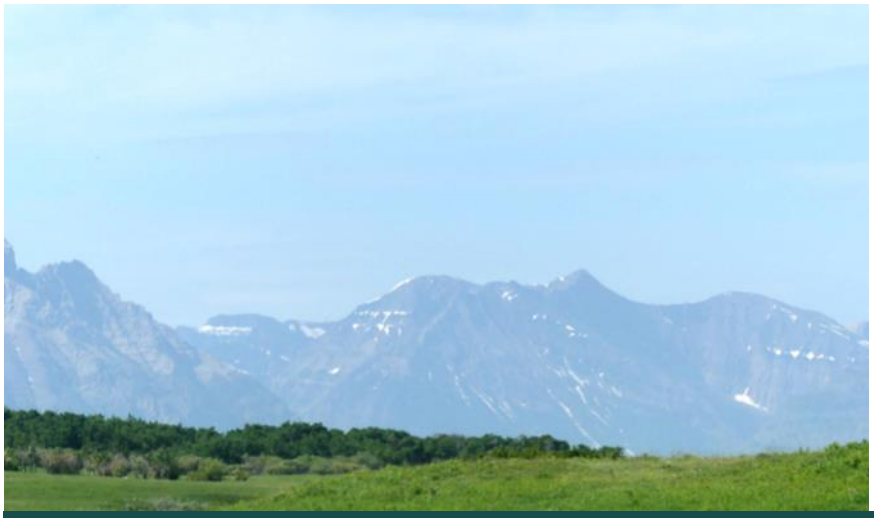


FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

Unit 4A, 710 Centre St. SE, High River, AB T1V 0H3
Phone: (403) 995-9466 ~ www.foothillsforage.com

GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
June 2023

Director's Note — Angela Kumlin

Howdy folks,

As I write this, smoke has rolled in and I am feeling blessed that we are not in the midst of the fires in the north. Drought has challenged our management in the past few years, but fire would be much more of a challenge, not to mention the fear and stress when your home is in danger or has been directly affected. We continue to pray for rain for all who need it.

Calving is well underway here. This is the first year we have really paid attention to moon cycles and how they affect calving peaks. Last year we had 108 calves on the ground by May 8, but when May 8 rolled around this year, there were less than 30. I looked up when the full moon was during breeding season last year, and it showed that we should see calves dropping hot and heavy around May 17 this year. Sure enough, on the 16th there were 9 born before breakfast, and by May 21 we were half done. We will be adjusting breeding season this year in accordance with the full moon!

We are very excited for June to roll around this year. On June 28th, we are hosting Greg Judy for a field day through FFGA. Both Matt and I credit Greg Judy's two books, "No-Risk Ranching" and "Comeback Farms" for part of the shift we started to experience in mindset about 6 years ago in regards to ranching paradigms. We were fortunate enough to meet Greg last December when he was in Edmonton the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing. He is down-to-earth, kind, but frank, not to mention one of the top graziers in North America. We are excited to host him here and see what we can learn from him, and I hope you will join us! The field day will start at 8:30 am at Jumping Pound Hall, and will include lunch, presentations, and pasture walks. We should be wrapped up around 3:45. If you can't make it on the 28th, Greg will also be doing a similar grazing school on June 26th in Rumsey AB. To register for either field day, go to: *https://www.foothillsforage.com/gregjudy*.

Over the past few years, I've attended several FFGA events and have enjoyed every one of them. I am honored to have begun serving as an FFGA Director this past March. The future is bright in grazing – there are opportunities if you are willing to see them!

Angela

(Photo: Angela and Matt Kumlin with their three kids)

IN THIS ISSUE

BURKE CREEK RANCH TOUR

JULY 5, 2023

BURKE CREEK RANCH - WEST OF CLARESHOLM

AGENDA

- 9:30 - Coffee & Registration
- NOON - (Lunch)
- 3:45 - Wrap-Up

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Woody species encroachment management techniques
- Electric fencing used for rotational grazing
- Water development
- Living Lab & Carbon Mapping update by Kim Cornish & Kris Nichols

COST

FFGA Member: $25 / Non-Member $30

https://www.foothillsforage.com/burkecreektour

Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada | Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Canada

On the Cover: Out soil sampling near Waterton, AB. Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!

Cattle-Hacks - Practical Tips for the Cow Herd by Livestock Gentec

Livestock Gentec

Livestock Gentec, in partnership with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, is an applied research centre out of the University of Alberta that is evaluated (and funded) based on our ability to develop genomic tools benefiting the Alberta and western Canadian beef sector.

First, Gentec thanks the Board and members of the FFGA for the opportunity to contribute and collaborate more closely with the Association to optimize the forage / cattle combinations that go into making Alberta Beef … part of which will include regular technology updates that will appear here.

Not that this is our first interaction with the FFGA. Back in 2018, Foothills Forage and Gentec co-hosted a two-day event that included three pasture-walks with:

- The LaBrie Family (Difficulty Ranch) showcasing their forage management philosophy, ecological initiatives, and how they have worked to optimize the performance of their cow herd to match their environment;
- The Goetjen's (Whisky Ridge Cattle Company) highlighting their approaches regarding swath grazing, perennial forages, and innovative fencing techniques that aimed for better wildlife inclusion, lower maintenance, and ultimately, an increase in their land's cattle-carrying capacity; and finally a stop at the
- Waldron Grazing Cooperative featuring walks showcasing soil health, the benefits of multi-species grazing, and a drone demonstration.

What's New?

Situation Critical: Hybrid Vigour

Fertility has always been recognized as a critical factor driving profitability within the cow herd. Gentec's first product EnVigour HX™ gave producers information on breed composition and genomic indicators of heterosis or hybrid vigour of an animal*.. It also established the relationship between hybrid vigour determined by genomics and female fertility, longevity and lifetime productivity.

From work done within the Alberta cow herd it is becoming increasingly clear that hybrid vigour is perhaps one of the most important predictors of cow fertility, longevity, and lifetime productivity.

Replacement Heifer Profit Index Score ™

A new tool being developed by Livestock Gentec, the Replacement Heifer Profit IndexTM is proving to be a valuable tool in selecting for fertile replacements that will last within a herd. It includes hybrid vigour and genomics values for traits such as birth weight, 200-day wean weight, residual feed intake, pre-breeding weight and backfat, age at first calving (and others) to provide a score that allows producers to directly compare the ranking of each female within their herd.

The table below (Figure 1) summarizes a Rimbey, AB, producer's experience using the Replacement Heifer Profit Index Score™. It shows that 77% of open cows had low RHPI Scores™ (23 out of 30).

Similarly, a larger trial involving 10 Alberta crossbred cowherds also indicates that open cows skew towards those having below average Replacement Heifer Profit Index Score ™.

Figure 1

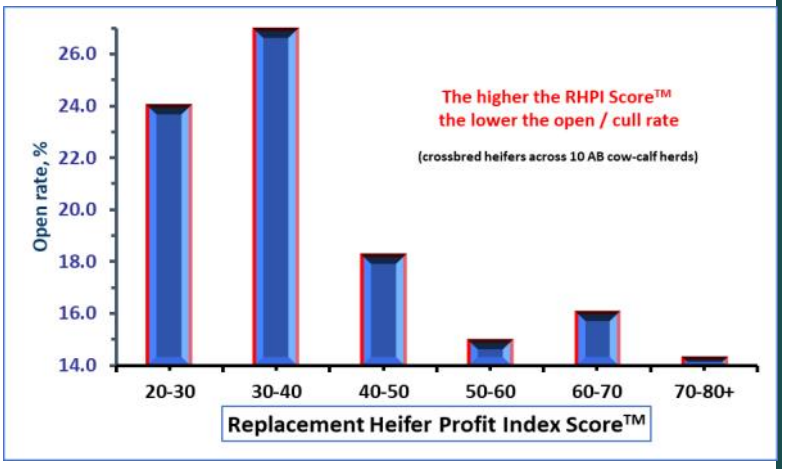
	RHPI Score™	Open Cows	All Cows	2yr Old	3yr Old
Where Did the Open Cows Originate? (Herd of 155 cows)	**High Above 50%**	7	23%	33%	17%
	Low Below 50%	23	77%	67%	83%
	Total	30	100%	100%	100%

Cows with low RHPI score™ have much higher open rates (figure 2)

Open cows cost Alberta producers thousands of dollars/year in lost productivity and profitability. Conversely, improving this area of the herd could vastly improve profitability with very little additional effort.

Financial assistance to test your herd is available from Gentec's funding partners.

Figure 2



As a University of Alberta Centre, Livestock Gentec is evaluated and funded because of our ability to advance genomics technology that benefits the beef industry.

For more information on how to select the animals to test in your herd, ask other questions or to start testing, contact Livestock Gentec at 780-248-1740 or lsgentec@ualberta.ca

Manage soil health while grazing cropland

Photo: FFGA

The practice of grazing cornstalks is far from new. Yet as land costs rise, farmers with cattle have a great opportunity to maximize use of their valuable land. Benefits of grazing cattle on cropland extend beyond having more cattle feed. Integrating cattle and cropland can also provide a much-needed boost to soil health.

Look at the value of extra feed first. Using some rough estimations, 1 acre of average Indiana corn will provide enough leaves and husks to feed one cow for six weeks, assuming the cow uses 50% of leaves and husks in the field. A month and a half of "free" feed sounds good vs. feeding valuable hay. With some additional investment in time, cover crop seed and management, you can extend that grazing window.

Cover crops flown into standing crops increase the quality and quantity of available feed following harvest. A popular grazing mix includes oats, turnips and cereal rye. The strategy is for oats and turnips to provide quick fall growth, while cereal rye provides grazing next spring.

Establishing cover crops

For future reference, successfully flying on cover crops requires opportune rainfall. For seeding into corn, at least 50% of the soil surface should be receiving direct sunlight at noon. During years where plants shut down early, this could be late August. With a late planting season, you may need to wait until mid-September to meet the 50% sunlight rule.

Tailor your cover crop mix for your seeding date. If you are unable to seed before Sept. 15, strongly consider removing winterkill species from mixes. When seeding into soybeans, 50% of soybean leaves should be yellow to ensure leaves drop soon enough to provide seedlings with light. If seedlings can "see the light," they should be OK.

Grazing strategy

Strip-grazing can improve utilization of crop residues. When cattle are released in an open field, they will glean grain, leaves and husks first, grazing stalks and cobs last. Containing cattle to smaller strips gives them less area to glean the best and encourages them to consume some lesser-desirable residues. Additionally, this approach protects cattle health where excess grain remains after harvest. When used with cover crops, this will give growing plants a chance to recover and regrow. This recovery period is vital for winter-hardy species that are adapted to capitalize on spring growth.

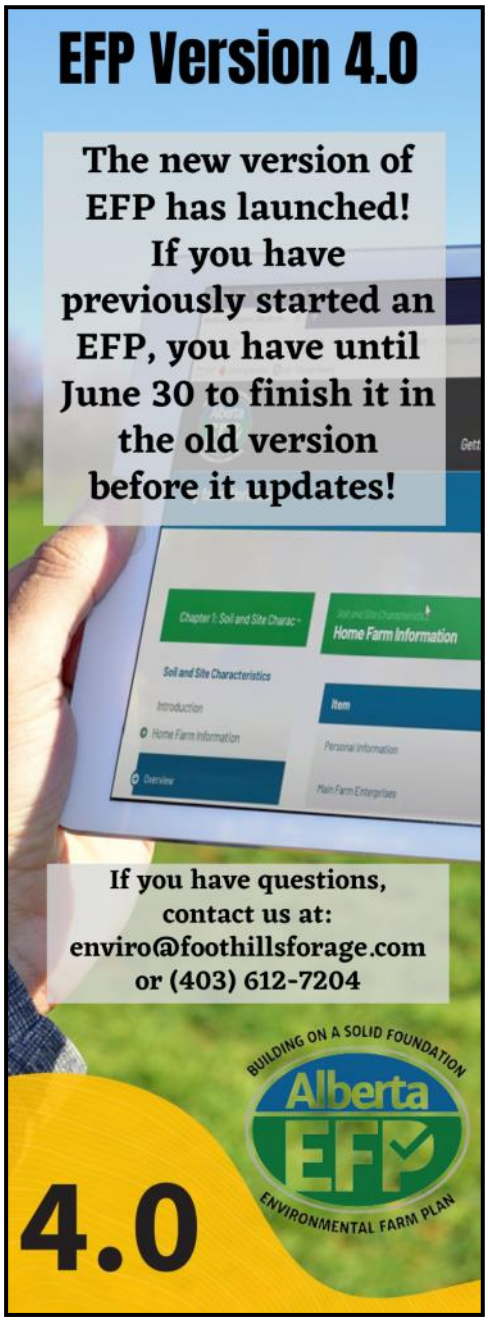
Strip-grazing will help minimize soil compaction by reducing hoof traffic. Control access to wet spots. A goal of grazing crop residues should be to improve field conditions with manure. These benefits are negated if cattle compact the soil. Once forage and residue are depleted, get cattle off the field before it's compacted, bare and vulnerable to erosion.

Cropland grazing benefits

With minimal investments in temporary fencing and water, expenses for feed, manure hauling, and building and equipment maintenance go down. Cropland grazing improves cattle health through exercise and getting them out of mud and confined lots. Soil health improves due to manure and cover crop living roots. Crop yields improve through quicker nutrient cycling and better residue management.

Always have alternative plans. Cover crop seedings can fail, and excess rainfall can degrade field conditions and reduce residue quality. Yet having cattle working on your land is a great way to improve your farming operation.

Author: Farm Progress
Original Article: https://www.farmprogress.com/soil-health/manage-soil-health-while-grazing-cropland



Technology & Forage for High Performance - Field Tour

July 12, 2023
Madden Community Hall

- Coffee & Registration: 9:30am
- Lunch (provided): 12:00pm
- Wrap-up: 4:00pm

Cost:

- FFGA or GWFA Member
- $25 Non-Member $30

Topics include:

- Olds College technology adoption to improve rotational grazing
- Specialty forage blends for higher performance and gains
- Field tour at Olds College Pitstra site
- Alberta Grass Sampling Project update

Register at: https://www.foothillsforage.com/fieldtour

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Farm Credit Canada

ULTIMATE STOCKMANSHIP CHALLENGE

Silver Slate Arena, Nanton Alberta

July 12- July 14, 2023

- Stockmanship School
- Handling Presentations
- Dance & Social

Speakers include:
Steve Cote, Dr. Joyce Van Donkersgoed, Dr. Desiree Gellatly, Glenn Stewart, Dawn Hnatow, Malcom Maclean

Cost for all 3 days:

- $400 incudes participating in school portions and spectating clinic presentations

Or

- $1000 includes participating in school portions, and participating in the arena clinic presentations

July 15, 2023

- Stockmanship Competition
- Tradeshow
- Awards Presentation & Judges Feedback

Cost for the Stockmanship Competition:

- $250 to participate in the competition (either on-foot or horseback)

Or

- $20 includes admission to Friday night dance, and to spectate the competition (10 & under are free)

Judges include:
Dylan Biggs, Paul Kernaleguen, Glenn Stewart, Marty Gardner, Dawn Hnatow, Dr. Desiree Gellatly

For more details and to register, contact Malcom or Jenny at ultimatestockmanship@gmail.com or (587)- 227-5827

@ultimatestockmanship

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COUNTRY VETS

The Highlights: Kris Nichols at the South Dakota 2023 Soil Health Conference

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition, a nonprofit organization led by farmers and producers, held their annual Soil Health Conference last January. The conference invites students, business professionals, producers, and community members to learn about soil science and the importance of healthy soils. As a keynote speaker, Dr. Kris Nichols gave a presentation about decision making tools for soil health.

At the beginning of her talk, Kris alluded to the audience experience at conferences such as this one. When you come home from a conference, she explained, you might have some ideas you want to implement or several plans that keep changing. But this isn't a bad thing: plans should be flexible and iterative, changing in response to the situation.

Regenerative agriculture can be like this too. The weather and environment doesn't stick to rules or a firm schedule. Neither does the science: it changes, it reevaluates, it discovers new ideas. Likewise, there are no rules in regenerative agriculture that a producer must follow to be certified or international standards that miss out on local nuance.

"You have options and opportunities that are almost limitless," she said, which can be both welcome and scary at the same time. So where do you start?

Here are the highlights from her presentation and practical tools for making decisions.

Nothing is free

Soil is an economy of carbon: for a healthy ecosystem, carbon needs to flow through different elements and be transformed by organisms and natural processes. The core of regenerative agriculture is to regenerate soil through recarbonization. That is, restarting a stalled economy by adding carbon back into the system.

However, as Kris said, nothing is free. Within the concept of "carbonomics," producers are essentially paying microorganisms with carbon (through the root exudates from the plant) for the nutrients that they supply.

Carbon isn't infinite – if you want to allocate more carbon belowground, that's less carbon that can be used aboveground. Many producers are concerned that allocating carbon belowground means they have to sacrifice yield, Kris explained.

But if the soil is managed right, it doesn't have to be a sacrifice. We need to maximize the photosynthetic capacity of plants in order to balance the underground and aboveground allocation of carbon, maintaining yield and revenue.

"We focus a lot on short-term gains but that gives us long-term losses," she said, referring to the practice of prioritizing yield without considering soil health.

Her recommendation? To focus on short-term balances and long-term gains.

Except for sunlight, that is

Photosynthesis is the most efficient form of solar to chemical energy conversion, Kris explained. And if our goal of recarbonizing the soil is only possible through photosynthesis, then we want to maximize the amount of time that plants are green and growing.

Because, as Kris said, sunlight is free. Unlike carbon, nutrients, seeds, fuel, or our time.

She recommends a minimum of 280 days a year of growing green, photosynthesizing plants. Even in South Dakota, not so far away from Alberta, this is possible. Producers need to choose frost-tolerant plants as cover crops to ensure that the plants remain productive when the cold winter months arrive; making use of warm chinooks can help keep plants such as turnips, radishes, rye, and canola alive. Some studies have even shown, said Kris, that some plants are able to photosynthesize beneath a cover of snow.

Stretching out the growing season is critical for the survival of soil microorganisms. "In a heaping teaspoon of healthy soil, you can have more microorganisms than the number of people on planet earth," Kris said. "And they are all hungry."

Microorganisms aren't suited to feast and famine periods; they require a consistent supply of soil carbon throughout the year. And the best way to keep them fed is to have living roots depositing carbon into the soil for as many days as possible.

Birds, bats and insects

How do you optimize the capacity of your farm ecosystem?

Producers might choose to plant flowers that attract pollinators or set up bat and bird houses. These animals are underrated pollinators on a farm; Kris explains that more pollen from grass species is found in the digestive systems of pollinators than that of flowers. Farmers can also set up insectaries to attract beneficial insects.

Kris explained a study that involved growing plants around the perimeter of a crop field to attract plant pest insects, drawing them away from the crops. The researchers added a strip of plants within that perimeter to attract insect predators; these insects helped to reduce the

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)
pest population. This study demonstrated a unique way to use valuable space and manage pests without pesticides.

This is what Kris means by "eco-function intensification" – considering every square foot of the farmscape and ensuring that it is managed as a healthy, thriving ecosystem.

Healing wounds

A moderate amount of stress to plants can make the soil healthier. Referring to the sixth soil health principle of integrating livestock, Kris explained how the unique grazing of cattle enhances ecosystem health.

When an animal grazes, they are injuring the plant's tissues. To protect the wound, the plant produces biomolecules like antioxidants and polyphenolics, chemicals that are already created normally to guard against damage from solar radiation. The plant requires extra nutrients (she lists the elements of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, copper, zinc, and molybdenum as examples) to create these chemicals, so it sends down carbon in the form of root exudates. The soil microorganisms supply the plant with the nutrients it needs.

Unlike sheep and horses, who cut and tear leaves while grazing, cattle graze by wrapping their tongue around the forage and tugging on the plants. This motion applies stress to the roots and causes some root hairs to break off, leaking carbon into the soil.

These two processes – injured plant tissues and pulled roots – lead to more carbon being stored underground, improving soil health and providing food for microorganisms.

Let's get the audience involved

Halfway through the talk, Kris invited four audience members up to the stage. She gave them two shallow plastic containers with a sponge, representing porous and compacted soil, and filled them with water. The volunteers were invited to hold each wet sponge over a cup and let the water drip out without squeezing it. This is gravitational water, Kris explained: soil moisture that drains downwards, away from the reach of plant roots. Soil with larger pore spaces is prone to this gravitational flow.

She invited the volunteers to squeeze the sponges into a different cup. What comes out is the water holding capacity, or the maximum amount of water that is available to plants. "What we have here is illustrating the power of porosity," Kris said.

The results: the highly porous sponge produced a fair amount of gravitational water and filled the water holding capacity cup by about a third to a half. The low porosity sponge produced a small amount of gravitational water and, with a nearly empty cup, showed almost no water holding capacity at all. In porous soil, she explained, some water will inevitably drain out. But with minimal infiltration in compacted soil, there won't be any water available to the plants. You need porosity in your soils to ensure that plants have an adequate and consistent supply of water.

Choosing your tools

The question, said Kris, isn't whether you should use a certain tool or practice, but why – taking into account the positive and negative consequences and how to use the practice most effectively.

Sometimes that means you'll have to till or disturb the soil to control weeds, even if you'd prefer not to. But what you can do is reduce the damage as much as possible and think about ways to help the soil recover. You might alternatively choose to use animals as a form of soil disturbance: their hooves gently break up the soil and control weeds without causing excess damage. And anyways, she explained, the soil can tolerate some disturbance; soils in natural ecosystems deal with animals, flooding and wind and remain functional and resilient.

Kris uses the FIST acronym to explain the nuance of tool use: frequency, intensity, scale, and timing. If you use a split application of fertilizer, you will need to apply it more frequently. But that isn't necessarily a bad thing, she adds. You might choose to apply it as the plants are going into their reproductive phase, which is when they need the most amount of nutrients.

The intensity of a tool can make a difference. Applying a large amount of readily available nutrients might be appropriate in one context, but other times you might want to apply nutrients in an organic form so that they are released gradually. As for scale, producers might consider the volume of soil that is disturbed by a certain tool, like a plow, or the quantity of nutrients to apply.

Considering the timing of seeding, producers may choose to plant seeds before a soybean cover crop senesces and drops their leaves (senescence occurs when a plant's cells stop growing and dividing due to aging). The leaves will protect the seeds and allow them to germinate without experiencing damage from solar radiation.

And above all, "it's not about bad or good, it's about looking at the consequences of the tools that you're using."

See the full recording here: https:/www.youtube.com/watch v=x5RpTVOEjLE

Author: Regenerative Alberta Living Lab

Original Article: https://www.regenlivinglab.org/

SOUTH AFRICA AG & SIGHTSEEING TOUR

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

January 19 - February 4, 2024

Experience the nature, rich history, and culture of South Africa. There will be opportunities to take in the culture through a visit to the Blyde River Canyon, a mango sub-tropical farm, open land rover safaris and game drives as well as indulging on a traditional Boma Dinner. We will visit the Kruger National Park, Boulders Penguin Colony, House of J.C le Roux, , Boschendal Wine Estate, Abalone Tour, Table Mountain, and V & A Waterfront. We will also get the real agriculture experience by visiting to the Inyoni Crocodile Estate, Embryo Plus Centre, Beefmaster Alliance, Scientific Bonsmara crossbreeding programme & Eragrostis Pastures. We will visit sheep, cattle, corn, soybean operations and much more!

Package Pricing includes: Land Travel & International Flights

Prices vary depending on group size!

Twin prices will vary from $8742.00 - $9473.00 per person

For Full Itinerary: https://www.foothillsforage.com/events

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(403) 764-2044 or lawrence@leadertours.ca

Leader Tours Inc.

Using hooves instead of harrows to rejuvenate pastures


Photo: FFGA

As forage stands age, plant species composition shifts and production declines over time.

There are many different methods of rejuvenating or renovating forage stands and strategies vary in intensity, effectiveness, and cost.

Breaking old stands and reseeding forages, while effective, is among the most expensive rejuvenation methods. So more producers are opting to improve their older tame pastures and reseed legumes using a key resource they already have on hand — their cattle herd.

At Nerbas Brothers Angus, they take a "hooves not harrows" approach to improving older pastures.

"We just try and use grazing as much as possible to take the mechanical component out of it," said Arron Nerbas, who operates on his family's multi-generational farm near Russell, Man.

The purebred and commercial Angus cow-calf operation has no cover crops or annual species and relies solely on perennial forages. Their goal is to try and graze as long as they can each season, and minimize the number of months they have cattle on winter feed, which is typically provided through bale grazing.

Nerbas said they plan out their grazing, moving cattle every two to five days.

"Anything that we graze by about June 15 or earlier, we won't graze for the rest of the (growing) season," he said, adding they will return to those fields again and graze them after freeze-up in the fall or the following spring.

Saving forage to use in the winter as stockpiled grazing is a significant part of their management strategy but he admits that their main goal hasn't been reseeding.

"Using stockpiled forage has its own benefits due to efficiency in feeding, but (reseeding legumes) is definitely a side benefit," Nerbas said. "We haven't renovated a forage stand in 10 years or more.

"Going forward our plan is to probably never rip up and renovate the traditional way."

They work with different land types on their farm and different species composition within that, but Nerbas believes that grazing stockpiled forage can work to reseed almost any species. "Anything that hits maturity that has viable seeds in the seed head that gets smashed or trampled into the ground will become some new seedling," he said.

They've seen increases in legumes in particular.

"When cattle are grazing mature alfalfa, they trample and shake all those seeds down. You'll see it in grasses too like meadow brome and other brome grasses. If you leave residue there, they trample quite a bit in. Over the years we've seen soil improve and forage production improve."

They examine the manure to look for forage seeds that pass through the animal's digestive system and also use that as an in-the-field estimate of whether their herd is getting enough quality forage when they are grazing stockpiled pastures.

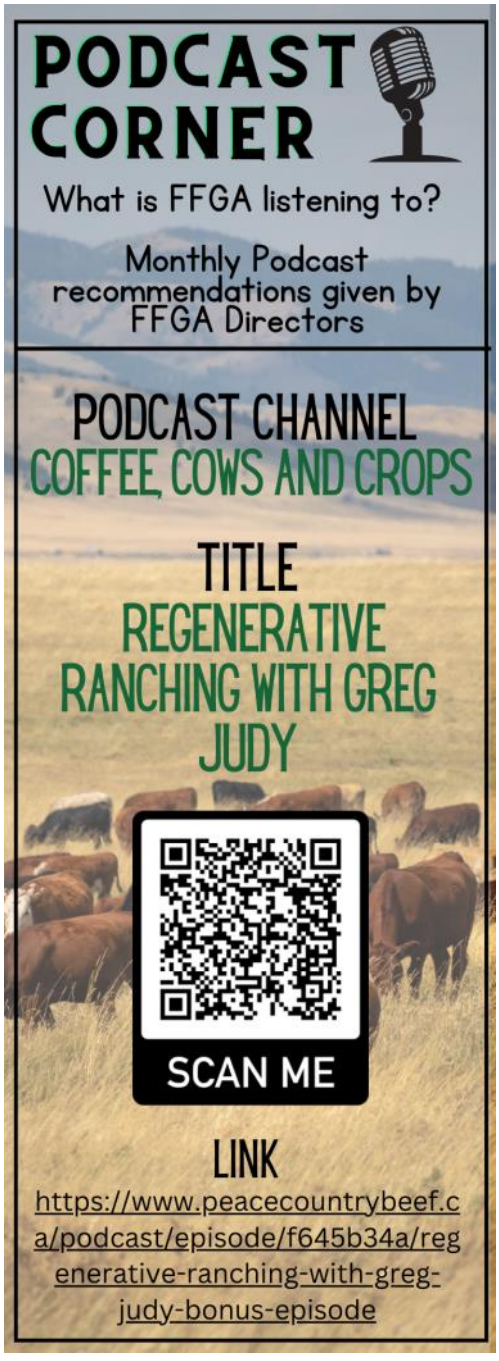
Nerbas has tried other experimental methods of seeding legumes including broadcast seeding using an airplane, which has shown a lot of promise. They've also tried mixing seed in loose mineral although they have had mixed results with this approach.

"It's extremely patchy. The seeds accumulate in small little clusters," he said.

Managing rotational grazing and using stockpiled forages has enabled the Nerbas family to get more days of grazing every year out of the same land base, all while rejuvenating older forage crops.

"That's a key indicator that the land is healthier and forage production is increasing," Nerbas said. "The goal is just to try and improve the land over time."

Author: Beef Cattle Research Council
Original Article: https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/livestock/using-hooves-instead-of-harrows-to-rejuvenate-pastures/



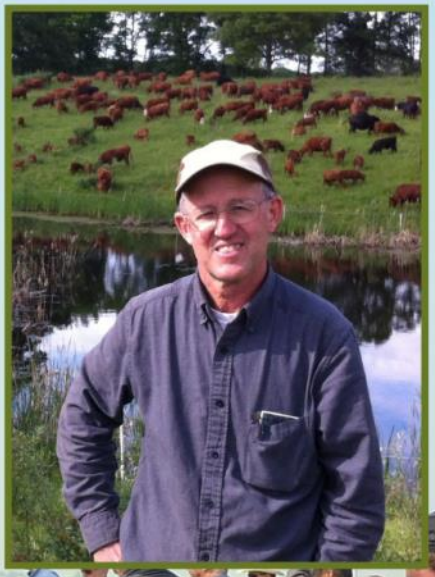
FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

GRAZING SCHOOLS

With Greg Judy

When: June 26, 2023
Where: Rumsey Hall & Two Valley Land and Cattle

When: June 28, 2023
Where: Jumping Pound Hall & Lazy J Cattle Company Ltd.



Registration & Coffee: 8:30am
Lunch (provided): 12:00pm
Wrap Up: 4:00pm

Topics include:

- Think Like A Grazier
- Fencing and Water Techniques
- For Maximum Profits, focus on daily animal performance
- Pasture Walks

FFGA Member: $40 / Non-Member: $50

https://www.foothillsforage.com/gregjudy

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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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Results Driven Agriculture Research

RDAR Results Driven Agriculture Research

FFGA is a proud member of AFIN Alberta Forage Industry Network, ARECA, CRSB Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef