FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
September 2025

Director's Note - Graydon Garner

Greetings FFGA Members

"Ba-dee-ya, say, do you remember? Ba-dee-ya, dancin' in September!

The lyrics from Earth, Wind, and Fire's classic hit 'September' seems to perfectly encompass most cattle producers in the FFGA network. Green grass going into September, over $6 calf prices, good supply of winter feed, grain crop yields hitting the roof, $3000 cull cows – there's reason to have a happy dance! As summer takes its leave, I find myself content and happy. It's a hard thing to do as a producer, to stop and smell the roses. When times are tough, we stress about getting by. When times are good, we stress about when times are going to get tough again. I urge everyone (if you haven't yet) to take advantage of the good times and just enjoy it a little – go for a drive, take pictures of your favorite places on your operation, sit on the porch with a cold one, or however else you like to enjoy the good times. There surely will be plenty of time to stress down the road.

This summer finally brought a chance for us to catch our breath on our grass management. With the past 5-7 years of drought, grass management was paramount, and we found ourselves at stocking rates as low as 25% of 'normal'. I found myself not moving fence as often this year, as once the taps turned on it was hard to stay ahead of the grass that seemed to grow inches every day. Sometimes it's okay to be a 'lazy grazer' pending the right conditions. I talked about this during the Small Ruminant Grazing Tour FFGA held at our place this August – with the growing conditions we ended up with this year, my wife and I took the opportunity to enjoy more recreational time and thus my grazing regime went from 3-4 days per paddock to 8-10 days, simply because I wanted to do other things in my spare time rather than move electric fence. In the drought years it's a non-negotiable, but in the good years I don't mind opening up my pastures in moderation.

One of my mentors told me that the good years are a great chance to learn about how to manage the not so good years. I think it's a great idea and a time to highlight a great learning opportunity through FFGA this fall with our research to on-ranch management day on November 13, or maybe you want to treat yourself instead and go on the FFGA tour to Uruguay in February 2026. However you do it, I think investing in yourself and your operation is a great idea and it can keep you dancin' in September for years to come!"

Graydon Garner

Photo: FFGA Small Ruminant Field Day at Graydon's

IN THIS ISSUE

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On the Cover: Perennial Pasture at the Summer Grazing School at Ribbon Creek Ranch. Photo: FFGA

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What to know about grazing cattle on crop stubble


Photo: FFGA

When it comes to extending the grazing season, stubble grazing is a viable option for many producers on the Prairies. But what are the benefits, and what are the challenges that come with it?

Grazing the stubble left after harvest has some real advantages.

"The first thing it does is it provides additional forage that the cows can use," says Barry Yaremcio about stubble grazing. Barry Yaremcio is an independent ruminant nutritionist and a production management consultant. He is well known for his expertise when it comes to stubble grazing.

There are other benefits, too, for both the cattle and for the land the cattle are grazing on.

"You can get up to 60 animal days of grazing per acre. So, it can be a considerable amount," Yaremcio says. "And depending on what kind of crop it is and how well the combine is set, (the cattle) can pick a lot of grain… they can pick up a lot of leaves and get a fairly reasonable ration."

He says stubble grazing can improve the soil quality, as well.

"When an animal drops the feces or urine on the pasture or on the field, there's a 40 per cent improvement in nitrogen retention compared to hauling manure out from a dry lot. So you've got higher fertility returned back to the soil compared to taking it off the dry lot or manure pile."

But there are challenges, as well. Yaremcio says producers should be aware of the types of cattle that are grazing stubble.

He says if a producer is fall calving or has lactating cows, they should not be stubble grazing, because there isn't enough protein for lactating cows or growing calves. Dry cows require 25 per cent less nutrients than a lactating cow, for example.

"So, if you do want to use it for a fall calving situation, you'd have to be supplementing probably, let's call it half of your daily feed requirement of something that is of a high quality to blend in with the stubble grazing."

Crop types

Yaremcio says producers shouldn't graze just any type of stubble, though. He says it's important for producers to know which cereal straw is best for their cattle to consume.

He says barley straw and oat straw are good options because they have a decent amount of fibre and protein.

He says wheat straw is a less desirable option because it is high in fibre, but lower in protein than other straws. A dry cow requires a minimum of seven per cent protein and 55 per cent total digestible nutrients (TDN). He says with wheat straw, they would get between 3.5 to 4.5 per cent protein, and 40 to 43 per cent TDN. Barley and oat straw provide around 4.5 to five per cent protein and around 48 per cent TDN.

That nutrition doesn't just come from the straw the cattle eat, Yaremcio says. Cattle will also consume leaves from the plants and any grain that has dropped to the ground.

Yaremcio says producers should avoid flax straw for stubble grazing because if there is any green material left after combining, it could have prussic acid present, which is more commonly known as cyanide. This is deadly for livestock.

"You can have high cyanide poison, and it does not take long for animals to die. So, for my safety side of things, I don't even consider flax straw or stubble," Yaremcio says.

Pea stubble has a good amount of protein but is low in calcium compared to cereal straws, so the calcium would have to be supplemented.

Yaremcio says for canola stubble, there are benefits associated with grazing the straw, but it depends on what is left behind. If much leaf is left, it will be suited to grazing. But if the combine was low to the ground, there won't be much left for the cattle to consume that would be beneficial.

Stubble grazing won't fulfil all the requirements of the cattle's diet, however. It is necessary to supplement the cattle's diet with minerals such as calcium, magnesium and phosphorus, says Yaremcio.

"You're looking at a mineral that is probably three parts calcium to one part phosphorus and probably two to three per cent magnesium. A one-to-one mineral is definitely not adequate. It will not bring the calcium level up."

He says producers should check whether their cattle are getting enough protein from the stubble, as they may want to supplement it. He says there are multiple ways to supplement protein, including with cubes or pellets.

"You've got these companies out there with cubes that are 20 to 30 per cent protein," Yaremcio says. "Your waste is less than what you would have with a… pellet." He says there are also other options, such as tubs or blocks, that are around 30 per cent protein.

Producers can often tell if an animal needs protein supplementation based on how the manure looks. Yaremcio says if the manure has more distinct rings than a regular patty, it often means protein levels are lower and fibre digestion is incomplete.

Considerations

Extended grazing and stubble grazing are becoming more common each year, but that doesn't mean it is without its challenges or considerations. For producers who are looking into starting stubble grazing, Yaremcio says they should ensure they are constantly aware of the state of their cattle.

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"Keeping an eye on the animals, making sure that they're not losing weight. It's usually too short of a period of time to see any problems with hair coat or other physical manifestations. But just keep an eye on the animals and make sure they're doing well."

He says producers should ensure they have a good source of water nearby for stubble-grazing cattle. He says though cattle may do okay with a water source a mile away, preferably the water source would be half a mile away.

Yaremcio also says when deciding which crops to graze, producers should be aware of ergot.

"That can cause real problems. Short-term implications of ergot toxicity being present is they'll find about three or four days after they put the animals in, the feed intake will drop by about 25 to 30 per cent," Yaremcio says.

"Look in the hopper and see if there's any ergot bodies present in the hopper. Or if they want to double-check, get in behind where the combine went through, right in the centre between the wheels… and see if there are any ergot bodies lying on the ground."

Author: Melissa Jeffers– Bezan

Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/livestock/beef-cattle/what-to-know-about-grazing-cattle-on-crop-stubble/

Farmer incorporates cattle into grain operation to boost soil health


Photo: FFGA

When Jerry Baerg first came to the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing years ago, he was just starting to think about regenerative agriculture and sustainable practices. Now, he is well-known in the industry for his work in this sphere.

At the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing in Edmonton, Alta., in December 2024, Baerg presented on a panel with two other producers, focusing on livestock and soil health. Standing in front of a room filled to bursting, Baerg spoke about the work he is doing on his operation and the effect the conference has had on his management.

"I was just thinking about the first time I came to this conference, and how changing it was for me. There was a lot of new ideas, a lot of processing to do, and it's really helped shape how I view things," Baerg says.

Cows and Grain

Baerg and his wife, Dawn, run Ribbon Creek Ranch near Linden, Alta. The farm has been in Baerg's family since 1972, under his grandfather. Now, Baerg continues to work on the grain side of the farm with his father and runs a cow-calf operation with his wife.

The cattle side started as a backgrounding operation, but after acquiring more pasture land, they turned it into a cow-calf operation.

Now, he makes sure cattle pass over all their land — whether it is used only for livestock or grain.

"I grew up on a grain farm, but I'm passionate about managing grassland and my cows."

Baerg has invested time and energy into learning about the environment, sustainable and regenerative practices, and his own operation, taking courses such as Ranching for Profit. In 2022, Ribbon Creek Ranch was named the Alberta Environmental Stewardship Award winner. He is also a director of Foothills and Forage Grazing, and he has used this organization to help with the management of his operation.

Regenerative grazing

Cash crops are still a staple for Baerg — but he is managing them differently now.

"We started putting cows back on the land many years ago and started for economics. It was a cheap way to winter the cows, but by now, I've seen the benefits of it."

The principles of regenerative agriculture and soil health are the same for grain farming as ranching: soil armour, minimizing soil disturbance, plant diversity, continual live plant/root and livestock integration. Baerg adheres to these principles through grazing, no till through a disc drill, rotating cattle for grazing and planting polycultures.

"The benefit of the ranching is using no synthetics. On the annual crops, there is more biomass grown on average … (which allows) more nutrients cycled per acre. Each practice has its place," Baerg wrote in an email.

One of the pillars of Baerg's operation is year-round grazing, and he uses his cropland to make this happen. His cattle graze crop residue in the winter, which helps provide a nutrient-dense feed. In the past, he underseeded his cash crops with clover to supply grazing after the cash crops were harvested.

"What are some of the challenges and the benefits of just putting our cattle back onto cropland?" Baerg asks. "Because a lot of us have access to a lot of cropland around us. Some of it's our own, some of it might be neighbours', and the benefit of doing that is huge."

Baerg has converted some cropland into grassland and is including perennials in his rotation because it is hard to find grazing land in his area. He says with markets the way they are right now, he has found it profitable to plant perennials.

"I've had friends tell me, 'You're going backwards,' and it's all right. But I'm really enthused to have perennials in a mix, on a rotation on my farm, just for what it's doing for me."

Year-round grazing

Baerg also uses chaff piles in his year-round grazing program. He shares a chaff collector with his neighbour which he uses to collect the chaff into piles for when he opens those fields to his cattle.

Having piles of chaff is also useful in the winter because it makes the feed a little more accessible to the animals.

"Snow doesn't seem to bother them. They can chug through a lot of snow to get to a pile. They'll put their heads in and they eat and they clean it up pretty well."

The calves learn how to dig through the snow for forage from their mothers.

When chaff grazing, Baerg supplements for energy and protein. He says it depends on the crop yield and the weather, alongside other factors.

"You have to learn your cows. You have to learn their needs. And you have to have a really good mineral package, because it is residue, and you have to be really careful with that."

He also uses swath grazing and bale grazing on his operation. Baerg loves the matter left after his cattle have left a paddock or pasture in the winter because he knows there will be future benefits that come with it.

"To me, that's beautiful," he says. "Look at all those nutrients I've been able to put on that piece of land that I wouldn't have been able to otherwise. So that's just one other aspect of the cattle that are on the land and spreading our nutrients out."

Baerg has seen benefits from grazing this way. Places where grazing oc-

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curs will usually turn green before the rest of the land in the spring.

The nutrients from both the cattle and the leftover feed provide something synthetic fertilizers can't. On his cropland, his agronomist recognizes that.

"He said we have moved the needle …he said, 'I'm recommending 30 to 50 per cent less fertilizer needs because of what the animals have done.' So I was pretty excited."

Water

With their cattle grazing all year round and moving across all their land, Baerg says one of the biggest challenges is water access. That's why it is important to have a water plan.

"When we're grazing in a variety of places, we have to have water, and we have to start planning ahead. You can't just say, 'Oh, I want to put cattle out there next week,' because how am I going to water them?"

What has worked best for him is an above-ground pipe. This has helped him get water to the top of the hills in his area, which prevents the lowlands from being overgrazed.

He also uses portable solar-powered water systems. In the winter, he uses a solar-powered portable water system that activates when the cattle walk up to it as a wet well.

"That is the most trouble-free water I have on my place — works really well."

Next generation

The regenerative journey isn't a linear one. Baerg says he is constantly learning and adapting — that's why events like the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing are so beneficial. The conference gives farmers and ranchers a chance to look at what others are doing and learn new practices to implement on their operation.

Baerg is still doing new things. Now, he would like to keep learning and observing his environment and adapt accordingly. He wants to expand his operation and create space for his children to come back to the farm if they want.

"Are we done? No, but we're on a journey," Baerg says of regenerative agriculture.

So, he continues to attend the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health and Grazing. "Here we are, how many years later? Still learning, still glad to be here."

Author: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/grazing/farmer-incorporates-cattle-into-grain-operation-to-boost-soil-health/

Eight Components of a Strong Preconditioning Program

Photo: FFGA

Many spring-calving producers are thinking about weaning and marketing this year's calf crop.

"In preparation for weaning and marketing, many producers do some level of preconditioning to add value and prepare calves for the next stages of life," says Chris Clark, Iowa State University Extension and outreach beef specialist.

In a recent press release Clark describes preconditioning strategies and explains why it is valuable.

He says there is not a solid, consistent definition for preconditioning and the meaning of the term can differ person to person, regionally and among various programs.

Clark says this definition summarizes his perspective on the meaning and importance of preconditioning: "Preconditioning is a set of practices and procedures applied to prepare cattle for the next phase of production. Weaning and marketing involve many potential stressors that can negatively affect beef calves: separation from dam, new environment, diet change and new social dynamics, just to name a few. The idea of preconditioning is to prepare cattle, minimize those stressors, support health and performance, and ultimately, help cattle reach their genetic potential."

He adds specific precondition practices often include castration, dehorning, vaccination, adaptation to new feeds and bunk breaking.

Although most preconditioning practices are associated with weaning, some of these things can actually be done well ahead of time, even in the neonatal period of a calf's life.

"Well-preconditioned cattle are the culmination of a holistic management program that starts when calves are born and arguably even while they are in utero," he says.

Clark shares these eight components of a strong preconditioning program:

1. Castration and dehorning procedures should be done as early as possible with appropriate anesthesia and analgesia to minimize pain and distress.

"Castration and dehorning surgeries should generally be performed within the first two to three months of life," he says. "Dehorning should be done through genetic selection or through disbudding calves before the horns become well established."

If these procedures have not yet been done, talk to your veterinarian about the best timing and technique. Open wounds can be a problem in the summer because of fly pressure, so it is worth some thought and discussion about how to best proceed at this time of year.

2. Vaccination to establish immunity prior to the stress of weaning and marketing.

Stress associated with weaning and marketing can cause immunosuppression, making animals more susceptible to respiratory disease and other infections. Preweaning vaccines help ensure protective antibodies are on board at weaning, which can help prevent and reduce the severity of disease.

"Work closely with your veterinarian to determine the products and vaccine schedules that make the most sense for your operation," he says.

3. Deworming to reduce internal and external parasite load can help promote animal health and performance.

Cattle commonly consume infective nematode larvae while grazing, so strategic deworming as they are coming off of pasture into drylot or feedyard settings can make a lot of sense.

4. Implanting with growth-promoting hormone implants is very much an optional part of a preconditioning program.

Implants improve performance and feed efficiency and can improve profitability when cattle are retained long enough to take advantage of these improvements.

"In a strong cattle market where each pound of gain has great value, implanting may be worth considering," he says. "Keep in mind the new FDA guidance and emphasis on not reimplanting within a phase of production unless the implant product is specifically labeled for reimplantation."

He explains with this recent development, some buyers might prefer cattle that have not been implanted, so it may be worth thinking through the value of enhanced performance versus buyer preferences and demand at market.

5. Adapt cattle to feed like what will be fed after weaning.

"Creep feeding consistently increases weaning weight but may or may not be profitable depending on the cost versus value of gain," Clark explains. "In the current market with significant value for every pound of gain, creep feeding may be worth considering."

Even when not obviously profitable, creep feeding or some kind of supplementation can help calves adapt to new feeds and feeding systems. This should support a smoother transition throughout weaning.

Postweaning feeding programs should be well-balanced to support health and growth but modest enough to prevent foot and rumen issues and over-conditioning of animals.

"Buyers generally like cattle to be relatively 'green,' meaning they prefer to buy cattle that are not overly fat," he adds.

6. Weaning is considered by some to be an integral part of the

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preconditioning process.

In fact, in some sponsored preconditioning programs, cattle are not truly preconditioned if not weaned for 45 to 60 days. Weaning allows producers to start cattle on feed, adapt them to the next phase of production, and treat any illnesses that might occur.

Consider low-stress weaning strategies such as two-step weaning, fence-line weaning, pasture weaning, etc., and think ahead about what might work for you. Weaned cattle should be past some of the most stressful and high-risk times and ready to enter the next phase of production.

7. Strive for excellence in the basics of animal husbandry.

Shelter, shade, bedding, water, feed and low-stress handling are all components of good animal care, and the most well-preconditioned animals are those that have been well taken care of from conception to marketing.

8. Daily care and record keeping are key components of preconditioning.

Create a plan for performing and keeping records of daily care, and develop a record-keeping system for treatment and feed records.

"Plan to check cattle daily throughout the weaning phase to look for signs of illness, develop a working relationship with a veterinarian and establish a treatment plan in case of illness," Clark says.

Review recommended biosecurity protocols and implement as appropriate to protect the health of your calf crop. Prepare records that can be shared with buyers so they understand how cattle have been cared for, what products have been administered and what procedures have been done.

Clark summarizes preconditioning does several things. First, it enhances animal health, well-being and performance, and increases the odds that cattle will perform to their genetic potential. Additionally, preconditioning minimizes risk.

"In the current record-breaking cattle market, cattle are more valuable than ever, and with great value comes great risk," he says. "Every illness, every mortality, every bout of weight loss and shrink hurts that much more than it would in a weaker market."

Preconditioning can help manage that risk and improve the likelihood of success for producers in all phases of production. Consider preconditioning to optimize cattle health and performance and promote the success of buyers of your cattle.

Author: Angie Stump Denton

Original Article: https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/eight-components-strong-preconditioning-program

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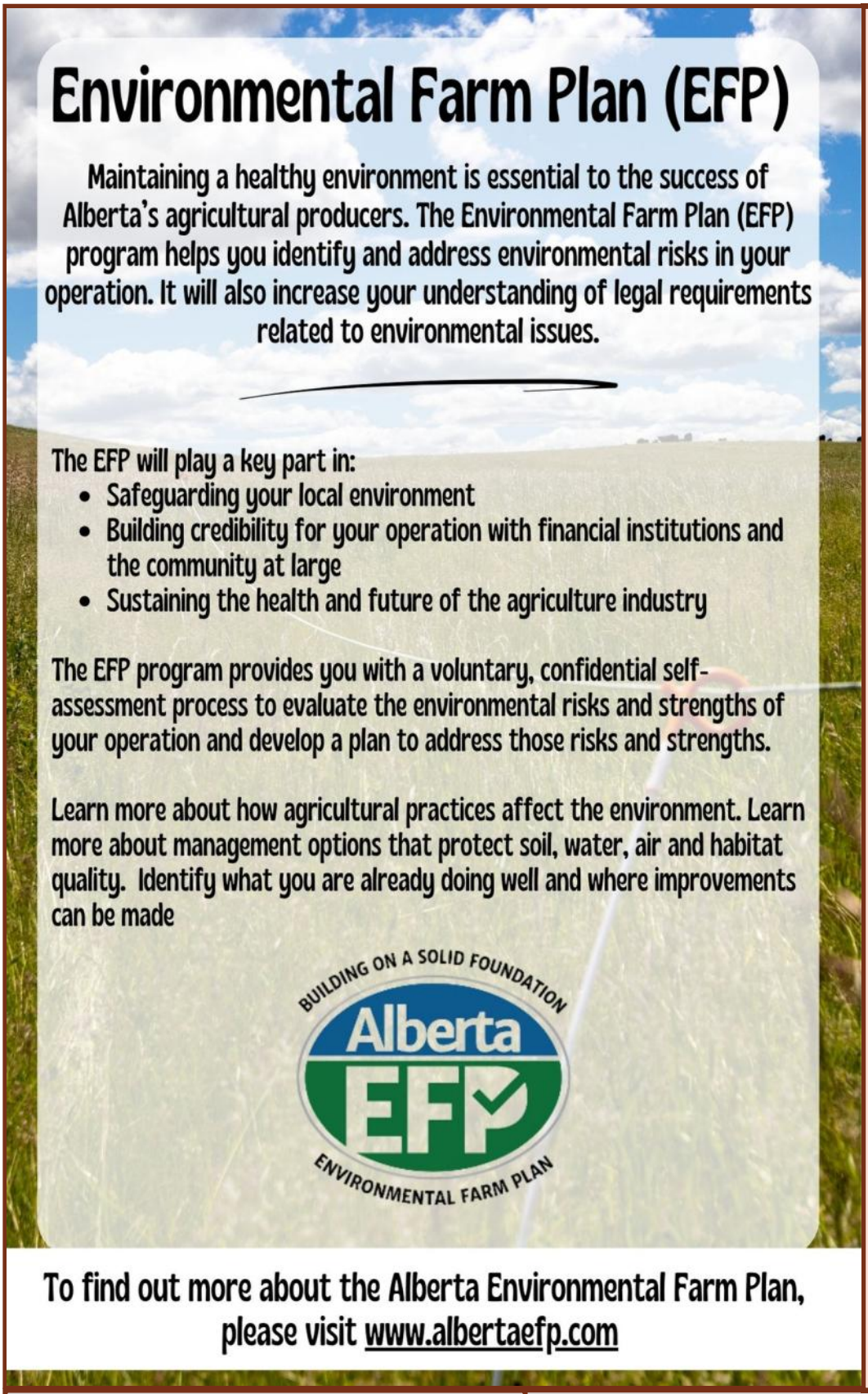

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