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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS April 2025

Manager's Note (A Year in Review) — Laura Gibney

Greetings FFGA Members

2024 offered more moisture in most areas than we had seen in the previous few years, providing some relief on pastures and feed supplies. Strong cattle prices created more optimism within the industry and we head into spring hoping for more timely moisture.

At the Foothills Forage & Grazing Association 2024 was a much-appreciated year of stability. Continuing to work closely with Alberta Agriculture & Irrigation (AGI) and Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) FFGA's base funding was also maintained. FFGA has worked hard for many years to diversify our revenue streams in order to grow and enhance FFGA while we strive for long-term stable revenue, and are happy to report have continued to make progress on this in 2024. The board and staff spent a couple of days revisiting and updating the association's 5-year Strategic Business Plan as well as an in-depth 18-month action plan, positioning us well as we move into 2025. FFGA is proud of the position we are in today with a consistent, capable, and energetic staff team, a cohesive and engaged board of directors, an active membership, thriving partnerships and a healthy financial position. We look forward to continuing to serve the FFGA membership across our entire region in 2025.

FFGA partnered on the delivery of 29 events and webinars with an attendance of 1,693 people in 2024. Our Grassroots News & Views newsletter continues to be distributed monthly to our members and partners. Currently FFGA has a

membership of 140 Farm Businesses, 408 hits on the website monthly, 3,038 followers on Facebook, 1,446 on X (Twitter) and 678 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 2025, we have been busy with our International Ag Tour to Italy, writing grant reports, wrapping up the 2024 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 tours and 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 is fabulous attending 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



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On the Cover: Group Photo in Italy on the FFGA Ag & Sightseeing Tour

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Enhanced calving biosecurity pays off



Photo: FFGA

Biosecurity is always of the utmost importance on beef operations.

At calving time, however, that importance is amplified due to two groups of animals being more susceptible to infectious diseases: new calves and their dams.

“Young calves, obviously, are prone to infectious diseases,” said John Campbell, a professor in the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan’s Western College of Veterinary Medicine.

“Their immune system is just really starting to function, they’re relying on their immunity from their mother ... and if a calf doesn’t get adequate colostrum, it’s especially susceptible to infectious disease.”

As well, cows experience a natural decline in their immune function when they calve, also putting them at greater risk of disease.

These factors make the lead-up to calving season a good time for producers to revisit biosecurity strategies on their operation, starting by creating a plan with their veterinarian to encompass the entire year.

Campbell said talking about biosecurity with their veterinarian can prevent major disease issues in the future.

“There’s some neat work out of England, where they showed that producers that had a formal discussion about biosecurity with their veterinarian had less problems down the road, so it’s something that’s important to think about and plan for.”

Minimize introductions

One main facet of biosecurity is preventing disease from entering a herd,

which is primarily accomplished by minimizing the introduction of outside animals.

Bringing new animals into the herd around calving season can be risky and should be avoided if possible, Campbell said.

A common risk comes when a cow loses her calf and the producer buys a calf from the auction market or another operation to graft onto her.

“That’s fairly high risk, especially for things like salmonella and bovine viral diarrhea and even many of the other infectious pathogens,” said Campbell.

“If you have a twin that you can cross foster, if you have some other option, it’s far better than going to buy a calf that you don’t know its background. You don’t know what it’s carrying and you don’t know what it’s bringing on to your operation.”

If a new calf must be purchased, source it from an operation with a similar biosecurity program, and quarantine it for two weeks with its new dam.

Similarly, it’s best to avoid introducing dairy females from outside operations to be used as nurse cows, according to an online resource from Saskatchewan Ag Extension.

“These operations may have diseases that are endemic that beef cattle operations are not regularly exposed to,” the article stated.

Ahead of calving season, quarantine any newly purchased bulls and replacement females and avoid commingling with pregnant cows.

Calve in clean environments

The other main facet of biosecurity is preventing the spread of disease within the herd. Using a calving strategy designed to reduce the incidence and spread of potential diseases is a major part of this.

The Sandhills Calving System is one such option, also known as the “drop-back method” or “leave behind calving.”

This system, as described in a blog post by the Beef Cattle Research Council (BCRC), “involves moving pregnant cows on to different ‘clean’ ground while leaving fresh-

ly calved pairs in the field they were born in.

“This method helps minimize direct contact between older calves and younger calves and reduces the transfer of viruses and the build-up of disease-causing pathogens in the calving area.”

Depending on the size of the herd, several calving areas may be used in this system.

“It’s a really effective way of making sure that calves are being born in a very clean environment because every time you move those cows that haven’t calved, they’re going on to a clean, untouched environment,” said Campbell.

Another option is the strategy known by some as the Foothills System, which Campbell said is perhaps the more traditional method that has been recommended to producers for some time.

“We’re moving the cows and their newborn calves onto a clean nursery area from the calving area and leaving the cows that haven’t calved behind to continue calving on the calving area,” he said.

“Both are pretty effective and are good strategies, and it probably depends on the system and one of those things you have to work with the logistics of the herd.”

Another consideration is to separate first-calf heifers from older females and designate areas specifically for sick animals to ensure there is no cross-fence contact or water shared with healthy animals.

As well, create a standardized cleaning and disinfecting routine that encompasses the removal of possible contaminants from calving areas and the disinfection of all equipment used.

Author: Piper Whelan

Original Article: <https://www.producer.com/livestock/enhanced-calving-biosecurity-pays-off/>

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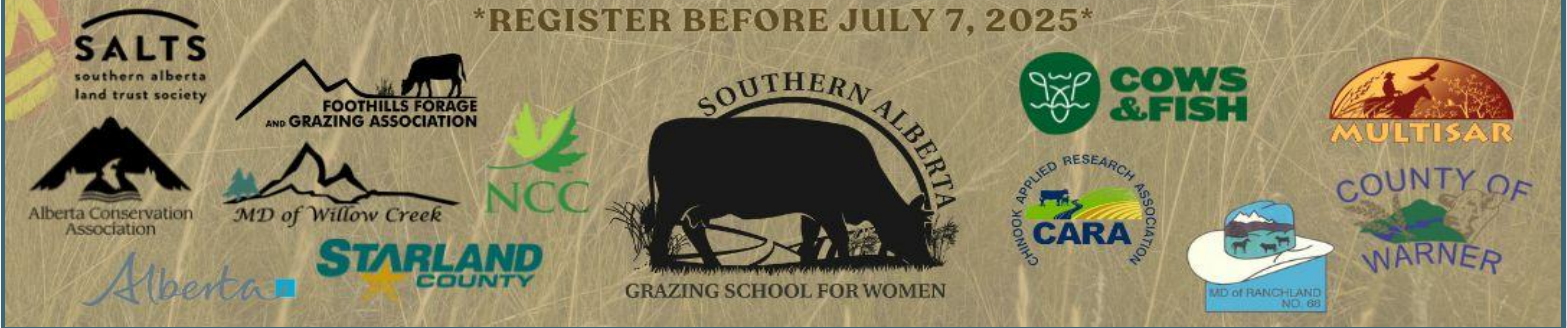
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Livestock grazing is secret sauce to making cover crops pay



Photo: FFGA

Struggling with how to implement cover crops on your farm? If so, you are not alone.

Fear not, because the secret sauce in making cover crops pay on the farm can be very simple in livestock grazing. Being able to use cover crops as a forage can increase the profitability of cover crops.

At a recent online Forage Field Day, conducted jointly by the Nebraska Extension, I-29 Moo University and the South Dakota State University Extension, Shelby Gruss, Iowa State University Extension forage specialist, talked about how to get the most out of cover crops, even in a corn and soybean rotation, by grazing those covers with livestock.

Small grain

Gruss noted that adding a cereal grain such as cereal rye into crop rotations provides multiple benefits, including another growing component in the field, living cover to reduce erosion and runoff, and weed suppression.

Cereal rye is a great weed suppressor because of its quick growth and allelopathic properties to keep weeds down. Although adding wheat or other small grains may not work into the rotation, another way to receive those same benefits is through planting cover crops and grazing them with livestock. “Grazing doesn’t take other benefits away when grazed properly,” Gruss said. “Cover crops used as a forage in some aspect brings in additional benefits.”

The forage production and quality of cover crop forages may offer 2 to 6 tons per acre for grazing

livestock. “There are some concerns, like soil properties, compaction, water infiltration, infrastructure and having enough biomass production,” Gruss noted. “In a research review, it shows that in 55% of studies, grazed cover crop fields saw an increase in compaction, but very few of these were bad enough to impact root growth, and it varied among years.”

An extremely small number of acres had compaction levels that would inhibit root growth for row crops the following season.

“Grazing with heavy stocking rates on wet soils can lead to soil compaction,” she said. “Additionally, avoid overgrazing. This can reduce soil cover, increasing evaporation and erosion. Implementing rotational stocking can help reduce the risk of overgrazing and better spread nutrients (manure) across the field.”

Water infiltration

“As for water and water infiltration, the majority of the time this was not impacted by grazing,” Gruss said. “The majority of studies also found that soil organic carbon was maintained.”

Very few studies conducted have found any difference in crop yields after the grazing of cover crops. “There was minimal impact on crop yields throughout the studies reviewed, and fields that had negative impacts typically had higher stocking rates,” Gruss said.

Additionally, studies have shown that in water-limited environments, grazing cover crops can increase evaporation and seemed more likely to negatively affect the following crop production.

What to plant

“The cover crop species to plant is dependent on how you are fitting them into the rotation,” Gruss said. “If we are looking for a cover that we can plant behind corn or soybeans, typically it will be a small grain for grazing in the spring. As a small grain, particularly cereal rye is one of

the few cover crops that can establish in the short fall growing period and survive winter.”

Rye is the highest for production of biomass, with high-quality forage for grazing before the boot stage. “If we are trying to fill a summer fallow period,” Gruss said, “whether it is following a winter wheat harvest or prevent plant acres, a summer annual will be one of the best producers, like sorghum-sudangrass, forage sorghum or millet.”

Termination advice

“For spring grazing of cover crops, we will need to terminate before row crop planting,” Gruss said, “but typically for summer or fall grazing, many of those cover crops will winter kill, so we do not need to worry about termination for spring planting.”

Grazing is not a reliable termination strategy, Gruss said. You need enough time to remove animals then terminate the cover crop. To determine when to terminate can vary depending on a couple of factors, such as if you have the availability of permanent pasture to move animals to, if you have additional stored feed, and when you need to plant your cash crop.

“Delaying termination for extended grazing can be done if additional grazing is needed,” Gruss said. “The general rule of thumb is to terminate cereal rye 10 to 14 days prior to planting, as corn has a hard time tolerating the residue. We do not see that in soybeans, so termination can occur right up until planting, and some will plant green and terminate before soybean emergence.”

The bottom line, Gruss said, is that cover crops offer “great opportunities for use as forage.”

Author: Curt Arens

Original Article: <https://www.farmprogress.com/cover-crops/livestock-grazing-is-secret-sauce-to-making-cover-crops-pay>

A guide to maximizing genetic and economic success



Photo: FFGA

A Kansas State University beef cattle expert urges the state's producers to consider key factors in selecting bulls for their operation, saying that "thoughtful bull selection sets the foundation for healthier cows, higher-quality calves, and greater overall herd performance."

Emma Briggs, a beef cattle systems specialist at K-State's Western Kansas Research-Extension Center in Hays, said selecting the right bull is one of the most important decisions a cattle producer can make, impacting everything from fertility and growth to overall herd profitability.

She notes that a well-chosen bull drives genetic progress, influencing traits such as feed efficiency, carcass quality, and maternal ability.

"Establishing clear breeding and

marketing goals is the first step," Briggs said. "Knowing whether you're keeping replacement heifers or marketing all calves at weaning helps define the traits you should focus on."

Genetic tools like Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) provide valuable insight when selecting a bull, but not all EPDs hold equal importance.

"If you're keeping replacement females, you'll want to prioritize maternal traits like calving ease and milk production," Briggs said. "If your focus is the feedlot, then growth and carcass traits will be more relevant."

Briggs added that selecting bulls based on the most economically significant EPDs allows producers to make strategic decisions that improve long-term herd performance.

"While genetics play a key role, physical soundness cannot be overlooked," she said. "EPDs predict genetic potential, but they don't guarantee that a bull will hold up structurally."

Structural integrity affects longevity and breeding efficiency, while muscle and frame size influence calf value. Bulls with poor conformation can lead to discounts at market, making a visual evaluation just as critical as genetic selection.

Briggs said crossbreeding remains

one of the most effective tools for improving herd performance.

"One of the biggest benefits of crossbreeding is the longevity and fertility advantages in crossbred cows," she said, adding that hybrid vigor improves maternal traits, enhances weaning weights, and extends productive lifespans.

Breed complementarity also plays a role. According to Briggs, British breeds offer carcass quality and fleshing ability, while Continental breeds contribute superior growth and lean yield. A well-planned crossbreeding strategy balances these traits to create efficient, high-performing cattle, she said.

"Bulls are the fastest way to make genetic progress in a herd, making careful selection an investment in both short-term profitability and long-term sustainability," Briggs said. "By using EPDs strategically, evaluating phenotype critically, and incorporating crossbreeding where applicable, producers can build a more productive and efficient herd."

Author: Kansas State University

Original Article: <https://www.beefmagazine.com/livestock-management/a-guide-to-maximizing-genetic-and-economic-success>



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Preparing for the 2025 Grazing Season



Photo: FFGA

For cattle producers on the Canadian Prairies, weather is more than just a daily concern—it dictates grazing conditions, water availability, feed costs, and herd health. With the 2025 calving and grazing season approaching, it's essential to understand the climate patterns shaping the coming months.

Recent meteorological data suggests we are entering a weak La Niña phase, which has historically impacted precipitation, temperatures, and overall range conditions across Western Canada. Here's what cattle farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba need to prepare for between March and July 2025.

How La Niña Impacts Cattle Operations

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a major driver of climate variability in Western Canada. The two phases—El Niño (warmer/drier winters) and La Niña (colder/wetter winters)—influence everything from snowfall to summer drought risk.

A weak La Niña typically brings:

- **Colder-than-normal spring temperatures:** Delayed pasture growth and late snowmelt.
- **Above-average spring precipitation:** Potential for flooding but also improved soil moisture.
- **Variable summer conditions:** Potential for continued wet weather or a quick transition to hot and dry conditions, depending on how La Niña fades.

Historically, La Niña years have increased the risk of spring floods while supporting stronger forage growth in the early part of the grazing season. However, they also increase disease risks for cattle, particularly in wet and muddy calving environments.

Weather Forecast for March-July 2025

March-May: A Slow Start to Spring Farmers should expect a cold and wet start to spring, particularly in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Alberta (Calgary & Foothills) - March temperatures are expected to be 1-2°C below average, with higher snowfall accumulation. Spring runoff could be above normal, posing challenges for low-lying calving areas.

Saskatchewan (Regina & Saskatoon) - Frequent snow events in March could delay calving season in outdoor settings, Muddy conditions in April may increase scours and foot rot risks,

Manitoba (Brandon & Winnipeg) - March will likely see below-freezing nights well into April, slowing early pasture growth. Expect higher-than-average precipitation, potentially delaying cattle turnout.

ADVICE FOR RANCHERS:

- Have extra bedding on hand for cold, wet calving conditions.
- Monitor pastures for excessive moisture before turning cattle out to avoid damaging sod and compacting wet soils.
- Watch for nutrient leaching in water sources, which can impact herd health.

June-July: Improving Pasture Conditions, But Watch for Weather Swings

By early summer, conditions may improve, but La Niña's lingering effects could mean higher-than-normal precipitation in some areas and a sudden shift to heat in others. Warmer daytime temperatures will help forage growth, but wet spring soils could

increase hoof issues and pinkeye risks in cattle.

Some regions may dry out quickly in late June, increasing the need for drought planning if rainfall patterns shift.

If persistent rains continue, there could be hay quality issues due to delayed cutting windows.

ADVICE FOR RANCHERS:

- Rotate cattle more frequently in wet pastures to prevent trampling and extend forage use.
- If an early summer dry spell develops, monitor water quality in dugouts and ponds for algae growth.
- Keep an eye on fly and parasite pressure, which can worsen in humid conditions.

Feed and Water Considerations for 2025

While spring moisture is good for pasture regrowth, excess rain or a late thaw could delay seeding and hay cutting. Here's what cattle farmers need to consider:

- **Delayed Hay Cutting:** Wet ground may push first-cut hay harvest into late June/early July, potentially reducing protein content. Consider supplementing with higher-protein feed if necessary.
- **Flooded Pastures:** If areas remain saturated too long, forage loss could become an issue. Identify higher ground for emergency grazing if needed.
- **Stock Water Availability:** With La Niña, there's a higher chance of ample stock water early in the season, but a quick shift to drought conditions is still possible later in summer. Keep backup water sources available.

Author: Alberta Beef Magazine

Original Article: <https://albertabeef.ca/alberta-beef-magazine-digital-editions-2025/>

MEET THE 2025 BURSARY RECIPIENTS



ERIN HUGHES

My name is Erin Hughes, and I was raised southwest of Longview on my family's commercial cow-calf operation, Chinook Ranch. Growing up surrounded by agriculture, I knew from a young age that I wanted to have a career in this industry. In particular, I have always been extremely interested in the beef side of agriculture, and this passion was further strengthened through the nine years I spent as a member of the Longview 4-H Beef Club.

Following my love for agriculture, I first attended Olds College, where I earned a diploma in Agriculture Management with an Agricommerce major. I am now furthering my education at the University of Saskatchewan, where I am pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness, which I will complete in December 2025. I am excited to begin my career in this industry and contribute to its future.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association for this bursary, which will help support my post-secondary education.

MARK NORREGAARD

My name is Mark Norregaard, and I am a first-year student at the University of Saskatchewan studying animal science. I am a fifth-generation farmer on our family's mixed operation, and I have aspirations of becoming a veterinarian after my bachelor's in agriculture degree.

I enjoy the aspects of farming and getting the chance to incorporate the science behind agriculture, it is a dream come true, as both have been prevalent in my life from a young age. I was a member in the Balzac 4-H Beef Club for 9 years, allowing me to experience many opportunities and sparking my interest to become a vet, along with spending 7 years competing in science fairs across the country. I hope to encourage others to learn more about the importance of science in agriculture.

Thank you Foothills Forage for this scholarship and giving me the opportunity to continue my studies to try and make a difference in my community.





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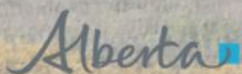
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(403) 803-9190

Staff

Manager:

Laura Gibney
manager@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 998-4687

Communications Coordinator:

Kayla Minor
comm@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 682-7116

Environmental Coordinator:

Sonja Bloom
enviro@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 612-7204

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