



Grey
Wooded
Forage
Association

The Blade

"Creating an Awareness of Forages"



DECEMBER | 2016

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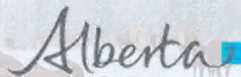


Photo Credit: Vance Graham

Mission Statement

*To promote environmentally and
economically sustainable
forage and agricultural practices.*

Vision Statement

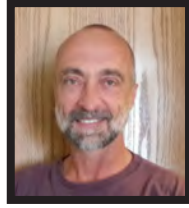
*The community is engaged in
regenerative agricultural
production methods.*



Message from the Chair

By Ken Ziegler

Well folks, as I write this note to you, it's warmed up to minus 12, the sunny is shining and at first glance, it's a pretty nice day out. But oh, did I overlook the wind? Well yes, actually. Its days like this though, that we appreciate the value of wind protection.



Obviously wind protection becomes more important as the temperatures drop but also has a huge impact on animals that need to be exposed to it for lengths of time. I'm thinking of you that have animals out in the open either grazing carryover, bale grazing or swath grazing. Its days like this that calls for flexibility where the animals can be fed in areas protected from the wind. This may require you to abort the "winter grazing" until the windy days subside.

Weather forecasters are quite keen to tell you the wind chill temperatures, partly because of the drama but also because of their importance. Even with animals having thick coats of fur, the wind chill has an effect, largely because of the increased energy requirements but also because of the discomfort caused. Animals will quit grazing too soon and will not consume the needed quantity for that day just

to get out of the wind. Body condition loss is the eventual result.

To change the subject, we hope you enjoy this version of "The Blade". As usual, Ginette and Devin have been working hard in compiling a good collection of articles for your benefit. Do let them know that you're appreciating their efforts and offer them constructive feedback. They've been working very hard in offering several good workshops and field days and have several more planned during the coming winter months. As a board, we're very pleased with their standard of excellence and personal levels of integrity. Their initiative makes our work so much simpler and more enjoyable.

Finally, we wish you and your close ones a very Merry Christmas. The time is getting close for us to celebrate the reason for the season and as leadership of the GWFA, we encourage you to take some time off from your busy schedules and contemplate the many good things in your lives and to acknowledge the source of those blessings.

Also, we wish you a full and rich new year and that you thrive amidst the challenges that will come your way.

Ken



Manager's Notes

By Ginette Boucher

Season's Greetings! Winter has set in; its has been quite harsh and keeping the watering system from freezing up is certainly a challenge. Those of you that may be experiencing some challenges with your existing watering systems may be interested in participating in our upcoming winter watering systems tour in February 2017. We are collaborating with Red Deer County and will provide the details as they become available. Stay tuned for more information.



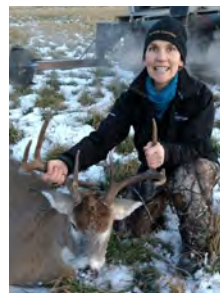
We've been extremely busy in the last couple of months hosting our events. As we compile the questionnaires and evaluation forms, this will provide the needs assessment that our funders require and will help us gauge how we are doing and where we can improve. We work to provide quality non-bias extension information; your input is extremely important. Please take a few moments to reflect on your production needs and let us know how we can help.

We are currently updating our 5-year strategic plan and will share the results with you in the New Year. In 2017, we foresee some new projects to be developed; we will need some land to accomplish this. If you have a few spare acres you could donate for project purposes this will provide a great service to your forage association and producers.

We are currently discussing our coming AGM; we would like to include a tour to make it a productive day. As we plan for our coming Annual General Meeting, please be sure to share your ideas with us to assist in making it as successful day.

We have applied for funding to hire an intern for the summer months; should our application get approved we will be looking to fill an agricultural related position. We will also apply to the STEP (Summer Temporary Employment Program.) Until we get word of our funding we are not yet accepting applications, please keep it in the back of your minds and once we hear about the funding we will extend the employment opportunity.

Hunting season started out very warm then the cold weather set in. I was overly busy this November and hardly got out to hunt. On November 29th, realizing the season was practically over I had to get my tag filled so I gathered my rifle and gear and headed to a nearby farm where a great friend



lives. We headed across the field and parked in the bush. A few minutes later two does were seen heading in the wrong direction. A few moments later appeared a 4-point buck heading our way. I slipped out of the truck, found a rest for my rifle then waited. I had to wait until the buck was on the right

side of the road allowance. By this time, he was about 100 metres away. My partner said shoot, I was lining up and didn't want to miss. I heard him say shoot a second time. I took a few deep breaths, squeezed the trigger and down he went. From that animal I got 70 lbs of meat. Thanks Bob Roper for the great hunting experience and all the help

Wishing you a wonderful Christmas Holiday and a prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,
Ginette



A Cash Grain Broker - Part of Your Crop Marketing Plan?

By Neil Blue, P. Ag. Alberta Agriculture & Forestry. 780-422-4053 or neil.blue@gov.ab.ca



Numerous cash grain brokers have become established across the Canadian Prairies. Could using the services of a cash grain broker be part of your marketing plan? By definition, a broker is a matching agent who arranges a transaction between a buyer and a seller, and for that service, is paid a commission. The seller typically pays a commission, but some brokers may charge commission to both the seller and buyer.

A cash grain broker acts as a matching agent between a seller and a buyer of physical grain. As a broker, they do not take legal or physical possession of the crop being brokered, but arrange for the deal to proceed upon agreement of the terms of the transaction by both parties. The broker may arrange for the trucking, or the buyer or seller may have the trucking capacity to handle that aspect.

Unlike a grain dealer, a cash grain broker does not take legal possession of the crop and therefore does not need to be licensed with the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), although some brokers may elect to do so. If licensed with the CGC, the broker will need to post a bond or irrevocable letter of credit from a bank to serve as security for outstanding payables. To check on whether any firm is licensed, you may contact the CGC by phone or check their website at <http://www.grainscanada.gc.ca>. Look for the link to "licensed grain companies".

Cash grain brokers often deal with buyers who are not licensed. Under current rules, end users of grain need not be licensed with the Canadian Grain Commission. Crop producer protection has been under review in recent years and is subject to change. End users obviously include cattle, hog and poultry feeding operations. The cash grain broker attempts to deal with buyers who they believe will stand for payment of the delivered grain, but there is always a chance of a full or partial payment default. In such a case, the cash grain broker will try to help recover the funds. At least one cash grain broker, in a case of payment default, covered the

outstanding payments for their brokered grain sales from their own resources.

If there is a higher default risk in using a cash grain broker compared to a large licensed grain company, why would one do so? The answer is "usually a higher net price". A cash grain broker can often get a producer a higher price for grain than the producer could arrange on their own. Brokers can often do so by arranging to meet a buyer's needs for volume purchases. Also, a cash grain broker may be able to find higher-priced markets that the producer may not have the time or knowledge to seek out. Often the deal is made "picked up from the farm" with direct delivery to the buyer's facility. Typically, an intermediary buyer is not involved and that saves handling costs, potentially benefiting both the buyer and seller.

In this year where many producers have lower quality or "tough" crops to market, a cash grain broker may be able to find a buyer that is willing to purchase grain with specs that prevent that grain from entering traditional market channels. A crop marketing contact list, which includes some cash grain brokers, is available on request.






General Inquiries:
 Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development
 Toll free help line: 310-FARM (3276)
 or Email: Info@Albertaefp.com

For more information contact the ARECA office:
 Phone: 780-612-9712
 or Email: faye@areca.ab.ca








Farmers' Advocate Office
 Legislature Annex
 9718 – 107 Street NW
 Edmonton, AB T5K 1E4
 Telephone: 310-FARM (3276)
 Fax: 780-427-3913
www.farmersadvocate.gov.ab.ca

Advisory 2016-3:

October 27, 2016

Some Landowners Report Receiving Electrification Charges for Insolvent Energy Sites

The Farmers' Advocate Office (FAO) is asking Albertan landowners to be diligent in watching their electricity bills if they have surface leases on their land belonging to an insolvent energy company.

In June 2016, the FAO was approached by landowners who were concerned that EPCOR Energy Alberta GP Inc. ("EPCOR") was attempting to collect payment for three phase electric services that were provided to a now insolvent oil and gas company for its surface leases. This action was based on an interpretation of EPCOR's terms and conditions of service relating to tenancy.

The Utilities Consumer Advocate (UCA) and the FAO have been actively engaging in discussions with the responsible regulator, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC), to resolve the issue. All three organizations have agreed that EPCOR's terms and conditions of service were intended to address situations where rental tenants have defaulted in payment, not oil and gas surface leases.

The AUC will be reviewing certain elements of the terms and conditions of service for EPCOR and Direct Energy Regulated Services (DERS) in proceeding 22091. Notice for the proceeding is available on the AUC website at www.auc.ab.ca by logging in to the e-Filing System. This proceeding will provide the AUC with the opportunity to consider changes to the terms and conditions of service to ensure rural property owners will not inherit costs for electrification of insolvent well sites in the future. The UCA and the FAO will be intervening representing the interests of Albertan landowners, and will be requesting that the proceedings include ENMAX as well.

Additional EPCOR customers may have been affected by industry bankruptcies, and we do not know if similar actions have been taken by other retailers. **At this time, the FAO requests that any landowners who believe they have been mistakenly charged for electrical distribution costs for an energy site on their land contact the FAO as soon as possible.**

Contacts

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 780-427-2350

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 Rural Engagement and Communications Specialist
jeana.schuurman@gov.ab.ca
 780-427-7956

Transition Planning Guide for Agribusiness

By Dean Dyck, P.Ag. Farm Business Management Specialist

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry has adapted a comprehensive guide to transition planning for agricultural businesses. If you are a farm family intending to work through a transition plan or a business advisor or consultant hired to assist in the development of a transition plan, this guide is designed to help you through the process.

The guide breaks down transition planning into three phases: readiness assessment, plan development and plan implementation. Each phase has individual chapters with useful information and tips.

The readiness assessment phase will help you determine whether your farm business is ready to begin transition planning. This includes discussions of goals, values, priorities, and assessing financial and management capabilities.

During the plan development phase, you will be able to explore topics such as setting a strategic direction, transition options, estate plan elements, and setting a management structure. Once you have completed the plan, it is important to review your work and have your accountant, lawyer and financial planner examine the plan. The last phase is turning your plan into action.

There are checklists at the end of each chapter to highlight any "red flags" or "green lights" that you may encounter on your transition journey. The appendix at the end of the guide contains forms and worksheets to help record information and guide you through each topic.

You can tailor your transition planning process that best suits your business and the priorities and needs of everyone in the transition. You may opt for the Comprehensive Approach which is the most detailed and all-encompassing approach to transition planning.

If everyone involved in transition planning already has a strong understanding of how the farm business will be transferred, then an Ownership Transfer and Tax Strategy Approach may be appropriate. The guide is completely flexible to suit your operation.

For more information, go to Agriculture and Forestry's farm manager homepage or call the Alberta Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276)



Alberta Ag-Info Centre
310-farm
 Phone 310-FARM (3276) toll-free to contact Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, or visit one of our field offices across the province for your agricultural information needs.

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Transition Planning Workshops for Farm and Ranch Families

January 11 and February 8, 2017

Lacombe Memorial Centre, 5214-50 Avenue, Lacombe

Design Your Farm and Ranch Transition Plan

Creating a farm and ranch transition and succession plan takes time, effort, family communication and working with professionals. These 2 day workshops will get you started on the road to designing your own transition plan and provide creative solutions to implementing your plan.

You will be prepared to discuss, write, and plan the legacy of your farm and ranch. You will also have access to business, tax, financial and legal experts in farm transition.

Who Should Attend?

The workshops are for families who are interested in shaping the future ownership of their family farm or ranch. Families are encouraged to register together and the registration fee will cover both days.

Workshops will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day (registration starts at 8:30 am).

How to Register

Cost: \$75 per person including GST for both days (includes lunch).

To register please call the **Ag-Info Centre at 1-800-387-6030**

Preg Checking, Herd Health, and Culling

By Devin Knopp, P.Ag.



This year has been a strange one, but one thing I can say for sure is the quality of pasture was second to none. Cattle coming in off pasture in many cases have grazed longer than any normal year. The only thing that may have shut some people down is the snow and now the freezing temperatures. Now the inevitable work of preg checking cows, managing your herd health programs and the decisions on which cows to cull begins.



Preg checking is probably one of the most important fall jobs a producer can do to their cow herd. Knowing shortly after cows come in off pasture which are pregnant and which are not, is probably one of the most important pieces of information needed for management purposes. Culling those cows now will save you money in the long run. It'll also allow you some time to look at options for replacing that culled cow.

Along with preg checking, a routine herd health program is also a very important activity. Managing your disease risk provides insurance for both your own operation, but also your neighbours. IBR, BVD, and Blackleg are just a few examples of diseases that can be vaccinated for. Talking with your veterinarian and planning a program is cheap insurance to protect your operation. Protecting the cows, but also the calves they carry is extremely important to your bottom line.

Some of the diseases you can vaccinate for aren't necessarily lethal to the infected cow but can cause abortions, sick calves, or immune suppressed calves come calving time. Managing secondary infections from E. Coli or Coccidia, as an example, may become a nightmare, and can lead to a very high death loss of your calves. Some people get away with it, but in my opinion it's like playing Russian roulette; eventually things have a way of catching up to you.

Culling is another important practice for any livestock manager. There are many reasons an animal may be culled from a herd and each producer has different criteria based upon their management goals. That being said, here are a few reasons that I feel a cow should be culled for.

The first is an open cow. This one feels like a no brainer. If she's not going to calve she's not making you money and is in fact costing you extra money to feed overwinter. Chances are there is a reason she didn't breed that season, which may prevent her from ever breeding again.

Another big reason to cull is bad teats or bag. If a cow has some form of deformity on her bag or had an infection that has caused irreparable damage to her teats or bag, feeding her calf can become an issue. Not detecting a problem right away can be detrimental to the calf as it hasn't gotten the colostrum right away. Now you must deal with that situation, costing you extra time and money.

Poor feet and legs is another good reason to cull a cow. There are many reasons cows can have poor feet, from nutritional imbalances to genetics. I've included this one due to the genetic potential bad feet can have on your herd. Cows with bad feet won't have the longevity, and they will pass that trait onto their offspring. If you're not careful with your records and don't document this, you may end up keeping her heifers, only to perpetuate the problem. Catching it quick and culling those animals can save you time and money. Also, make sure you have good bull selection as the cow only accounts for half of the equation in feet issues.

A big, yet often overlooked, reason to cull is cow 'attitude'. Cows with a poor 'attitude' are dangerous to have around. They can be incredibly unpredictable, hard on infrastructure, and hard on you. Lastly, eye issues of any kind. The eyes are the gateway to a cow's brain. If she can't see, often they become aggressive towards you and other livestock and can be very unpredictable, and afraid. Having

Continued on next page...

that kind of energy in the herd can create undue stress during already stressful circumstances.

This time of year, is a critical time for managing your cow herd. Preg checking and completing herd health programs can be costly in the short term, but in the grand scheme of things is cheap insurance and helps your bottom line. Culling your herd appropriately not only ensures you have top breeding stock, but can help prevent some of the issues you don't want to deal with when it's cold outside and during an already busy calving season.

Is your annual compensation review coming this year?
It is time to start planning.

I can help. Give me a call.



 **Gilchrist Consulting**
587-989-4180
www.gilchristconsulting.ca

Feed Quality - A Poem

By Karin Lindquist; Forage Beef Specialist, Ag-Info Centre, Stettler AB, Alberta Agriculture

Feed value's an issue,
Have no denial.
With all the late harvest,
It's been a real trial.

So how can one know,
How bad it sure is,
With just nose and eyes,
To get a good viz.

You worry about mold,
Black slimy stuff too,
Oh God, all the dust!
My glove's all a'goo.

So you get on the phone,
To the Ag-Info Centre,
Dial up three ten farm,
Then ask a hay mentor.

"I'm worried my feed,
Is not up to par,
So, how do I know,
If it's gone too far?"

You get asked other questions,
About colour of mold,
Is it white, red or blue,
Pink, green or just old?

What kind is your feed?
Alfalfa or oats,
Because it sure matters
When the experts take notes.

You say the mold's white,
The center so brown,
As you unrolled a bale,
For those cows eat down.

They picked through it all,
The good stuff, they find,
The cows didn't care,
S'long it tastes fine.

But you go far beyond,
What the cows have ate.
So you ask yourself;
Will it keep on the weight?

Feed test is declared,
Must take a sample:
Core between strings,
Ten bales to ensample.

Filled up a bread bag,
With one sample per field,
That's all that's needed,
To see what it yields.

Shipped it to a feed lab,
You ask for "wet chem;"
Knowing they'll do it,
It's no bother to them.

The results came back,
But what do they mean?
You phone up the expert,
To ask if they're keen.

Rations on CowBytes,
Numbers, oh my!
What kind are your cows;
Other questions go by.

Then finally you see,
How much you should feed,
Add those nutrients,
Which cows'll need.

Your cows will be happy,
And you will be too,
No thank you's from them,
But that's fine with you.

Feed value's an issue,
Have no denial,
But with good feed tests,
It's less of a trial.



Foragebeef.ca

Technical Information
for the Canadian
Forage Beef Industry

A Summer Solution for Watering Calves

By Frostfree Nose Pumps.

August 23, 2016 - Press Release:

A Summer Solution for Watering Calves

Historically, the Frostfree Nosepump has successfully provided quality water year round for the majority of our livestock. There has however, been a sticking point for some producers in that baby calves do not have access to free choice water in spring and early summer pasture scenarios until they are big enough to pump their own water.

Frostfree Nosepumps Ltd. has taken this feedback very seriously and has developed a solution to overcome this concern. We have developed a Frostfree Nosepump supplied, creep watering attachment that producers can add to their existing Frostfree Nosepump(s) which takes a small portion of the water from each pump and redirects it into a conventional, float controlled water trough inside a paneled off section that only calves can access.

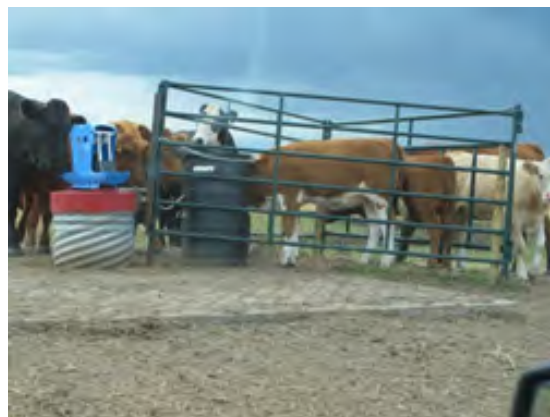
Unlike the Frostfree Nosepump itself, this new creep watering attachment is only effective in above freezing temperatures, but is a fantastic solution for watering calves on pasture. Similarly to the Frostfree Nosepump itself, the creep waterer uses no power or inputs whatsoever and once installed, represents no ongoing cost to the producer to use.

The Frostfree Nosepump is a livestock operated, year round watering device. A gravity fed, or pressure controlled wet well is developed on top of, or beside your water source. Then, one or more Frostfree Nosepumps can be installed on top of the wet well, which consequently allows your livestock to pump their own drinking water on demand at any time of day, on any day of the year. The benefits of this product include:

- saving time (no more hauling water, chopping ice etc.),
- saving money (no regular spending on inputs like a power bill, solar components etc.),

- improved environment (keeping livestock off riparian areas and out of dugouts allows vegetation to re-establish which in turn improves filtration effects and reduces erosion),
- improved herd health (by keeping livestock out of the source, we improve the quality of water our animals consume, and reduce health problems such as foot rot and dirty udders).

It is also very important to note that the Frostfree Nosepump prevents contamination by allowing no backwash into the wet well.



"Everyone is content, there is no bawling and my calves are getting huge!" Brendon A. Rimbey, AB, Canada



"Simplicity Equals Reliability"

Frostfree Nose Pumps
Box 675, Rimbey AB, T0C2J0
info@frostfreenosepumps.com
1-866-843-6740

Foothills Livestock Co-op - A Success Story

1996-2016 - Twenty Years

In 1996 someone had a vision. The need for a Breeder Co-op was deemed necessary for farmers that had bred heifers. The program started with bred heifers in mind but the need to expand to cows and cow/calf pairs soon became a necessity as well.

In the beginning the co-op served people of the area within a 50 mile radius. Word began to spread and calls were received for members outside this area and the co-op began to grow. Within 3 years, quickly expanding, across the province.

Our boundaries have now spread into British Columbia and Saskatchewan. We have a seven person board of directors, a supervisor/manager, office staff of nine and 20 fieldmen across the three provinces.

What has set our program from other lenders is that the Co-op uses only cattle and security deposit as collateral for the loan rather than holding the farmers land for security.

There are many reasons members are attracted to the Co-op; the paperwork is relatively simple, the office is open five days a week, and we try to make it as convenient as possible for members. Staff are

always available to discuss any matters on financing with us. The Co-op works hand in hand with other lending institutions. Comprehensive security checks are conducted ensuring that any cattle financed are free and clear, thus protecting all parties.

The Co-op considers no loan too small. As a result, many members who started out with small loans have been able to increase the size of their herds substantially. With our in depth knowledge of the needs and concern of farmers the Co-op looks forward to contributing to agriculture growth in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

Since our inception we have financed a total of 300,000 cows and feeder cattle. We have 2000 members enrolled.

Farm Credit Corporation has been our money lender since the beginning. They have been a tremendous help to us in developing this program together. They have been active in our day to day operation. Always being there for us with exceptional guidance. For that we want to thank them.

Our slogan remains:
" FARMER'S HELPING FARMERS "

Foothills Livestock Co-Op Board of Directors



Left to Right:

Roy Hilbert
Ron Billings
Stan Taylor
Mike Poffenroth
Lyle Verhaeghe
Myron Pearman
Doug Seland.



Feeling the Cash Crunch after Harvest? AFSC Can Help!

By Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, Lacombe AB.

Following an early snow fall and higher-than-normal fall moisture, Agriculture Financial Service Corporation (AFSC) knows that harvest was tough on Alberta producers. Challenging conditions left unharvested acres across the province, expenses need paying, and current cash flow may be a concern to many. We know this because AFSC understands farming in Alberta – we're in your community, and many of our staff are producers too. We want you to succeed, and we have the financial options to make that happen.

Customized solutions for your operation's needs.

All producers, - it doesn't matter if you're a new or existing AFSC client - are welcome to visit one of our 45 branch locations to speak with a program specialist about your current situation. We'll evaluate your unique needs on an individual basis, understand the challenges facing your operation and provide you with personal and expert advice. Our lending programs can provide convenient and immediate access to working capital to support your operations through the coming months. For current AFSC loan holders, options may be available to ensure you have the

flexibility required to continue business as usual. AFSC can provide customized solutions to producers facing financial hardship brought about by the 2016 harvest season.

Reminder to AFSC clients: file your Harvested Production Report. Harvested Production Reports (HPR) for crop insured under the 2016 insurance programs are still being accepted with a late file fee of \$50. It is important to remember that a failure to file by the deadline noted will result in zero yield recorded, and no indemnity will be calculated.

AFSC accepts completed HPRs as follows:
Annual Insurance HPR – December 31, 2016
Perennial Insurance HPR – February 28, 2017

Ready to learn more? Contact AFSC today to learn more about the options available to you. Visit one of our branches in person, call our Client Contact Centre at 1.877.899.AFSC (2372) or email us at info@afsc.ca. View our website at www.afsc.ca at any time and follow us on Twitter @AFSC_AB to keep up to date with our initiatives and programs!

DECEMBER 31 - Annual Crop Insurance and Perennial Crop Insurance - Last day to file Harvested Production Reports (with late-filed fee).

All Insurance Premiums - Last day to pay premiums without negatively affecting your credit.

AgriStability - 2015 Supplementary Forms due (with penalty). 2016 Fee due (with penalty).

FEBRUARY 28 - Perennial Crop Insurance - Apply, make changes or cancel coverage. Remove grazing livestock from insured Export Timothy Hay.



There's no telling what's in the cards for 2017 perennial crops.

Unpredictable weather is a challenge that all Alberta producers face, but Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) can help. In 2015, AFSC's suite of perennial crop insurance programs paid out more than \$60 million to clients who lost production because of factors they couldn't control. AFSC insurance programs – giving you the peace-of-mind you deserve.

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation offers whole-farm coverage through its suite of risk management and lending programs. Contact us today for a free consultation.

www.AFSC.ca • 1.877.899.AFSC (2372) • [@AFSC_AB](https://twitter.com/AFSC_AB)



LONE STAR RANCH & SALES



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Designed with clean out plug and completely rust-free. All sizes available for any size of operation.

Promold Dealer

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Our expanding product line now includes:

RFIC Tags

Cow Cam Monitoring Cameras

Hot Shot Livestock Prods

Tru-Test Equipment on request

Calving supplies are arriving early March!

**3D Fencing
Project
Sponsor**



Prebiotic Supplements Hold Promise for Bee Health

From www.growingforward.alberta.ca | Growing Forward 2 is a federal – provincial – territorial initiative.

With project funding from Growing Forward 2, this researcher found that a product used in cattle could have value for bees as well. With bee populations still on the defensive, this could be a significant breakthrough.

Bees in Alberta have had a rough ride over much of the past decade. Between 2007 and 2011, the province's bee populations declined significantly due to annual winter-kill that was far greater than normal. One possible explanation is that poor bee health levels made colonies susceptible to threats such as varroa mite and nosema disease. The same conditions prevailed across North America.

Another issue is the use of the neonicotinoid class of pesticides. While this connection is controversial and hotly disputed, contact between bees and pesticides could be another factor impacting bee health.

Over the past few years, Shelley Hoover, an Apiculture Researcher with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry in Lethbridge, has been closely involved in monitoring these developments.

She's been looking for new tools to improve bee health. Through a colleague, she learned about a prebiotic supplement that's given to cattle to improve gut function, boost immune response and reduce the impact of toxins.

"I started to wonder whether this prebiotic could work for bees," says Hoover. "I wanted to identify a product that could work with honeybees, as well as bumblebees and leafcutter bees."

Proven For Cattle, What About Bees?

In 2014-15, with project funding from Growing Forward 2, Hoover conducted a series of trials with the prebiotic to determine its value for bees. In small-scale work in bee cells and caged bee trials, she applied the neonicotinoid pesticide, then added the prebiotic. The bees, she reports, were

happy to cooperate.

"They love it," she says, "because we dissolve the prebiotic in sugar syrup. It's nutritional for them, its food. We found that the prebiotic could mitigate the effect of the pesticide. In the cage trials, we saw that it can also increase the longevity of bees."





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Why does this happen? The prebiotic, a kind of non-living yeast, appears to do in bees what it has long done for cattle. It encourages the growth of probiotic bacteria in a way that contributes to the well-being of the animal. When toxins are present, the prebiotic seems to bind to them and render the toxins less harmful.



Registration Still Years Away

Based on work to this point, giving bees this prebiotic nutritional supplement appears to be a way to strengthen their intestinal tract and even fight off toxins. Hoover cautions there's still a long way to go. Sugar could be a means of delivering the prebiotic to bees, but some sugars can be toxic to bees. Then there's the question of formulation: would a syrup, a granular shake-on form or some other method work best?

In 2016, Hoover will take this work to the next level by conducting large-scale field trials with the syrup formulation. She'll continue to look at how different

prebiotic doses work when pesticides are present, and whether or how this differs by bee species. If all goes well, a bee prebiotic could be registered for commercial use in the next two years.

"It's already registered in Canada for livestock, so it would just be a label extension to approve it for bees," says Hoover. "The question is whether or not the product makes a health claim. That could affect the timeline." Not long ago, bee populations in Alberta were under serious threat. Since then, they've bounced back.

Shelley Hoover's prebiotic supplement could be another tool to help keep the province's bees strong and healthy.





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