environmental Farm Plan), RALP (Resilient Agriculture Landscape Program) application, or learn how to build their own grazing plan for their operation with Mike Roberts and Ben Campbell. Partners on the three events included; MD of Pincher Creek, MD of Ranchland, Cardston County, MD of Crowsnest Pass, MD of Willow Creek, CFGA, ARECA, Foothills County, Vulcan County, Mountain View County, Grey Wooded Forage Association, MD of Big Horn, and Rocky View County.





# PROJECTS

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## SOIL HEALTH BENCHMARK STUDY

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## REGENERATIVE ALBERTA LIVING LABORATORY INITIATIVE

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# SOIL HEALTH BENCHMARK STUDY

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The final report for the Soil Health Benchmark Study was submitted in 2023 to Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation's Natural Resource Management Branch. The project was designed to promote a better understanding of soil health and to develop a provincial database of physical, biological and chemical soil indicators, all of which contribute to an overall measure of soil health. A biological and physical baseline for provincial soils will provide a framework which can help define strategies for managing and improving the productive capacity, and sustainability, of our soils. Understanding and managing for a diverse micro-biological functional group underground may contribute to an overall healthier soil by improving soil aggregation, soil water infiltration and storage, as well as improved carbon sequestration. The improved aggregation stability will also contribute to enhanced carbon sequestration levels in the soil. Healthy soils produce healthy plants resulting in a higher quality food product. Knowing their soil health constraints will give Alberta producers a valuable tool for use in making strategic management decisions, and monitoring those practices, on their farms and ranches.

The database will also be used to develop regional scoring functions for assessing, interpreting and understanding soil health status and management responses. The overall soil health benchmark will contribute to target, monitor and adjust soil health constraints not only at the provincial level but also in each region represented by the 11 Alberta Applied Research and Forage Associations involved in this project.

During the course of the project, soil samples were collected from over 1800 sites across Alberta by partnering organizations. Soil health indicators for physical (soil compaction, water infiltration, texture and wet aggregate stability), biological (active carbon, soil microbial respiration, total fungal and bacteria biomass) were done under the guidance of Dr. Yamily Zavala at the CARASHLab using protocols adapted from Cornell University as well as the Canadian Soil Food Web Protocols. Total carbon, organic and nitrogen levels were analyzed in partnership with the University of Alberta and chemical characteristics (soil minerals and fertility) were evaluated at a commercial laboratory. The database and regional scoring curves are continually evolving as information from benchmark analysis from samples outside the project are added. Soil health reports were initially generated using the Cornell Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health (CASH) framework.

Dr. Zavala has observed a few trends from samples. Compaction, soil wet aggregate stability and poor water infiltration are common concerns at many sites and are often associated with lower biological components. She has found a great diversity of beneficial soil creatures and predatory species.

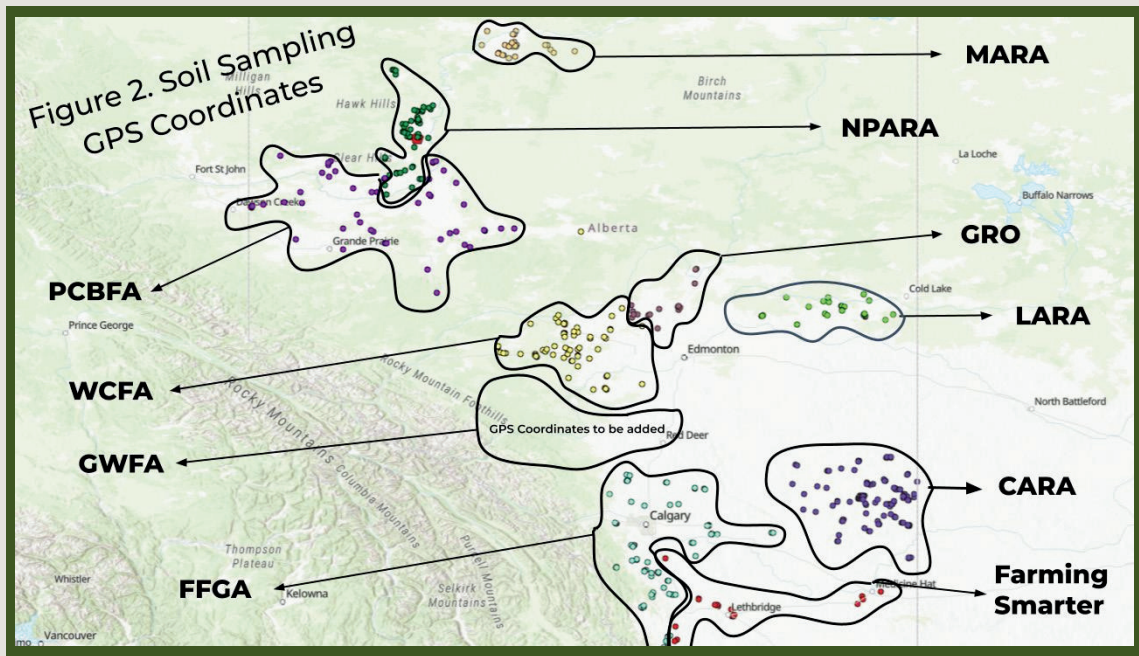
Some of the sites sampled in 2019 were re-visited in 2022 for collection of on-site compaction and infiltration measurements as well as a full analysis. Any changes observed in soil parameters will be correlated to management practices at these sites during the past three years. Evaluation of the data from site re-visits will be a highlight of the project. The information is intended to be a working tool that helps managers better understand soil health, how various management practices impact it and those which might contribute to improving land resilience.

Funding for further monitoring was received from RDAR for a verification of management on soil health at specific sites during 2022 through 2024. The verification project is a collaboration of all groups who have been working with producers across Alberta. Most of the soil health reports have been shared with regional associations and their producers. Additional meetings are planned for discussion of individual site information.

Participating groups included soil health information in many events and activities during the year. Several methods of sharing information were utilized, including one-on-one consultations, seminars, workshops, field tours, webinars and more. Dr. Yamily Zavala has met with several producers to discuss their benchmark reports as well as strategies for remediation of identified constraints. An update on the Soil Health Benchmark project was made by project lead Dr. Zavala at the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing held in December 2022 in Edmonton to over 500 conference attendees. The project received attention as the first submission for the Cattlemen magazine's new research update column early in 2023.

Dr. Yamily Zavala participated in RDAR's January 2023 Research Review with a poster presentation of the project.

Figure 1 shows an example of one of the soil health indicators' scoring functions for the 3 depths of soil samplings. The scoring functions were initially developed using the Cornell Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health (CASH) framework because there was not adequate information from Alberta soils. The scoring functions are now based on the data collected during the Alberta Benchmark Study and will replace those generated earlier.



*Dianne Westerlund*  
Manager  
**Chinook Applied Research Association**



# REGENERATIVE ALBERTA LIVING LABORATORY INITIATIVE

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We have had a busy year two (April 2023- March 2024) of the Regenerative Alberta Living Lab!

The proposal “Maximizing Agricultural Solutions through Integration of Beneficial Management Practices” has grown into Regenerative Alberta Living Lab (<https://www.regenlivinglab.org>, @regenlivinglab).

The program continues to be funded through Agriculture Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)’s Agricultural Climate Solutions-Living Labs program.

The project has 115 producers from Mackenzie County in the North to the Montana Boarder in the South who will be working with the science and socio-economic team to collect data on whole-farm soil carbon sequestration and ecological goods and services. The overall goal is to better understand mechanisms involved in soil health, reduce costs of production, and improve soil organic matter and function. Focused around the 6 soil health principles, we are following real life successes and challenges to advance on-farm and ranch systems both for the 115 core producers and hopefully the broader farming community.

## **Soil Sampling and Lab Analysis**

A big part of the project includes three rounds of soil sampling (years 1/2, 3 and 5). A guiding sampling plan is generated through machine learning using over 50 layers of data to inform where we take the points. Currently, we are completing the last 4 farms in the first round of soil sampling across the project. We are sampling to a depth of 1 metre and are dividing the samples 0-15cm, 15-30cm, 30-60cm and 60-end of the core or 100cm.

Across the province this year we sampled on 82 farms and ranches, took 1397 cores resulting in 4956 samples.

Within the FFGA cohort, 26 farms and ranches were sampled for a total of 454 soil cores and 1533 samples. Core and layer data was collected for all of these samples including bulk density, root length, concentrations of significant roots and gravel, soil horizon color and depth, and temperature and moisture levels at sampling. Total organic carbon, carbon, and nitrogen have been measured on 233 of these 1533 samples. Macro- and micro-nutrients were extracted and analyzed using weak and strong acid extracts on 211 samples. Phosphate was analyzed using the Olson methodology and ammonium and nitrate with potassium chloride on these samples.

In addition to working tirelessly to process samples for carbon and nutrients our partners at AAFC in Lethbridge are extracting DNA so that we can deliver data to core producers on the bacteria and fungi in the microbiome of their soil sometime in year three (2024-2025) of the project.

It is A LOT of samples to process! Both the FWWF and AAFC team are working at full capacity to get data out to core producers and to our mapping team as quickly as possible.



## Soil Mapping

All of the soil characteristics will be mapped once all the results have been analyzed to create farm-scale soil maps for the core participants. We are in the process of a series of co-development sessions with core producers to determine how their results and package of soil maps will be presented.

## Knowledge Transfer

Across the project our partners at the applied research and forage associations hosted 6 field/ tailgate sessions that featured the operations of some the RA-LL core producers. FFGA was gracious to host two at Burke Creek Ranch and Gemstone Cattle Company in 2023. The FWWF/RALL soil processing lab team hosted an Open Lab Day on August 21 at the lab in Olds. This winter our partner groups are hosting a workshop series on Overcoming Weed Management Challenges in Regenerative Ag with 5 sessions across the province. FFGA is hosting two sessions, in Fort Macleod and Cheadle.

## Plant and Grazing App

To collect useful data related to grazing management and plant communities, the RA-LL team is developing an integrated plant community and grazing app that will enable each producers' unique conditions and management practices to be gathered and studied in relation to their soil and carbon sequestration data. It is also being designed to be a management tool.

We have designed a prototype of the grazing app which has two distinct modes, historical records for those who have a multi-year set of past grazing charts; and a field application that will facilitate the recording of herd moves in real time. The field data gets transferred into a desktop platform to interface with that year's grazing plan. Past years' grazing charts from several ranches already have been recorded in the application, which deliver seasons' total consumption data, recovery periods, herd density, etc. The field mode of the application will be tested in a few ranches this coming 2024 growing season.

The plant aspect of the app is being developed in parallel and training data was collected by our soil sampling team over the 2023 sampling season, again we hope to have the app functional for testing on farms during the 2024 growing season.

## Socio-Economic and GHG data collection

Olivier LaRocque from FWWF has been focused on collecting management data from grazing operations to inform the function of the grazing app to maximize the usefulness of the app to core producer operations.

Keri Sharpe from FWWF is continuing to gather management data from producer participants that will enable estimation of GHG emission reductions throughout the project.

The FWWF team is developing a report on producer perspectives to barriers of adoption and will sending out a new type of survey called a "OneonOne" to collect more data on this subject mid-March.

*Kimberley Cornish*  
Director  
Food Water Wellness







# ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMING

## ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN (EFP)

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) WebBook, is an online voluntary educational system that guides producers step by step to build their EFP. The system is conveniently laid out online with resources at each step to give you all the information you need to make decisions about your farm. Once your plan is complete, submitting it to your technician to review is as simple as clicking a button. When your plan has been approved the online system will provide you with a checklist of your action plan to reduce environmental risk. Then when you have accomplished some or all of your goals, you can update your plan in minutes, making the renewal process seamless and easy. The EFP can also be a prerequisite for some funding opportunities.

FFGA has an EFP Technician on staff to help you navigate your workbook and implement your action plan. Whether you prefer to work virtually, one-on-one in the office, or in group workshop settings, our EFP Tech, Sonja Bloom is always ready to help you with your EFP. Visit <https://www.albertaefp.com/>



# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

## SUSTAINABLE CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIP (SCAP)

To support continued innovation, growth and prosperity, the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) has launched its programs. This 5-year (2023 - 2028), \$3.5 billion investment includes \$1 billion in federal programs and activities and \$2.5 billion in cost-shared programs and activities by federal-provincial-territorial governments. The SCAP framework represents a cost-shared federal-provincial investment of \$508 million over 5 years towards strategic programs and services for the agriculture and agri-food industry in Alberta.

Funding programs under SCAP for producers include; On-Farm Value Add, Water, Efficient Grain Handling, and Farm Technology. Also included in SCAP funding is RALP which is highlighted below.






**Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership**

## RESILIENT AGRICULTURE LANDSCAPE PROGRAM (RALP)

RALP funding is offered on a per-acre payment basis for a term of 3 years. In this way, RALP can better support producers in their ability to implement projects on their land that over time can provide significant benefits for the producer, the public and future generations. Funding is available in 4 areas: Pasture Management, Cropland Conversion, Tree Establishment and Wetlands (for produces participating in WRRP projects).

**Get one-on-one help with your application**

-  1-866-310-RALP
-  [info@RALP.ca](mailto:info@RALP.ca)
-  [alberta.ca/resilient-agricultural-landscape-program](http://alberta.ca/resilient-agricultural-landscape-program)





# MEET THE 2023 FFGA BURSARY AND NUFFIELD SPONSORSHIP RECIPIENTS

## MORGAN ROBERTSON

My name is Morgan Robertson and I grew up on a mixed operation just East of Longview. Growing up I was involved in the Longview 4H Beef Club and learned many lifelong skills from it. In addition, I also learned the importance of agriculture and more specifically the beef industry. With a passion for agriculture, I knew I wanted to gain more knowledge and attend post-secondary. I am currently attending Olds College and I am finishing up my Agricultural Management Diploma. I plan on continuing my education at the University of Saskatchewan and I am interested in taking the Animal Science program they offer. I have grown up in this incredible industry and have enjoyed every minute and I am excited to continue learning more.

I would like to thank the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association for this bursary that allows me to further my education in post-secondary.



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## AARON VAN STEEKELENBURG

My name is Aaron Van Steekelenburg and I'm from a dairy farm near Millicent Alberta. We milk 65 purebred Holsteins and five years ago have started my own purebred Red Angus herd as a side project. Currently I go to school at the University of Saskatchewan and I'm in my 4th and final year of my Animal Science Degree. My future plans are to go abroad and learn how to make cheese and other milk products with the goal of having my own business selling milk and beef products directly off the farm.

I would like to give a big thanks to the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association for helping me forward my education and I am excited to be a member now!



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## CRAIG LESTER

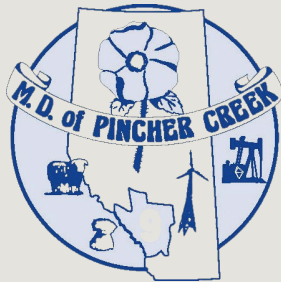
FFGA is sponsoring Nuffield Scholar Craig Lester. Making valuable connections is Craig's passion. As the owner and producer of Rural Roots Canada, a multi-media platform serving agricultural producers, businesses and organizations throughout the prairies and beyond. Craig's topic will examine the media's role in agriculture and the influence it has on consumers' perspective of the industry.



**Nuffield Canada**  
AGRICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

# MUNICIPAL & FUNDING PARTNERS

## THANK YOU TO OUR MUNICIPAL PARTNERS



Mountain View  
COUNTY



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY



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## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS



# MEMBERSHIP

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION IS A PROUD MEMBER OF:



**AFIN**

Alberta Forage Industry Network

FFGA Producer Representative:

**Tamara Garstin**

Longview



**CRSB**

Canadian Roundtable For Sustainable Beef

FFGA Producer Representative:

**Graeme Finn**

Madden



Agricultural Research Extension and  
Council of Alberta

FFGA Producer Representative:

**Wolter Van der Kamp**

Longview



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Conserving  
Canada's  
Wetlands





