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# GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS May 2026

## Director's Note—Ben Campbell

### Greetings FFGA Members

Happy Spring Everyone! Grass is growing, bees are flying, birds are nesting and valuable cattle are growing! This time of year is always exciting because it's a chance to put boots to ground for plans we've made over the winter (with ideas sparked at a foothills event?), a new water project, fencing or seeding something for grazing. Whatever it is, you'd better get started because the clock is now ticking! It's exciting and a time where explosive growth is right in front of us. It's also a time where we can create a situation for burn out with all the daylight and enthusiasm, at least that's been my pattern. It's now become a part of my spring planning, strategizing to avoid burnout. What that's looked like is scheduling time with no work (doesn't always work) for at least an afternoon of otherwise "usable" time with my family, no phones, work texts or thinking about work. I also try to spend one night per month away from home and the farm, which I find gives me perspective and puts a lot of the "really important" things stressing me into their rightful perspective. Alberta has such an annual push and pull based on the season that I feel more and more like a part of the wildlife population, living in concert with the weather. Sometimes flying south for the winter!

Speaking of that, I've been in New Zealand for a few months and have missed some of the excellent FFGA events! But good news for me is that we have two events coming in hot in June that should be really exciting. One

just north of Coaldale focusing on farm innovations and hands on skills. The other is at long time FFGA member and past director Alex Robertson's ranch near Longview called From Settlement to Stewardship: Ranching in the Foothills, focusing on grazing native grasslands in the foothills, where I'm lucky enough to be one of the presenters.

We're very pleased to announce an exciting expansion to the FFGA team and are thrilled to welcome some new faces. At our AGM in March, we welcomed three new board members, Martina Wade, Brandon Toews, and Matt Malyk and extended a thanks to outgoing directors Daryl Chubb, Daniel Doerksen, and Tanis Cross, who have completed their six-year terms. This transition reflects a healthy board turnover, bringing in fresh perspectives and new ideas. We're also excited to share that we've added a new staff member, Lori-Anne Eklund-Forbes. This will increase our capacity to cover new areas in greater depth.

We're all looking forward to an exciting summer at FFGA!

**Ben Campbell**



(Ben hiking a volcano in New Zealand)

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# PRODUCER FUNDING UPDATE

## PROVINCE WIDE FUNDING PROGRAMS

### Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP)

- **On-Farm Efficiency Program (OFEP)** -  
*Application intake is closed.*
- **Water** - *Application intake is open.*
- **On-Farm Value Added (OFVA)** -  
*Application intake is closed.*
- **AgriInvest & AgriStability**

### On Farm Climate Action Fund (OFCAF)

- **CFGA** - Rotational Grazing  
*Application intake is closed.*
- **RDAR** - Nitrogen Management
  - Adoption of Cover Cropping
  - Rotational Grazing*Application intake open.*



## FFGA REGIONAL FUNDING PROGRAMS

Municipal Ag Service Board Funding

ALUS

Oldman Watershed Council

Waterton Biosphere Reserve

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Irrigation Districts



*On the Cover: Last summer at the Summer Grazing School. Photo: FFGA*

## Thank you for your support!



# Virtual Cattle Management



Photo: FFGA

Moving the fence or checking cows while drinking coffee from the kitchen table may seem like fiction, but it is fact for Laura Laing and John Smith.

In January the couple placed 276 solar-powered collars on their cows and can now sit back and watch the movement of the cows from an app on their phone. “It has been pretty exciting,” said Laing, of Nanton. “We wanted to try something new. How do we advance and take advantage of new technology? We wanted the potential to change our entire industry,” said Laing.

The couple has followed the growth and adoption of virtual fencing on cattle operations for a few years, but felt the Halter brand technology was the best fit for the rugged terrain of their summer grazing land. “I am fairly impulsive and it was the right time,” said Smith.

Now, the cattle are being trained to respond to sound cues from the virtual collars on swath grazing in fields near their home. Soon, the rest of the herd will be fitted with collars, trained and in the summer all their 450 cows will head into the rough terrain on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains to graze.

“It is absolutely amazing how quickly they respond,” said Laing.

Sound is the primary directional cue. When a cow crosses the virtual boundary, sound comes out of the left side of the collar to guide right and the right side to guide left to bring them back into the fenced areas. Sound increases in frequency the longer the

cow ignores the cue. If the sound cues are ignored, a low energy electric pulse is used to get the cow’s attention.

Vibrations cues let cows know it’s time to move. When a new fence is drawn on the map, the collar vibrates when the cow is facing the right direction letting the cow know there is fresh feed ahead. There is no pulse with this cue, so cows can move at their own pace.

Plateau Cattle Co. is just one of three Alberta cattle operations testing the Halter company’s technology this winter. The company hopes to fully launch in Canada this spring. The test for the technology will be when the cattle are moved to the rough terrain this summer in the hills and valleys of the Livingstone Mountain Range.

Smith has no worries weather will impact the collars. The technology is used by ranches in the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. The southern Alberta weather is similar to weather in Montana where the technology is already being used on ranches. The unknown part for their operation will be when they spend time on the summer grazing land.

Some of the grazing land is heavily forested and the cows may linger longer in the trees and not enough sunlight will reach the solar-charged collars. The technology works by sending a signal from the collars to the phone through cell service. The company maps and installs towers to ensure full coverage across each ranch or grazing area.

Using the app, the couple can draw virtual fences throughout the grazing area. A virtual fence may be drawn alongside a riparian area to prevent the cattle from damaging sensitive waterways. A fence can be drawn around an undergrazed part of the grassland to keep the cattle grazing longer in an area. A virtual fence can be drawn around a group of cows and a bull to ensure the animals stay bunched together to increase pregnancy rates.

Cost is one of the first questions they are asked about when the pair talk about virtual fencing. The upfront cost is significant with collars and added towers, but the benefits are also substantial. If the open rate for cows drops from 12 percent to 7 percent, their herd will easily pay for the subscription to the service, said Smith.

Laing said they expect to save money by reducing labour, lowering fencing costs and optimizing grassland by moving cattle to areas of new grass and reducing overgrazing grass in others.

“This is the greatest invention for our industry since barbed wire,” said Smith.

The summer grazing land is shared with recreation users, loggers and random campers. One of their biggest losses is when cattle collide with vehicles on the 35 kilometres of road in the allotment. The virtual fencing can keep the cattle away from the busy roadways. The collars also send a signal if the animal isn’t moving. The notification can lead Smith or Laing right to the collar. If an animal is killed by a predator, officials can be notified and a compensation claim made quickly. By bunching the animals into larger groups may also help reduce predator losses.

The couple estimate the adoption of the technology will be rapid and within 10 years 85 percent of the cattle operations will adopt the technology. It is a way of increasing carrying capacity without increasing the land base.

While using the technology has plenty of benefits, it doesn’t eliminate all of the work, said Smith.

“The halter doesn’t tell you how high your grass is.”

Author: Mary MacArthur  
Original Article: Alberta Beef Magazine

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# When should you use a calving jack — and when should you stop?



Photo: FFGA

The calving jack can save a life, but it can just as easily kill the cow or calf if used improperly. That's why it's important to understand the pros and cons of this tool.

A calving jack can exert up to 400 kg of force. For context, a cow naturally pushing exerts 75 kg of force, while two people pulling on a calf exert 150 kg. While a calf jack may extract a calf when two people manually pulling have failed, the result may be a fatality. Forcing a calf through a birth canal that it should not fit through causes serious trauma to both cow and calf.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** A calving jack can exert more than five times the force a cow generates on her own. Used at the right time, it saves lives. Used too soon or too aggressively, it causes nerve damage, internal tearing, broken bones, and death — injuries that far outweigh the cost of calling a veterinarian or waiting 20 more minutes.

## **Risks to the cow**

Cows are at risk of nerve damage, which can result in them going down after calving. In some cases, nerve damage is permanent. In others, the cow expe-

periences severe muscle damage from prolonged lying and dies before the nerve recovers. Cows are also at risk of uterine or vaginal tearing from hard pulls. This can lead to peritonitis and death, or reduced fertility in future breeding seasons. In extreme cases, severe pelvic or spinal cord injuries can leave cows completely paralyzed.

## **Risks to the calf**

Calves are at risk of broken bones, especially ribs and limbs if chains are placed incorrectly, and internal organ damage.

## **When the calving jack makes sense**

A calving jack is a useful tool for mild to moderate dystocias when a person is working alone, especially if they have strength or physical limitations. Before pulling any calf, check to make sure the calf is in the normal birthing position. You should feel a nose and two front feet.

Before pulling, determine if the calf is likely to fit through the pelvic canal. You should be able to fit one hand on either side of the calf's shoulders as it is entering the canal. If your hand does not fit or if the calf's front legs are crossing, it is unlikely the calf will fit. Remember, the widest part of the calf is the hips. If the shoulders of the calf are already wedged into the pelvic canal, then the hips can't make it through.

## **Why patience matters**

Even if the calf is in normal presentation and presumed to fit through the birth canal, the calf

jack should not be the first choice of intervention. When a calf is born, the entire process of pushing the calf through the birth canal (stage two of labour) can take 30 minutes to two hours. This allows the cow's cervix to fully dilate, her vagina to stretch, and facilitates the safer progress of the calf to reduce tearing. A calf jack will expedite the process, preventing the cow's body from naturally adapting and increasing unnecessary trauma to cow and calf.

“Forcing a calf through a birth canal that it should not fit through causes serious trauma to both cow and calf.” - Dr. Lexie Reed

If a cow or heifer is not progressing after 20 to 30 minutes of active labour, it is appropriate to intervene. There are several techniques that can be used to leverage the cow's natural physiology during labour as an alternative to the calf jack.

## **Alternatives to the calving jack**

### **Cervix not dilated**

If the calf is unable to fully enter the birth canal because the cervix is not fully dilated, it can be manually dilated. Place your hands through the cervix and clasp them on the uterine side. Push outwards with your forearms to encourage dilation of the cervix. The cervix should slowly dilate as you continue to push for several minutes.

A cow and calf rest in a calving pen near round bales, with

*(Continued on page 7)*

(continued from page 6)

other cattle and farm buildings in the background. Photo: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

### Vagina not dilated

If the cervix is dilated but the vagina is preventing passage of the calf, use the same technique above with your arms to stretch the vagina. This helps to prevent tearing of the perineum, the separation between the vagina and the rectum.

### Calf stuck in birth canal

If there is concern that the calf is too large to fit through the birth canal, there are a couple of tips to try before resorting to veterinary intervention. First, apply lots of lubricant. Mix in a bucket and use a drench tube and pump to get sufficient lubrication inside the birth canal. If possible, avoid J-Lube, as this brand is irritating to the abdomen if the dystocia leads to a C-section. Second, cast the cow down so she is lying instead of standing when you pull the calf. When a calf is lying down her pelvis is naturally tilted on a 45 degree angle. Since the birth canal is an oval shape, this rotation allows the hips of the calf to pass through on a diagonal, naturally creating extra space for it to pass.

For in-depth instructions on how to safely and easily cast a cow, search for videos of the Rueff or Burley method for casting cows with rope.

### When to stop pulling

Keep in mind that as long as the umbilical cord is intact, the calf is receiving oxygen from the cow, and there is time to perform these manipulations. There is one related scenario where a calf jack is especially useful: backwards

calvings with larger calves. When the calf passes through the birth canal backwards, the pelvis puts pressure on the umbilical cord, limiting oxygen delivery to the calf. If the calf runs out of oxygen, its instinct is to inhale, and it may breathe amniotic fluid into its lungs. Once the decision has been made to pull the calf, it is important to get the calf's hips and abdomen through the pelvic canal as quickly as possible to prevent this.

If progress is not being made after 20 minutes, move on to the next option. Some calvings will only end successfully in a C-section or fetotomy. Making this decision promptly will improve the success rate for both calf and cow.

Author: Lexie Reed

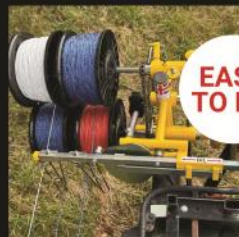
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# Share Your Feedback on the Beef Cattle Code of Practice

Photo: FFGA



The public comment period for the Beef Cattle Code of Practice (Beef Code or the Code) is open April 13 through June 12 at [www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle). The Beef Code outlines expected and recommended animal care practices for beef cattle and is subject to a regular review process. The public comment period is an opportunity for anyone who has an interest in how beef cattle are raised in Canada, including consumers, veterinarians, foodservice professionals, and producers, to review the draft content and share feedback.

Feedback gathered through the public comment period is critical in the code development process and helps determine the direction set in the final document. Strong producer feedback from all regions of Canada is an important step in this process.

The Beef Code is meant to drive continuous improvement in animal welfare and is

built to be scientifically informed, practical, and reflect societal expectations for responsible farm animal care. The Code uses an outcome-based approach that focuses on achieving successful standards while allowing for flexibility in how these outcomes are met rather than dictating the exact processes or methods to be used.

The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) ([www.nfacc.ca](http://www.nfacc.ca)) oversees Code of Practice development and review through a structured, multi-stakeholder process that includes producers, veterinarians, scientists, transporters, processors, retailers, government, and animal welfare representatives. CCA is a member of NFACC and serves as the national commodity organization responsible for initiating the code review process for its sector. Decisions are science-informed and consensus-based.

The review process involves two committees: the Code Development Committee and Scientific Committee. The Code Development Committee updates the Code if required and the Scientific Committee reviews literature to determine priority welfare issues and summarizes available research for the Code Committee. Science-informed, industry leadership on code development, reviews, and revisions ensures a code that reflects an animal care standard that is grounded in practicality while considering the diversity of Canadian beef

cattle producers.

Maintaining an up-to-date Code informs potential policy conversations with industry expertise backed by science and prevents rules written by people far from primary production. A current Code can help inform policy by showing what's workable and already in place, providing helpful context and a frame of reference on acceptable practices and standards of care in Canada.

The content and layout of the draft code available for public comment remains largely consistent with the current Beef Code, which can be viewed at [www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle). The proposed draft incorporates new scientific evidence and updated practices in beef cattle care.

There are six sections or "chapters" in the Code: Animal Environment; Feed and Water; Animal Health; Animal Husbandry; Transportation; On-Farm Euthanasia. Visit the CCA website, [www.cattle.ca](http://www.cattle.ca) for a broad overview of content in the draft Code content that differs from the current code.

The finalized Code is expected to be released in the second quarter of 2027.

Producers, please visit [www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle) before June 12 to ensure your feedback and opinions are considered!

Author: Tyler Fulton, CCA President



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# FROM SETTLEMENT TO STEWARDSHIP RANCHING IN THE FOOTHILLS

June 16, 2026 - East Longview Hall

Join us for a day in the Foothills to learn about ranch history and tools to keep rangelands healthy and productive for future generations.

## AGENDA

- **9:15am** - Coffee & Registration
- Scott Grattidge on Western Settlement, Ranching History in the Foothills
- Justin Thompson & Sandy Bruce on Land Trusts & Projects in the Foothills
- Sonja Bloom on Funding & Grants available to producers in the Foothills
- **12:00pm** - Lunch
- Ben Campbell & Alex Roberston on Grazing Management in the Foothills
- **3:00pm** - Wrap up

## COST

(includes lunch)

FFGA MEMBER: \$25 / NON-MEMBER: \$35

## REGISTER AT

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July 8, 2026

9:00am - 4:30pm

\*Please meet at the Stavelly Community Centre, where buses will take us to the research centre.\*

### COST

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<https://pastoralstewardship.eventbrite.ca>





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The day will include visits to two pastures, where we'll tour demonstration plots, compare treatment and control results, and discuss product performance. You'll also gain practical knowledge on grazing management and how these approaches can be applied on your operation.

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

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Note: Subjects may change due to speaker availability.

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