



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

November 2025

Director's Note - Gary Smolik

Greetings FFGA Members

By the time this note lands, most of us are deep into the fall run — calves are gone, cows are sorted, and we're shifting gears to winter mode whether we feel ready or not.

It's the time of year that makes you stop and take stock of what went right, what didn't, and where the stress points showed up. Every year seems to bring its own brand of unpredictable — dry springs, wet falls, feed that didn't stretch as far as planned — but that's just part of running cows on the prairie.

What stands out to me lately is how much the basics still matter. Feed inventory, water reliability, wind protection — all the unexciting stuff that ends up being the difference between a smooth winter and a wreck. I've spent more time than I'd like chasing down a frozen water line or a missing mineral tub because I thought it could "wait another day." It never can.

On the grass side, it's good to look back and think about what kind of recovery your pastures got this year. We've had enough years now to know that leaving cover pays off. Bare ground doesn't catch snow, and it sure doesn't build much root. The herds that had planned rest built themselves some insurance for next spring.

Markets are what they are. I'm not sure anyone has that figured out, but cost control still seems to be the best hedge most of us have. Keep what you can simple, keep it working, and spend where it makes a difference.

As a board, we've been talking a lot about how to keep this organization useful to producers — not just another email in the inbox. The pasture walks, workshops, and peer learning sessions only work if they solve real problems. If there's a topic or idea that would make a difference on your place, don't be shy to tell us.

It's easy to get caught up in the grind this time of year, but don't forget to check in on your neighbours.

Everyone's juggling something — frozen pumps, feed shortages, or just long days in short daylight. Sometimes a coffee and a half-hour visit can keep a person going better than a new mineral mix.

Take care of yourselves, keep an eye on the herd, and remember why we do it — not for the easy days, but for the good ones that make it all worth it.

Gary Smolik

(Photo: Gary's son and 4-H Steer)



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On the Cover: Grazing School at Jerry Baerg's in July 2025. Mt. Sentinel Ranch. Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!



Strengthening beef cattle immunity in cold weather

Photo: FFGA



As temperatures drop and winter sets in, beef cattle face increased stress due to cold weather, fluctuating feed intake and higher energy demands for thermoregulation. These stressors can suppress the immune system, making cattle more susceptible to respiratory diseases, digestive issues and other illnesses.

While antibiotics are part of the health regimen for most producers, it might be time to consider strengthening the immune system from within. The gut is home to 70% of the immune system, and incorporating prebiotics into your winter management strategy enhances your herd's resilience. More robust cows can endure the elements more effectively, allowing them to convert more of their daily nutrition into performance.

Prebiotics and how to use them

We all add treatment to our diesel tanks during the cold months, so think of prebiotics as the anti-gel of the cow's engine. Prebiotics are nondigestible feed ingredients that stimulate the growth or activity of the microbes in the gut. They serve as fuel for the existing "good bugs" and can provide substantial health benefits for the herd. There are many types of prebiotics in the marketplace, with many differing modes of action. Prebiotics are effective, proactive tools that can stimulate rumen function, nutrient absorption and immune response. Fortunately, we can easily incorporate these powerful technologies in daily supplements, such as your free-choice mineral tub or total mixed ration (TMR).

I always tell producers to treat herd health in a proactive rather than reactive manner. Although I'd recommend year-round use, start feeding prebiotics at least two to four weeks before the first major cold front. This gives the microbiome a chance to adjust and optimize rumen function before the first signs of cold stress occur. For every degree that the wind chill falls below a cow's lower critical temperature (LCT), she requires an additional percentage of energy to meet nutrient demands for thermoregulation. Prebiotics can improve energy utilization up to 11%. Utilizing the forage more effectively will allow her to partition more energy toward the immune system, colostrum development or preparing the growing fetus for life outside the womb. Instead of using all the nutrition to keep herself warm, she's providing more for her calf and improving the generational health of the herd. Not to mention, that's a huge savings on supplementing energy.

Not all our cows are spring chickens, and we don't always know how weaned calves and high-risk cattle will respond to the cold. Pay extra attention to older cows, commingled groups and cattle confined in tight areas. These cattle are more susceptible to bovine respiratory disease (BRD), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) and cold stress. We can't prevent all pathogens from entering the herd, but improving gut function by feeding prebiotics can reduce the viral load that initiates clinical morbidity.

Prebiotics are a powerful tool. When used proactively in conjunction with proper management and health protocols, your herd health will flourish. Adaptive immunity improves with vaccination protocols, but keeping the bad bugs from even entering the system is the key to herd health. If we properly manage manure and have a strong microbiome and healthy gut, the last 30% of the immune system never has to be activated. Keeping the herd healthy boosts your nutritional savings that translate directly into performance that strengthens your bottom line. If you want to incorporate prebiot-

ics into your nutritional management program, you can.

Cold weather brings unique health challenges for beef cattle, but a well-designed, prebiotic-based nutrition plan can offer vital immune support. By fostering a healthier gut environment, prebiotics help cattle maintain resilience, reduce disease risk and perform better during winter stress.

Author: Chris Cassady

Original Article: <https://www.agproud.com/articles/62256-strengthening-beef-cattle-immunity-in-cold-weather>

PODCAST CORNER



What is FFGA listening to?

Monthly Podcast recommendations given by FFGA Directors

PODCAST CHANNEL

WORKING COWS

TITLE

BURKE TEICHERT ON DEVELOPING AND GRAZING STOCKPILED FORAGE



SCAN ME

LINK

<https://www.workingcows.net/450>

ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN (EFP) WORKSHOPS



ENFORCEMENT/CEMETERY BUILDING - HIGH RIVER, AB
NOVEMBER 12, 2025

TOWN OF THREE HILLS HALL - THREE HILLS, AB
NOVEMBER 13, 2025

MD OF WILLOW CREEK BUILDING - CLARESHOLM, AB
NOVEMBER 24, 2025

MD OF PINCHER CREEK BUILDING - PINCHER CREEK, AB
DECEMBER 11, 2025

WORKSHOP DETAILS:

- Workshop will begin at 9:00am and wrap-up around 3:00pm
- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring laptop or tablet
- Please bring information on your water sources & water bodies if you have them
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

TO REGISTER FOR SPECIFIC LOCATION & DATE VISIT:

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/efp>





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Canadian Beef Farmers are Leading in Global Sustainability, and the Proof is in the Numbers



Photo: FFGA

As a Canadian rancher, you have a powerful story to tell. Thanks to generations of land and cattle stewardship by producers like you, Canadian beef is recognized globally as being among the most sustainable in the world.

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) is a non-profit member-based organization that brings together the entire beef sector from farm to fork and beyond, including beef producer voices. Our role is to measure and help advance the industry in areas of mutual interest, and to facilitate connection and knowledge exchange between stakeholders that don't typically work together. The Foothills Forage and Grazing Association is a critical member voice and is represented on our governing Council with an elected Member at Large seat.

Sharing your story with the public is a priority for the CRSB. This year, CRSB showcased the industry's excellent environmental progress using metrics from the CRSB's National Beef Sustainability Assessment. The campaign entitled "Confessions of a Canadian beef farmer" reached over 19 million Canadians, with a beef producer at the heart of the story. We encourage you to share the story too, which shows your contribution to building a sustainable food system here in Canada.

Watch and share the main campaign video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGKf-tOH04>

The CRSB's National Beef Sustainability Assessment (NBSA) is one of four areas of CRSB's work and provides an extensive scientific evaluation of Canadian beef production from environmental¹, social¹ and economic² perspectives. The most recent study measures progress from 2014-2021 and found improvements in most farm-gate indicators of sustainability. These numbers reflect the collective commitment to continuous improvement and show your hard work and dedication.

They also provide information that supports industry communications, marketing, research, policy and advocacy efforts in Canada and around the world. The annual membership fees collected by CRSB, leveraged against government grants, make projects like the NBSA possible.

Canada is one of the most efficient beef-producing countries in the world, generating 52% fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per kilogram of beef when compared to the global average³. From 2014 to 2021, emissions to produce each kilogram of Canadian beef declined by 15%, a result of advanced genetics, feed efficiency, and management practices^{3,4}, and shows we are on track to reach the 2030 goal of a 33% reduction in emissions intensity^{4,5} while achieving healthier and more productive cattle - a win-win for producers' pocketbooks and the industry's footprint.

Canada's grasslands are critical to the story. Land used for grazing cattle is one of our most important ecosystems and CRSB's assessment¹ makes it clear that Canadian beef is more than just food. Land for

raising beef cattle is estimated to store 1.9 billion tonnes of soil organic carbon — nearly 40% of all carbon in Canada's agricultural soils. Most of this carbon is found in native grasslands (67%), followed by tame pastures (24%) and cropland (9%). Of those 1.9 billion tonnes, Alberta holds almost half (48%), highlighting the province's critical role in carbon storage³. To put this into perspective, the total carbon these landscapes currently store is equivalent to the annual emissions from **over two billion passenger vehicles**^{1,6}.

Beyond carbon, land used to raise beef cattle provides critical wildlife habitat. While the overall habitat capacity across Canada's agricultural land has declined, the share provided by cattle grazing land has actually increased¹. Considering all crop and pastureland combined, land used for raising beef cattle provides 74% of reproductive and nesting habitat, and 55% of feeding habitat for Canada's wildlife. Alberta's landscape is an important contributor here too, where land for grazing beef cattle provides 87.5% of the reproductive habitat on which Alberta's wildlife rely¹. Over 60 species at risk rely on grasslands, much of which is maintained by farmers and ranchers - because of grazing - not in spite of it.

Additionally, the economic impact of the Canadian beef sector cannot be overlooked. Consumer demand for Canadian beef is strong at home and abroad, and 2.5 jobs are created for every worker at the farm-level. The beef sector contributes \$51.6 billion in production of goods and services, \$21.8 billion to the Canadian GDP and \$11.7 billion in labour income annually².

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Canadians have a strong and growing level of trust in beef farmers and ranchers. According to a 2025 Public and Stakeholder Engagement consumer survey, 70% of Canadians hold a positive view of beef farmers, a seven-point increase in just one year. In Alberta, trust is even higher, at 76%. Canadian consumers view beef as part of an environmentally friendly diet (74% nationally and 80% in Alberta), up 14% since 2023.

Canadian beef is more than just a source of protein—it's providing ecosystem services, maintaining grasslands, supporting the Canadian economy, while contributing to a resilient Canadian food system. Behind every one of these metrics are hardworking people like you, and for that, Canadians are very proud.

Learn more at crsb.ca

1 Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef. (2024a). National Beef Sustainability Assessment: Environmental and Social Assessments. Calgary, AB: Groupe AGECO.

2 Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef. (2024a). National Beef Sustainability Assessment: Economic Assessment. Calgary, AB: Canfax Research Services.

3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2022a). GLEAM v3 emissions dashboard. Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM).

4 Aboagye, I. A., Valappil, G., Dutta, B., Imbeault-Tétreault, H., Ominski, K. H., Cordeiro, M. R., ... & McAllister, T. A. (2024). An assessment of the environmental sustainability of beef production in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Animal Science*, 104 (2), 221-240. <https://doi.org/10.1139/cjas-2023-0077>

5 Canadian Beef Advisors. (2020). Greenhouse Gas and Carbon Sequestration Goals. Canada's National Beef Strategy.

6 Natural Resources Canada, Office of Energy Efficiency. (n.d.). Greenhouse gas emissions calculator. Government of Canada.

7 Mottet, A., de Haan, C., Falcucci, A., Tempio, G., Opio, C. and Gerber, P., 2017. Livestock: On our plates or eating at our table? A new analysis of the feed/food debate. *Global Food Security*, 14, pp.1-8.



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Importance of record keeping on cow-calf operations



Photo: FFGA

Although most cattle producers agree that good recordkeeping is important, many operations are not currently collecting valuable information that can be used in management decisions and marketing efforts. Because each of us will only do what we enjoy doing (or are forced to do), recordkeeping should be approached to try to maximize enjoyment or minimize pain.

From a recordkeeping standpoint, the needs of cow-calf ranches differ from other livestock operations such as dairies, feedlots and swine or poultry operations in that cow-calf ranches only collect usable information at a few specific times of the year, such as at pregnancy check, weaning, pasture turnout or at other times that specific ranches handle their cattle.

This is in contrast to other livestock production systems that hand-deliver feed on a daily basis and measure production on a daily (dairy) or at least on a weekly or monthly (swine or poultry) basis due to frequent marketing.

Because of these differences, the relatively low amount and frequency of data collection in cow-calf herds allows ranchers to have very effective recordkeeping systems that are simpler than systems needed by other livestock produc-

tion systems. In fact, a lot of important information can be captured on the ear tag or freeze brand, such as year of birth, sire information and calving order; and paper or relatively simple computer programs can be used to keep and organize ranch production and health records.

The first set of records you should keep should answer a pressing question or solve an immediate need. Your primary need today may be to have the information gathered to make filling out tax forms easier next year. Or you may want to know which cows are becoming pregnant early in the breeding season or which cows wean the fastest-growing calves. By starting a recordkeeping effort with one or a limited number of objectives in mind, it is easy to see what information you need to gather and how that information will be used.

Once you have identified exactly what you want to know, how you will collect the information also becomes obvious. For example, if you want to determine which cows calved in the first 21 days of the calving season, you will need a way to identify each cow, and you will need to know when each cow calves (to the day, week or 21-day period, depending on whether the herd is a registered or commercial herd, and the current level of data collection). Often, I find that once the first pressing question is answered, other questions become important. As more questions are asked, such as which bulls are weaning the heaviest calves, or which bull's daughters stay in the herd the longest, the more information needs to be collected, and the more sophisticated the recordkeeping system needs to

become.

For small herds or herds where the needed information is very simple, a notebook with hand-written notes will do the job. As herd numbers increase, or as the questions asked demand more pieces of information, a computer program makes recordkeeping much easier. Some producers make their own record system using a spreadsheet or database software program in order to customize their records to their specific needs. Many other cattlemen utilize commercially available cow-calf record programs.

Every record system has its strengths and weaknesses; these strengths and weaknesses are based on the fact that the more one wants out of a program in the way of reports and calculations, the more complicated the data entry becomes. The secret to being happy with a computer record program is to find one that will answer all the questions you want it to be able to answer, but not a lot more.

Different veterinarians have preferences for different types of records and recordkeeping systems, but all would agree that having accurate information about the herd has many valuable uses, including: to assist in the assessment of production efficiency, to help in the investigation of disease outbreaks and as a component of Beef Quality Assurance (BQA).

From a production standpoint, I am most interested in the percentage of the herd that becomes pregnant in the first 21 days of the breeding season, the percentage of exposed cows that wean a calf and any differences in reproductive efficiency by cow age group (heifer,

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first-calf heifer, cow), body condition score, genetic background or breeding pasture.

Many farms and ranches record all open cows, abortions, illnesses and deaths, and veterinarians can utilize this information to pinpoint problems to specific age groups, pastures, months of the year or other factors that may be contributing to the losses. This type of recordkeeping is very helpful to veterinarians but requires a dedicated effort on the part of producers to collect information over many years and to have an information storage system that allows efficient search and retrieval.

BQA involves several aspects of cattle management that directly affect the quality of the beef products sold to consumers as well as the health and welfare of the herd.

Accurate documentation of all events that occur to an animal from the time of birth through all of the production phases and on into the slaughterhouse is becoming the expected level of recordkeeping.

Whenever a vaccine, dewormer, fly control, antibiotic or other product is administered to cattle, you should record the exact name of the product, the serial number of the product you purchased, the dose that was administered and how the cattle were treated (e.g., by mouth, in the muscle, under the skin, etc.).

If you decide that your current level of recordkeeping is holding you back from improved production efficiency, it is important to know what you want to gain from your records and to match the most appropriate recordkeeping method or computer program to your needs; then diligently follow

through with appropriate information collection.

Author: Dr. Bob Larson

Original Article: <https://www.beefmagazine.com/farm-business-management/importance-of-recordkeeping-on-cow-calf-operations>



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Grazed Right

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**December 5, 2025
Best Western Plus, Okotoks**

AGENDA:

- **Registration - 3:30pm**
- **Producer Panel - 4:00pm**
- **Cocktails - 5:30pm**
- **Dinner - 6:00pm**
- **Social to follow - 7:00pm**

SPEAKERS:

- **Sarah Green, Mt. Sentinel Ranch**
- **Julia Palmer, Palmer Ranch**
- **Andrea Stroeve-Sawa, Shipwheel Cattle Feeders**
- **Kelly Sidoryk, Panel Moderator**

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COST: \$30 FOR FFGA MEMBERS



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January 16, 2026

Heritage Centre, Cremona, AB

TOPICS INCLUDE:

PASTURE MANAGEMENT FOR FIRES, IMPACTS OF INVASIVE SPECIES ON NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS, RECORD KEEPING OF GENETICS, HOW TO CARE FOR CHICKENS, LIVESTOCK HEALTH, AND MORE!



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