



**FOOTHILLS FORAGE
AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION**

Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS August 2025

Director's Note - Sarah Green

Greetings FFGA Members

August already? It seems that the years pick up speed as I get older- perhaps a reminder to slow down and take in the moments of life more often. Much gratitude for the rain that has fallen over the last weeks and I hope that moisture will come across the prairies to so many areas that desperately need it. A reminder once again that water supplies can tip the pendulum so quickly and hone our practice of resilience.

Water continues to be a big part of the plan throughout our year, although when it's wet one forgets the struggles of drought. Our main water project this year is developing a well that will have year-round solar watering capacity. This coincides with willow clearing last winter and spraying a longstanding tall buttercup community in the same field. The plan is to feed calves here over the winter and get the soil "waking up" and the world within it more vibrant. Hoping to see a shift on the landscape- a slow but enticing process that I am eager to begin.

We are also collaborating to install a pond leveling system in a beaver dam to help lower the level of the water. The intent is to decrease flooding over the road during high water periods while still maintaining the beavers along the creek. The final project related to water is fencing two dugouts and planting willow seedlings to revegetate the area. This was done in collaboration with

the Oldman Watershed Council in the spring and the willows seem to be growing like crazy!

Foothills Forage continues to have a jam-packed summer thanks to Laura, Kayla and Sonja. How lucky we are to have these 3 ladies at the helm as the busy season unfolds. Looking forward to the grazing school coming up on July 29-30 and to the stockmanship school in September with Jordie Waters. I always learn so much at every event I attend and come home more energized to keep improving. Staying in my home bubble too long creates more worry, less creative capacity and I see the problems rather than the blessings that abound.

I will leave with a quote from Hemingway that resonated with me and was a reminder of the opportunities that are possible in our operations. "Now is no time to think of what you don't have. Think of what you can do with what is there." Wishing everyone a summer filled with good people, empowering experiences and of course happy cows.

Sarah Green

(Photo: Sarah's son)



Photo Creds: Emily Jamieson

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On the Cover: 22nd Annual Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women. Photo: FFGA

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Cattle and forage management for grazing success



Photo: FFGA

“Now is the time to prepare forage and cattle for the fall and winter grazing season,” says Patrick Davis, University of Missouri Extension livestock field specialist. Proper management of cattle and forage right now leads to fall and winter grazing success as well as setting up your operation for spring.

Davis provides forage and cattle management suggestions for successful grazing through the fall, winter and into the future.

“Make sure the cattle that you are retaining are producing for you,” says Davis. This is a good time to look through those records to identify poor-producing cows and cull them at weaning. Davis also recommends early pregnancy checking spring calving cows and replacement heifers to identify those open females so they can be culled at weaning. He suggests marketing these open replacement heifers as soon as possible to improve salvage value and reduce impact on feed resources and operation profitability.

“Properly utilizing forage resources and updating those resources can provide a feeding system that will reduce production cost for your cattle operation,” says Davis.

Some suggestions to consider as you look at your forage program for fall and winter grazing and when updating your forage program for successful future grazing:

Evaluate your pastures

“Now is the time to evaluate

those cool-season pastures and identify those weedy or thin stands,” says Davis. Once those are determined, contact your local MU Extension agronomy field specialist about options for weed control or if renovation is required. If renovation is needed, begin this fall by smothering out the fall perennial forage and seeding in a winter annual mix of legumes, small grains and brassicas to provide late fall and winter grazing. Consult your local MU Extension agronomy field specialist on selecting forages and implementing a process that will make your grazing program successful in the future.

Stockpile fescue

“Stockpile fescue now for a cheap feed resource during the late fall and winter months,” says Davis. Start stockpile preparation by clipping or grazing fescue pastures to 3 inches. Then apply no more than 40 pounds of nitrogen per acre to toxic endophyte-infected fescue pastures. If the pasture has novel-endophyte-infected fescue, then 60 to 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre can be added. Defer grazing these stockpiled pastures until late fall or early winter. Cattle producers should try to defer grazing toxic endophyte-infected fescue stockpile pastures until January, when concentrations of ergovaline have likely fallen below the toxic threshold level of 200 parts per billion. Strip grazing will increase grazing efficiency by improving forage utilization and reducing waste due to trampling and soiling with manure.

Incorporate idle crop ground in the grazing system

“Incorporating idle ground into the grazing system can be beneficial to the cropping and cattle operation,” says Davis. Consider seeding a winter annual mix into your idle crop ground to provide high-quality forage to graze your cattle

through the late fall and winter months. In addition to providing a high-quality forage for your cattle, the manure and residual forage will improve soil fertility, which helps the cropping system. Most of these annual mixes will require 60 days of growth from planting before initial grazing. For optimum utilization, use temporary electric fencing to allocate one to three days of grazing forage to your cattle. This extra high-quality forage might be a way to retain and put cheap gain on your spring-born weaned calves or incorporate a winter grazing stocker operation in your farming operation.

“As you feed more hay and supplement, cattle production costs increase,” says Davis. Furthermore, “retaining open and low-producing females reduces your production efficiency,” he says. These things reduce cattle operation profitability. “Hopefully, these suggestions lead to retaining productive females and promoting a productive forage base to efficiently feed your cattle, which promotes optimum operation profitability.”

Author: University of Missouri Extension

Original Article: <https://hpi.com/2025/07/24/cattle-and-forage-management-for-grazing-success/>

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Breaking Down Ranch Profitability: Expenses, Goals and the Path Forward



Photo: FFGA

Profit. It should be a reality — not just a wish — for today’s ranchers. But getting familiar with your books and understanding profitability can feel overwhelming and time-consuming.

So, where should ranchers start if they want to build a profitable operation they can someday pass on?

“We start planning for profit by first setting a goal,” says Patrick Jones, regenerative ranching advisor at the Noble Research Institute. “That goal can be anything — from a specific income target for the year to a certain return on investment. We set the goal, then manage expenses to reach it.”

But if goals can vary by operation, what makes a good one?

“The biggest thing is setting a goal that’s attainable,” Jones says.

The time frame depends on the type of operation.

“Profitability goals are typically set for no longer than a year,” he says. “Stocker operators may have multiple budgeting periods in a year, so their goals align with each of those.”

To truly understand if your ranch is profitable, you must track income and expenses by enterprise.

“To be sustainable, each enterprise needs to be profitable on its own,” Jones says. “We want to hand down something that works — not something that’s bleeding money.”

Many producers may think they’re in the black, but they’re actually leaning on outside support.

“We see a lot of operations that appear profitable, but they’re being subsidized by off-farm income or inheritance — land or money,” Jones says.

Understanding your cost structure is essential to changing that.

“We have two buckets of expenses: overhead and direct costs,” he says. “Overhead costs stay the same no matter how much you produce. Direct costs vary with production.”

Overhead costs include land, labor, equipment and other fixed assets.

“Ranchers don’t always capture all their overhead,” Jones says. “Just because a piece of equipment is paid off doesn’t mean it doesn’t cost anything. There’s still maintenance.”

Labor is another commonly overlooked expense — especially owner labor.

“Unpaid labor often goes unaccounted for,” Jones says. “But we shouldn’t be working for free.”

Tracking overhead year over year helps ranchers gauge whether they’re moving toward profitability.

“There’s a ratio we run on overhead,” he says. “Watching that trend tells us whether we’re heading in the right direction.”

Direct costs — such as feed, medicine, and marketing — also need to be accurately tracked.

“Ranchers usually do record direct costs,” Jones says. “The mistake is they don’t charge the enterprise the true value.”

Take hay production, for example.

“Many cow-calf producers raise their own hay and just track production cost,” he says. “But they should be charging the current market rate per bale. Otherwise, they don’t really know if it’s more cost-effective to raise or buy hay.”

Managing direct costs is operation-specific, but keeping an open mind is key.

“I grew up chasing weaning weights,” Jones says. “But now we know that by managing forage differently — and even lowering weaning weights or reducing herd size — we can become more profitable because it costs less to get there.”

No matter where your operation is today, the most important thing is making progress.


“We can’t fix what’s behind us,” Jones says. “We want to manage for profit moving forward.”

Listen to the full conversation with Jones on the Casual Cattle Conversations podcast.

Author: Shaye Koester-Wanner

Original Article: <https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/breaking-down-ranch-profitability-expenses-goals-and-path-forward>

PODCAST CORNER



What is FFGA listening to?


Monthly Podcast recommendations given by FFGA Directors

PODCAST CHANNEL

CASUAL CATTLE CONVERSATIONS

TITLE

BREAKING DOWN PROFITABILITY: EXPENSES, GOALS AND A PATH FORWARD



SCAN ME

LINK

<https://www.casualcattleconversations.com/casual-cattle-conversations-podcast-shownotes/patrick-jones>

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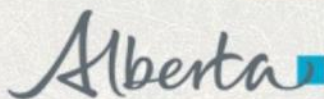
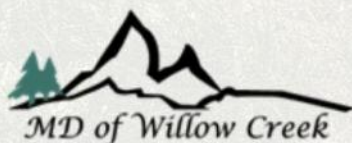
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- **ALEX HARLAND: VIRTUAL FENCING**
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Make sense of forage testing results



Forage makes up at least 50% of the diet for beef and dairy cattle and horses. Despite this fact, most livestock owners don't test forages on a regular basis, leaving their forage quality assessment up to factors like color, smell, leaf and stem texture, or presence of seed heads.

While there may be some correlation between these metrics and nutritional value, relying solely on them leaves a lot of room for producers to overfeed or underfeed nutrients. This not only has an impact on the animal's ability to produce or reproduce, but also affects the profitability of the operation.

This is where forage laboratory testing becomes the key to optimizing the use of forages to meet livestock nutritional needs. The first step is to accurately collect the forage sample or seek out a nutritionist or other service provider that can collect and submit the sample for you.

Next, submit the sample to a National Forage Testing Association-certified lab to make sure the forage is analyzed accurately and provides the information you need to properly balance diets.

Understanding the numbers, however, can be tricky. Forage laboratory reports provide livestock owners with a lot of great information — but unfortunately it can be challenging to determine what each line item means when making forage decisions. Factors such as the species of livestock consuming the forage also impacts which nutrients or calculations should be at the

top of your list.

While a full discussion of these metrics could fill several textbooks, here are some key values that can be useful to a wide range of producers:

Dry matter. DM is what remains when all moisture is removed from feed. Comparing feeds and forages is always done on a DM basis to ensure we are evaluating nutrients accurately. Many nutrients on a forage analysis report are reported as a percentage of DM. Diets are also formulated on a DM basis, and we focus on dry matter intake levels, especially in dairy cattle diets.

Crude protein. CP is calculated by multiplying the nitrogen content of the forage by 6.25. Unfortunately, CP does not indicate the quality of a forage but gives us a good idea of how much protein might be supplied by the forage. Legume forages are relatively high in CP, while grasses are typically lower.

Acid detergent fiber. ADF is the indigestible portion of fiber in a forage and is composed of lignin and cellulose. Lignin is completely indigestible, so high ADF levels mean lower digestibility and lower energy forages. More mature forages are typically high in ADF.

Neutral detergent fiber. NDF is an estimate of the total fiber in a forage and includes the ADF fraction plus hemicellulose, which is digestible by ruminants. NDF is an important number — it provides an indication of how much of this forage an animal can consume and how much energy is available from the forage. Like ADF, high NDF forages are lower in energy and can decrease DM intake. Plant maturity also affects NDF.

Neutral detergent fiber digestibility. NDFd is an estimate of how digestible the NDF fraction of the forage is in the rumen. Higher levels of NDFd typically indicate higher intake potential and higher-energy forages that can better meet the needs of high-producing ruminants like dairy cows.

Ash. Ash is a measure of the total minerals found in a forage and comes from two sources: internal minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, etc., that are also broken down on a forage analysis report, and external contamination from dirt or sand that might be picked up in the field or bunker. High levels of ash can indicate contamination at harvest or feedout. If forage consistently comes back high in ash, analysis of your harvest and feeding management programs might be necessary.

Relative feed value. RFV is a calculated index that combines forage digestibility and dry matter intake. This index is not used for formulating diets but is commonly used to make forage pricing decisions. RFV was developed for alfalfa forages and has limited value when evaluating grass and legume mixed forages.

Relative forage quality. RFQ is an index similar to RFV; however, RFQ includes digestible fiber calculations that better predict the feeding value of grass-based forages. This can also be used when making forage marketing decisions but is not used for developing diets.

Understanding forage quality through laboratory testing is essential for making informed feeding decisions that support livestock health, productivity, and farm profitability. The process allows you to best match your forage inventories to the proper production stage for your livestock, allows you to price forage fairly and helps limit purchased feed costs. While forage reports can be complex, focusing on key values like the ones discussed here can help you make informed decisions from field to feed bunk.

Author: Liz Gartman

Original Article: <https://www.farmprogress.com/forage/forage-testing-key-to-optimizing-livestock-nutrition-and-farm-profitability>



GRASSROOTS GRAZING A SMALL RUMINANT EXPERIENCE

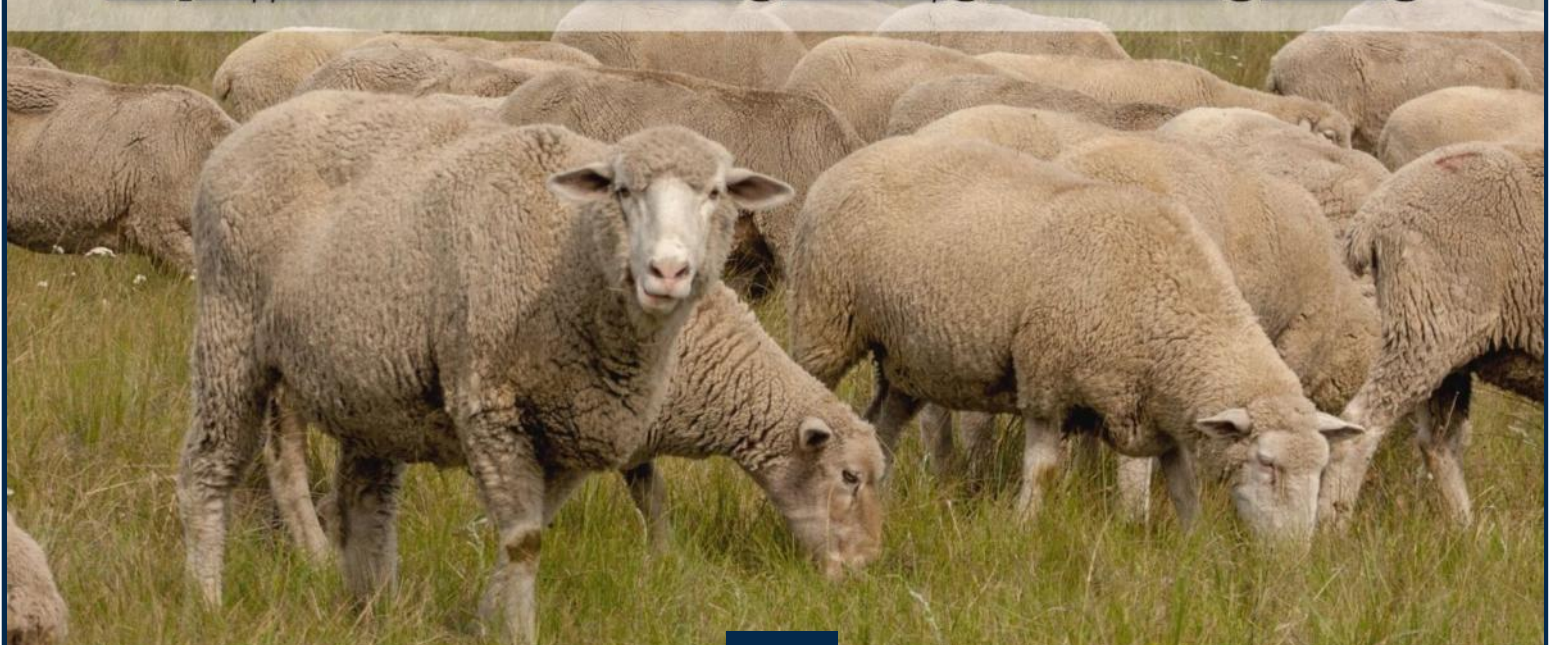
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CRSB CERTIFIED QUALIFYING CATTLE

Make the most of your certification, giving your cattle a chance to qualify through a CRSB Certified supply chain by completing these essential steps.

Requirements

To qualify for a CRSB Claim:

Cattle must move through CRSB Certified Operations (that are in scope for a certification audit) from birth up to and including the primary processor.

Beef must be from animals with documented records, which must include:

- animal identification (RFID tag)
- birth date (age verification) evidence from a CRSB approved live-cattle chain of custody verifier, and
- cattle movements showing that they moved through only applicable CRSB Certified Operations.

As of October 2023, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) is the only approved live-cattle chain of custody verifier for beef cattle in Canada, excluding Quebec.



1 Get and maintain CRSB Certification

2 Agree to share information

Consent to sharing information with CCIA for CRSB Certified Chain of Custody purposes. Written consent is part of the Certification Body's audit process. Upon consent, the Certification Body will share the following with CCIA:

- Name • Email • Mailing address
- CLTS account ID • Certificate number
- Certification date • Audit type
- Certification status change / de-certification date

If you have consented, your contact info will appear under the "CRSB Client Information" section of your CCIA Canadian Livestock Tracking System (CLTS) account.

You can give consent at any time by contacting your Certification Body.

3 Submit birth dates

Input birth dates into the CLTS for the cattle born and tagged on your operation since becoming CRSB Certified.

Animals born-on your operation within six months of your CRSB certification date are eligible.

4 Submit move-in events

Move-in events must be submitted to the CLTS each time eligible cattle move to a new operation.

Qualifying animals moved-in from another CRSB Certified Operation within six months of your CRSB certification date are eligible.



CLTS client support:
1.877.909.2333 / info@canadaid.ca

Contact us: info@crsbcertified.ca
For more information: crsbcertified.ca





COMPLETING THE STEPS

What you need to know

1 Sharing information with CCIA for Chain of Custody purposes

For cattle to be traced through CRSB Certified supply chains, information is needed for Chain of Custody purposes. Your personal information, collected by the Certification Body during the CRSB Certified audit process, requires your informed (written) consent to be accessed or shared by CRSB or CCIA.

To add or change consent permissions, contact your Certification Body - they will notify the CCIA of changes. Permission can be changed at any time.

VBP+: phone (587) 328-5980 / email info@verifiedbeef.ca

Ontario Corn Fed Beef Quality Assurance: phone (519) 686-6226 / email info@ontariocornfedbeef.com.

Where Food Comes From: phone (866) 395-5883 / email: info@wherefoodcomesfrom.com

2 Submitting birth dates to CLTS

The CRSB Certified program requires that cattle must move through CRSB Certified Operations from birth up to and including the primary processors to qualify for a CRSB Claim. Birth dates provide a starting datapoint for each animal in a supply chain from which to trace that animal's conformance to the CRSB Certified program requirements.

The birth date must be submitted to the Canadian Livestock Tracking System (CLTS) by the herd of origin and the animal must have been born on your premises within 6 months of CRSB certification.



FIND OUT HOW

3 Submitting move ins to CLTS

A move-in event shows that an animal has been moved to a new operation/premises as it moves through the supply chain. Move-ins provide a datapoint from which to trace that animal's conformance to the CRSB Certified program requirements (that the animal was born and raised only CRSB Certified Operations, and processed in a CRSB Certified facility), for each stage in an animal's lifecycle in a supply chain.

Move-in events must be submitted to the CLTS each time eligible cattle move to a new operation. Qualifying animals moved in from another CRSB Certified Operation within six months of your CRSB certification date are eligible.



FIND OUT HOW

CLTS client support:
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The CRSB Certified Look-up Tool

To assist producers in tracking cattle that qualify through the supply chain, the CRSB worked with CCIA to implement a search function within the CLTS called "CRSB Certification Status".

This tool enables searching by tag/indicator number to view the CRSB Certified status of an animal in real-time, at any time in its lifecycle.



TRY IT OUT!

Contact us: info@crsbcertified.ca
For more information: crsbcertified.ca

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Maintaining a healthy environment is essential to the success of Alberta's agricultural producers. The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program helps you identify and address environmental risks in your operation. It will also increase your understanding of legal requirements related to environmental issues.

The EFP will play a key part in:

- Safeguarding your local environment
- Building credibility for your operation with financial institutions and the community at large
- Sustaining the health and future of the agriculture industry

The EFP program provides you with a voluntary, confidential self-assessment process to evaluate the environmental risks and strengths of your operation and develop a plan to address those risks and strengths.

Learn more about how agricultural practices affect the environment. Learn more about management options that protect soil, water, air and habitat quality. Identify what you are already doing well and where improvements can be made



To find out more about the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan, please visit www.albertaefp.com

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

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

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