FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture
Unit 4A, 710 Centre St. SE, High River, AB T1V 0H3
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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
January 2026

Director's Note - Wolter van der Kamp

Greetings FFGA Members

Happy New Year everyone!

Welcome to 2026. I hope everyone had a great holiday season and got to spend some quality time with family and friends.

As I'm writing this, I'm preparing for our 2nd annual family curling bonspiel, and if you know any van der Kamp's, we are very competitive, so it makes for a great family get together. This Christmas is also very exciting for me, as it's the first one for me as a father.

With the addition of our son, Hayes, 2025 was certainly one of the best years for me here at Bar AD Ranch.

But that wasn't all to get excited about. For the first time since we started here we had a summer of 'normal' precipitation, albeit it started slow and late. The grass grew fantastically, and with the addition of some major water infrastructure improvements, it made for a great summer. To top all that off, the cattle prices throughout the year just kept on rising. It was sure nice to see a lot of the hard work we've put in over the last 8 years come to fruition. All this makes me look forward to the possibilities that 2026 has to offer for us and the ranch.

2025 was also a great year with FFGA. We had lots of great workshops, all with good attendance.

Unfortunately due to a busy summer, I had to miss some of the workshops then, but was able to attend the Stockmanship School with Jordie Waters, and the Sell/Buy Marketing workshop with Doug Ferguson. Both of these schools were fantastic, and gave great insight into new ways to continue improvement at home. If you missed out on some of these events, don't worry, 2026 is going to once again be packed with some great events.

The first big one is coming up right away in the form of a trip to Uruguay. Also, let's not forget that 2026 is a year where we will once again have the Western Soil Health and Grazing Conference. If this is something you haven't attended before, it's an absolute must!

On top of these two very exciting examples, we also have a great keynote speaker coming to the AGM, which will be Shaun Haney. That however is not the only good reason to attend the AGM this year. As Daryl mentioned in his December note, we will see several directors term out this year. Although we will miss the knowledge and expertise these great people brought to the table, this is an opportunity for you to step up if you're excited about agriculture. FFGA does a great job being on the forefront of not only sharing knowledge, but also pursuing new ideas. Besides all that, the board is a great group of people, and the experiences you gain are more than worth the time commitment.

Lots of other events are planned already as well, and will be added throughout the year, so keep checking back with us. I'm looking forward to connecting with everyone at these many learning opportunities, sharing knowledge, experiences, and stories.

Seize the opportunities and enjoy 2026!

Wolter van der Kamp

(Wolter with his wife Katie and new son Hayes)

IN THIS ISSUE

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

FFGA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MARCH 18, 2026- HIGHWOOD CENTRE, HIGH RIVER

- 11:30AM - REGISTRATION
- 12:00PM - LUNCH
- 1:00PM - AGM BUSINESS MEETING
- 2:00PM - KEYNOTE ADDRESS: SHAUN HANEY
- 3:30PM - WRAP UP

Please note, you must be a member in good standing to vote during the Business Meeting. Memberships can be purchased online at: www.foothillsforage.com/membership or at the door!

Are you interested in joining the Foothills Forage & Grazing Association Board of Directors? Email manager@foothillsforage.com or contact a FFGA Director for more details!

SAVE THE DATE

Shaun Haney is the founder of RealAgriculture, a leading North American ag media platform delivering news and insights on policy, agronomy, and farm management. He hosts RealAg Radio on SiriusXM's Rural Radio Channel 147 and RealAg on the Weekend across Saskatchewan and Alberta.Shaun is also a regular contributor to RFD-TV, Agritalk, and US Farm Report, and co-leads RealAgristudies, a farmer-focused market research initiative launched in 2019.

Registration Coming Soon!

On the Cover: Filming Gerald Vandervalk at VXV Farms for the Regenerative Alberta Living Lab Virtual Field Day. Photo: FFGA

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How to Keep Livestock Waters Open All Winter Long


Photo: FFGA

Extended grazing seasons and fewer days starting the tractor to feed cattle sound nice in theory, but what about the watering constraints? Some producers struggle with where to place watering systems, while others battle freezing temperatures brought on by harsh winters.

"Without water, there is no fall grazing," says Rocky Brown, owner of Wald Fencing. "Fencing is easy; watering is the real constraint."

Some might let their cattle fend for themselves with snow, but that's not a preferred method for most.

"I'm not a big believer that snow gives cattle enough water," Brown says. "They use up too much energy warming that snow to body temperature to make it useful."

The good news is there are plenty of tried-and-true options for both temporary and permanent livestock watering systems that work in harsh winter conditions.

"The biggest thing is if water is moving, water is not freezing. So, if you can keep that going and water is always moving, your water is fine," Brown says. "However, nothing's foolproof. There's not one thing that is the silver bullet, but you can monitor and manage to make most systems work."

For fall grazing and more temporary setups, ranchers should start by considering the water source: wells, rural water, dugouts or natural springs.

"We have customers who put a generator and tank in an old two-horse trailer and pump water from a dugout," Brown says. "They figure out the timing and gas needed for the generator, and any excess water flows right back to the original source."

For ranchers using hydrants or other water sources, there are a variety of methods to keep water flowing even while using a float.

"We've developed a stainless-steel system using products from Watson Manufacturing that allows for continuous flow using a combination of a float, petcock and copper tubing," Brown says. "I've had customers here in North Dakota use this system into January."

There's also a similar Watson Manufacturing product that runs on temperature control, and of course, Freeze Misers are another option for running off a hydrant.

For permanent winter watering setups, ranchers should consider whether they're using energy-free models, the materials of the tank and a concrete pad to go around the outside of the water tank.

"Buy good-quality waterers that will last. Don't skimp, because cheap ones never fail in the summer; they fail when your cattle need them most," Brown says.

Even in extreme climates, energy-free waterers can be effective when installed correctly.

"Energy-free waterers can work even in North Dakota and most of Canada if they're installed right and deep enough to capture geothermal heat," Brown says.

Tire tanks are a common sight in the Dakotas due to the natural insulation they provide, but they need to be properly cared for to stay effective.

"Fresh water is so important. If you're using tire tanks, clean them out often," Brown says. "Additionally, make sure they are set up with stainless-steel bolts and thick bottom plates so they don't rust out. They don't fail in July; they fail in January when your hands are freezing."

Tank heaters — whether floating or sinking — are another option to consider to keep floats from freezing, but Brown finds sinkers to be more effective.

"If you're using tank heaters, go with a sinking de-icer. Heat rises, and it warms the water from the bottom up instead of just the surface," he says.

Ritchie tanks are another common brand for colder climates, but there are several factors to consider to make them most effective, starting with material.

"Be careful with all-plastic troughs in cold regions. They might be fine for Nebraska or farther south, but not for North Dakota winters," Brown says.

He also encourages producers to keep valves below water whenever possible, use thermal cubes and incorporate a small aluminum plate.

"A thermal cube is a $20 game-changer. It turns your heat lamp on at 35 degrees and off at 45 so you're not wasting power or burning bulbs," Brown says. "A simple 4x6 aluminum plate under your element spreads the heat and keeps calcium from building up; cheap fix, big difference."

Concrete pads are also important around permanent tanks.

"Make pads big enough for the animal to fit all four feet on there," Brown says. "Don't make cattle step up onto concrete pads. Keep them ground level so they're not washing out the landing every time they step down."

If concrete doesn't seem feasible, there are other options.

"If you can't get a concrete pad poured, build one out of rough-cut treated lumber," Brown says. "It lasts, it's reusable and you can move it if you ever have a water break."

At the end of the day, it takes a combination of experiences — from the rancher and from others — to find the best solution for an operation.

"Share what you know, but don't be arrogant about it. The beef industry rises together when we share what works instead of keeping it to ourselves," Brown summarizes.

Know your constraints, talk to your neighbors or talk to an expert to determine which fall and winter watering systems will be most effective for your operation.

Author: Shaye Koester-Wanner

Original Article: https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/how-keep-livestock-waters-open-all-winter-long

LADIES LIVESTOCK LESSONS

RED BOW AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

January 16, 2026 | Heritage Centre near 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!

Register at RedBowAg.com

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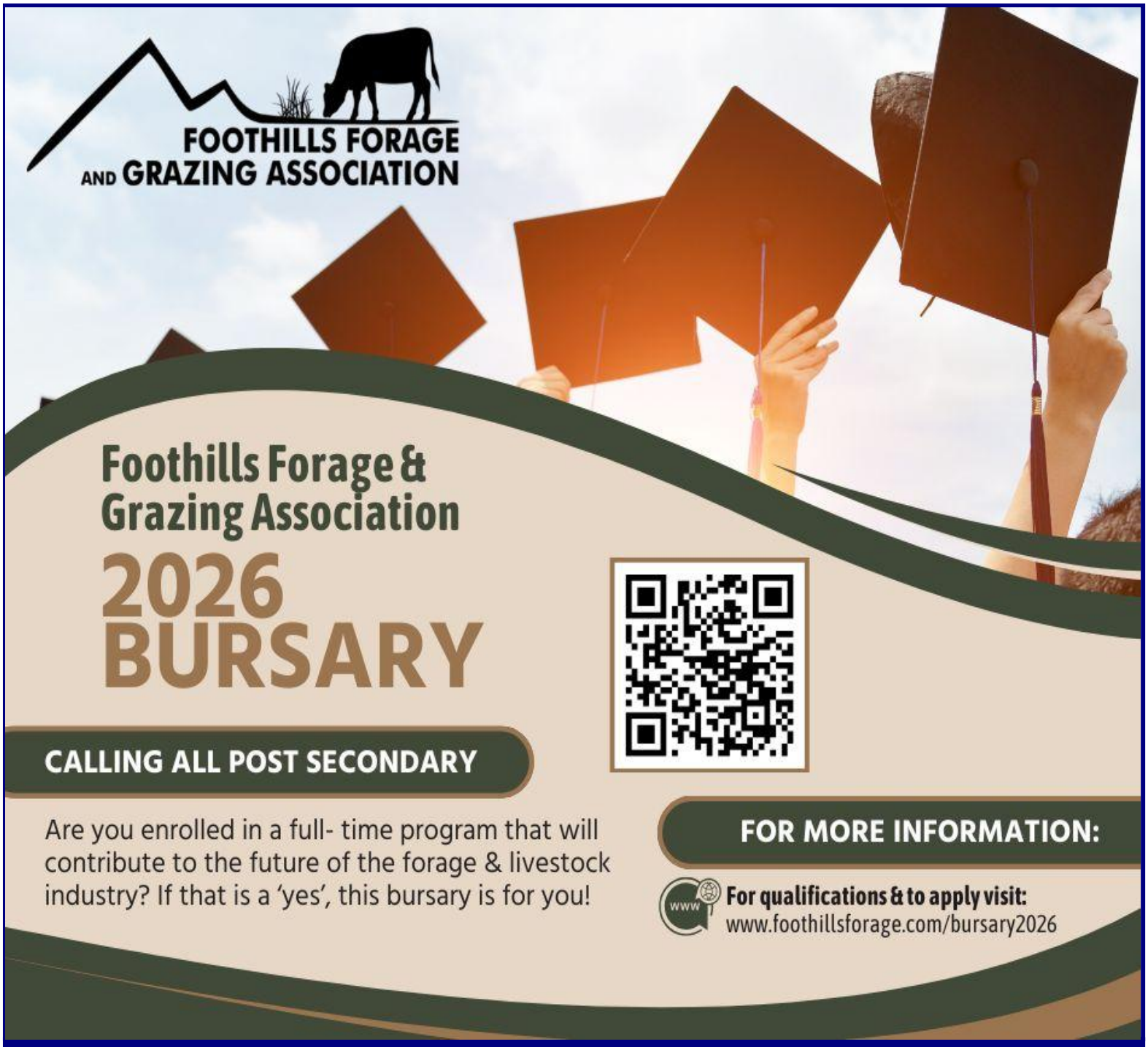

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Water supply and lactation metabolism

Photo: FFGA

During calving season, your herd transitions through parturition to become a lactating herd. Late-gestation nutrition challenges such as decreased rumen capacity are replaced with the energy demand of milk production. The physiological changes during calving, not to mention the strain of parturition, require energy and, simply put, are pretty remarkable.

The cow's metabolism and physiology change quickly during and after parturition. After giving birth, the gravid uterus naturally goes through involution as secretion of the hormone progesterone is decreased and energy is directed to the mammary gland to support milk production. Although the birth of a calf and the reduction in uterus size may result in a reduction of about 200 pounds, the total energy demand of the cow remains high during lactation. During late gestation, the main energy substrates for the growing fetus were glucose, which must be synthesized by the cow, and amino acids. Now during lactation, fats may be incorporated as a major energy source in the milk.

An area of nutrition management to keep in mind during lactation is how much energy the cow spent pre-calving by mobilizing body tissue to feed the growing fetus. Avoiding major loss of body fat reserves is critical to not only support lactation, but also to maintain reproductive fitness for the upcoming breeding season. Body fat and muscle degradation during late gestation occur as the uterus has such a high demand for glucose and amino acids. Body fat is broken down to long-chain fatty acids such as non-esterified fatty acids (NEFA) in an attempt for the cow to maintain normal levels of blood glucose for herself. Typical scenarios resulting in increased NEFA include fasting, metabolic stress and late gestation. Although elevated NEFA levels in a state of undernutrition during pregnancy are processed in the liver and can cause a negative metabolic state called "fatty liver syndrome," during lactation, the uptake of NEFA into the mammary gland appears to have no upper limit as a source of long-chain fatty acids contributing to milkfat.

A ration providing adequate energy to fuel milk production without large body fat reserve losses still requires adequate protein for milk production to occur. Processes such as the formation of lactose in the udder require adequate amino acids, along with glucose and galactose. Lactose is a sugar that is made in abundance within the udder and is present at about 5% of milk weight in dairy cattle. The total amount of lactose correlates with milk production because lactose is what draws nutrients, including water, from the blood supply into the udder to create milk.

With this information, a loose analogy can be formed by comparing the anatomies and functions of lungs and mammary glands. Anatomically, lungs and mammary glands are very similar. Both organs have large surface area provided by the presence of alveoli. In the same way that individual fibres create a rug, these individual alveoli maximize surface area so that blood passing through the lung has a large area to grab oxygen from the new air and get rid of carbon dioxide. In the udder, the epithelial layer of these alveoli makes the lactose, which then pulls water, protein and fat out from the blood passing by. The more lactose there is, the more water can be pulled out from the blood supply.

As mentioned, cows will mobilize body reserves to provide nutrients to the fetus during pregnancy and to the mammary gland during lactation. To put these concepts together, recent research showed if you restrict beef heifers to 70% necessary energy and protein from day 160 of gestation to calving, it results in a 40% decrease in colostrum volume due to decreased lactose production, and increased NEFA by 78% at day 265 of gestation, showing increase in body tissue mobilization. Additionally, restricting energy in the last 100 days of gestation can decrease calf weaning weights by more than 10 kilograms. Given the current price of weaned calves, a decrease in 10 kilograms represents a significant impact when selling 100 calves or more.

Estimating requirements for lactating beef cattle is difficult given they can produce anywhere from 5 to 13 kilograms of milk. For a mature cow weighing about 600 kilograms, current requirements outlined in the Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle suggest that an extra 5.7 megacalories of energy (equivalent to 2.5 kilograms of barley) and 400 grams of metabolizable protein (equivalent to roughly 2

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kilograms of dried corn distillers grains) are required to produce 8 kilograms of milk. To encourage steady production of milk, it is also important to provide free access to water.

Cattle operations that calve earlier may provide access to waterers in pens, whereas later spring calving out on the range may have larger waterers or rely on groundwater. No matter how your operation is set up, free access to fresh water and avoiding reliance on snow or low-level sloughy areas is advised. Cattle weights can vary day to day upward of 40 kilograms based on their level of water intake, but current NRC recommendations are that water intake rises nearly 60% for a lactating cow versus a wintering pregnant cow. However, this total amount can be influenced by ration and rumen capacity, with drier rations causing higher water intake.

By providing access to fresh water, and ensuring adequate waterer space, you can minimize variance of water intake from day to day and encourage steady milk production. Removing or restricting access to water can not only reduce milk production but can also reduce dry matter intake, which affects the cow's energy balance and milking.

Another effect of free access to water, particularly in the winter, is the reduction of consuming dirty water laying on the ground or eating snow. Hopefully in turn, that reduces the occurrence of calves drinking that dirty water as well. If the little monkey doesn't see Mommy drinking the dirty water, hopefully the monkey won't drink it either. The post-calving pen does not need to be completely sanitary, but little things to keep both cow and calf a little cleaner will hopefully lead to avoidance of mastitis or subclinical events that lead to increased somatic cell counts in the milk, since mastitis causes significant reductions in lactose content and milk yield.

Author: Caleb Eidsvik
Original Article: https://www.agproud.com/articles/62532-water-supply-and-lactation-metabolism

Virtual fencing for beef cattle gains momentum in Canada


Photo: U of A

Virtual fencing is growing rapidly as more companies are sprouting up with variations of the technology and more trials are happening across the country.

For producers interested in adopting virtual fencing, understanding the differences between technologies, Canadian research and associated costs is crucial.

Vence

In 2022, the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association were looking for a producer interested in trialling virtual fencing technology.

When John Chuiko heard, he decided to get involved in the trial. Now, this virtual fencing technology has changed how he and Deanne do things on their operation.

The technology being trialled on the Chuiko's operation, CJ Ranching, in northwestern Saskatchewan, is from Merck Animal Health, and known as "Vence." With this technology, cattle wear collars that emit GPS signals and users can set up virtual fences from their phone or computer. Solar-powered base stations remotely manage the collars. The collars, however, don't use solar-powered batteries — instead, they use regular batteries, as Vence believes they are hardier.

Currently, CJ Ranching is the only place in Canada with this technology from Vence. They have done one year of the trial and are going into their second and last year, though they are hoping to extend the trial.

"The potential is only bound by your creativity," Chuiko said.

There was a learning curve for both the Chuikos and their cattle.

"There was just lots of stuff to figure out. But Vence was so good. There's a support team, you get a 'rancher success' person that helps you along with the tech, and she was so good. So it was just a matter of learning the software," Chuiko said.

The cattle have to be trained with the technology, as well. There is a four-day training period where the producer, alongside their 'rancher success' contact, creates virtual fences along a physical fenceline. Gradually, the virtual boundaries move inward from the physical fence until, by day four, they are near the middle of the paddock. A warning beep is emitted from the collars when the cattle get too close to the virtual fenceline, and a shock if they get even closer.

Northern Saskatchewan trial

The trial started in full force in the spring of 2024. The main thing Chuiko was hoping to get out of it was the ability to manage his cattle in his vast forest lease and to rotate his herd through the pasture. He rotates his cattle between one to six times a day to mimic nature. It is important to the Chuikos to prioritize the health of the land.

"Our forestry lease is very high labour and very intensive. So, the potential for this is pretty huge for us," Chuiko said when he presented at the Saskatchewan Stock Growers AGM in June 2024.

As the only people trialling this technology in Canada, the Chuikos ran into a few challenges. One of the big ones is collar lifespan and retention. Throughout their breeding season, only two of their 15 bulls kept their collars. Seven per cent of their cow herd lost their collars throughout the year. Signal errors affected 32 collars and another seven per cent had critical battery health by the end of the fall.

"The things that we learned from last year would be battery life seems to be a little bit of a challenge for us."

They also realized their base stations couldn't just stay in one spot due to their forested lease and how much their cattle move. To combat this issue, Chuiko put their base stations on trailers and move them to the cattle as needed.\

"As soon as we did that, our communication got way better again. So there are definitely some challenges that we face, but we feel like we have an opportunity to kind of alleviate these and be better again this year."

The Chuiko's forestry lease is 7,500 acres, making it hard to build a fence and manage their herd. Virtual fence is a game changer when making use of this part of their operation. Now they can not only make better use of their land base but focus on soil health and taking care of the grass.

Though the biggest benefit for the Chuikos is in their forestry lease, Chuiko can see potential uses for producers who are using this technology on the flat prairie.

"I think there's lots of potential for this type of technology going forward."

Moving into the second and last year of the trial, the Chuikos have plans for what they want to try to examine this year for the virtual fence. They want to figure out what can be done to make the collar batteries last

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longer. They also want to try the technology for different applications, such as corn grazing, stubble grazing or sorting cattle.

At the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association's AGM in June 2024, Chuiko highlighted other potential applications of this technology he is interested in — for example, monitoring bulls to see who is performing and who is lying around.

The program is a subscription model and costs US$50 per collar per year. Base stations are purchased and cost $13,000 each.

Currently, the Chuikos have three base stations and over 400 animals they have collared. They have money invested in this trial alongside the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association and the Saskatchewan government.

eShepherd

Gallagher launched their virtual fencing system, eShepherd, a year ago in the North American market. In their first year, Gallagher has acquired 40 to 50 new customers in Canada.

Sharl Liebergreen, the general manager of eShepherd, sees interest in virtual fence in the North American market.

"Flexibility, for sure," he said of the benefits.

Producers can use virtual fencing for many things. Commonly, it is used for rotational grazing or to make better use of pasture land and cropland with cattle. Some users are getting rid of internal fencing and cross fencing altogether and moving to just virtual fence.

During times of disaster, virtual fence is a benefit, as well.

"In your part of the world, British Columbia, Alberta, where there's been enormous forest fires, there simply are no fences left. And so (virtual fence) is a really big advantage," Liebergreen said, adding that "even if you could find the labour to get out there and spend all that money building fences, you can now use a different type of technology to replace that permanent infrastructure. So that's a big win."

EShepherd consists of collars the cattle wear that connect to GPS and cell service so users can create virtual fences directly from their phones. The collars emit an audible beep when the cattle draw close to the virtual fence, and then a pulse when they get closer.

The fences are set up in one of two ways — through cellular data service, or through base towers that help emit a stronger signal. Gallagher will help farmers and ranchers determine which will work, based on their operation size and what they need.

"We begin by asking many questions. We really want to understand basically the lay of the land. How strong are the cellular providers in that area? Is it mountainous? Is it flat? Oddly… the very flat land actually gives us a few problems with the base stations. We want to try and get a bit of altitude. But we ask as many questions as we possibly can about the land, but also about the intentions of the customer."

With multiple customers already in Canada, Liebergreen is confident that the battery will withstand a Canadian winter. Because the batteries are solar-powered, the only issue they have run into is the amount of sunlight the batteries get in the winter — they are fine with most normal winter days but can struggle with fog or prolonged cloudy periods.

There are some similarities between eShepherd and other virtual models, but some important differences as well. A big one is eShepherd is a purchase model, unlike Vence, which uses a subscription and rent model for the collars.

With eShepherd, each collar costs around $350. The base stations are around $6,000 each. There is a service charge of $2.50 per head.

Liebergreen said the collars are long-lived devices and will last many years.

After the first year of operation with eShepherd, there are plans to adapt and update the product in the future. Currently eShepherd has free updates every two weeks, but Liebergreen said there will be bigger changes coming down the line.

"I think in the future, there will be other things that we want to introduce which may come with a charge but right now, we are very focused on virtual fencing."

More virtual fencing options

NoFence: A virtual fencing system from a Norwegian company, which comprises collars worn by the cattle and an app downloaded to a phone or a tablet that communicates over a mobile network. Producers create virtual fences in the app. The University of Alberta trialled the technology in 2023 with 39 to 49 heifers collared, depending on the year. Lakeland College also trialled NoFence, focusing on how it performed in a Canadian winter. NoFence collars for cattle cost around $329 each with a monthly subscription fee on top of that.

Halter: Based out of New Zealand, this technology has started to expand in North America. Halter consists of collars, towers for the mobile signal and an app. Halter has a team of experts who help producers map their farms, determine what they need, and help train the herd. Halter has only recently expanded to the U.S. and has not been trialled in Canada yet, though there has been interest from research institutions such as Olds College.

Author: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

Original Article: https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/grazing/virtual-fencing-for-beef-cattle-gains-momentum-in-canada/

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COMING BACK TO THE FARM

An evening for Agriculture students and future producers

January 28, 2026 | 5:00pm | Olds College Alumni Centre

Guest Speakers

Angela Kumlin
Lazy J Cattle Co.

Lorin Doerksen
Gemstone Cattle Co.

Ben Campbell
Grazed Right

Brandon Toews
Route 304 Cattle Co.

Graydon Garner
Flying Heart Meats

Hear real stories from producers who've each forged their own path in agriculture! Learn from next-generation innovators, successful family farm successors, and a first-generation producer who built his operation from the ground up. Together, they'll share their experiences, lessons learned, and practical insights on what it takes to build a thriving future in agriculture.

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UPCOMING WEBINARS

VIRTUAL FENCING & ROTATIONAL GRAZING

January 19 - 7:00pm MST

Register:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/vlPdk3PCTbCqIjYIGJasHQ

SMALL RUMINANT SERIES

January 13, 20, 27 and February 3 & 10 - 7:00pm MST

Register:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/3GXU6F9EQdOg31xhRfVtFw

BISON WEBINAR SERIES

January 13, 20, 27 and February 3 & 10 - 7:00pm MST

Register:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/vf5PhRlRRtqLu9gqnCy-ew

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