



# The Blade

Monthly Newsletter of the  
*Grey Wooded Forage Association*

September-October 2019



# SAVE THE DATES!

DATE	TITLE	LOCATION
November 19	Environmental Farm Plan Workshop	Mountain View County, see Page 4
November 21	Cattlemen's Day	Evergreen Hall, see page 10
November 26	Feed Evaluation & Nutrition Workshop	To Be Announced
December 10-12	Western Canadian Conference on Soil Health and Grazing	Edmonton, SOLD OUT
January 18	Ladies Livestock Lessons	Cremona, see Page 6
February 13	Ranching Opportunities	Olds College, see Page 6
Ongoing	Cows and Chaos Webinar	See Page 10

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West Country Driving Club.

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The Grey Wooded Forage Association is  
a member of the Agricultural Research  
and Extension Council of Alberta



## Office Report

By Brenda Kossowan

Special thanks to everyone who took time to phone in for our Special General Meeting on October 21. We had some real difficulty with the telephone system and ended up taking your votes the hard way—having each of the directors call you from their cell phones and set you up on the speakers. It wasn't fancy, but it worked.

The upshot, of course, is that Spruce View-area producer Lee Eddy, operator of Blue Rock Animal Nutrition, was acclaimed to fill one of three vacant spots on our Board of Directors. Lee has been taking part in meetings since mid-summer as an ex-officio. Now, he can vote on every motion. We still have room for two more people if there is anyone out there who would like to spend some time at the table, noshing on pizza and ruminating about new trends and innovation in soil health and forage production.

Looking left to the Coming Events section, you will see that conference season is in full gear with a slough of events coming up through the fall and winter. Being at full staff for most of the past year has enabled Grey Wooded Forage Association to become much more aggressive and efficient in planning events on our own and with a variety of partners. Thanks in no special order to the counties, the province and the businesses and associations who have partnered with us in bringing you the best information available on the topics you have said are most dear to your hearts.

We enjoy good working relationships with the six counties in our region as well as the forage and research associations who are partners with us, including members of the Agriculture Research and Extension Council of Alberta. Our association with these groups provides a pipeline to the people and resources whose work has been so integral in bringing research and innovation to the farm gate.

Thanks also to the new members who have attended these events and found merit in the work our association and its partners are doing for you. Your continued support, as well as that of people who have stayed with GWFA through thick and thin, is the grease that keeps our wheels running.

Our fall lineup opened early in November with the introduction of



a two-day drone school focused on agricultural applications..

We got a look at some of the possibilities during our Annual General Meeting in June, when Markus Weber from LandView Drones gave an overview of how drones could be used to monitor and manage both crops and livestock.

LandView's business operation includes offering courses in the regulations and principles involving remotely-piloted aircraft. After that short workshop in June, Markus felt it would be a good idea to tailor a course to agricultural uses of drones, drawing on the expertise of another well-known pilot, John Church, Associate Professor and the BC Regional Innovation Chair in Cattle Industry Sustainability at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. Church agreed to participate in the course, which had 21 people registered at last count—including both staff and one director from GWFA.

I've been practicing with the test drone that's included in the course. It's a pretty tough little unit. Duck.

Later in the month, Chair Gil Hegel, Director Jess Hudson and yours truly are heading to Edmonton to meet with Agricultural Minister Devin Dreesen and as many more MLAs as we can pack into a room. Arranged by ARECA with support from the provincial government, the meeting is an opportunity for the 12 agriculture research organizations in the province to have an informal chat with our government representatives and talk about our mutual concerns. Minister Dreesen has indicated that he supports applied research that is driven by the needs of Alberta's farmers and ranchers. We feel that this support is encouraging for our efforts to provide all producers with the information they need to improve their sustainability, both economically and environmentally.

Next up is a workshop on November 26, focused on feed evaluation, nutrition and economics. Details of this workshop are still being worked out, including a location. Please watch our web page and social media for updates.

We remain busy in the following weeks as planning and hosting partners in the Western Canadian Conference on Soil Health and Grazing in Edmonton in mid-December. Thanks to the hard work and generous support of the many partners involved, the event sold out a few weeks ago.

GWFA's board and staff will hit the ground running on January 13, with a day-long Strategic Planning Session. This will be the point at which we will review our past operations and look for tweaks and nudges to carry us into the future.

Then, it's off to Banff on January 14 for the annual conference of Alberta's Agriculture Service Boards, whose members direct agricultural endeavours within their respective counties. We will share a booth at the trade show with ARECA in our ongoing effort to carry forward with the conversation about what we do and how we can help each other..

Please mark your calendars now for Ladies Livestock Lessons in Cremona on January 18 and Ranching Opportunities in Olds on Feb. 13. These one-day seminars offer a wealth of information for livestock and forage producers. Watch upcoming issues of *The Blade* for further details on the speakers and topics that will be on the table.



[www.afac.ab.ca](http://www.afac.ab.ca)



## Environmental Farm Plan Workshop

**Register by November 15, 2019 to Reserve Your Spot**

Coffee & Lunch Provided

*\*Canadian Agricultural Partnership Funding Update Included\**

Please bring your own laptop. One can be provided if needed.

**Space is Limited**

<https://efpworkshopmvc.eventbrite.ca>

For Information Contact:

Lorelee; 403-335-3311 Ext 163

[ag@mvcounty.com](mailto:ag@mvcounty.com)



Tuesday,  
November 19th  
2019

Registration: 9:30  
Event: 10 am - 3 pm

Mountain View  
County Office





## How Do We Measure Up?

By Greg Paranich, Ag Field Specialist

There is the saying that “you can’t manage what you don’t measure”. There is merit to that. When you think about it, we should see our actions and results along a line progressing towards our goals. When we put some sort of measure against something we can see if we are going in the right direction and how much advancement we had made.

Fall is the time we are harvesting our year’s work and the best time to evaluate our operations and resources. Planning into the next year will reflect what we must work with and how much we need to do to move forward.

Some of the big items that should be tested include soil sampling, feed and forage testing, livestock weaning weights, female soundness for retention/culling, pregnancy tests, to name a few. We could also take the opportunity to examine any new or standard practices we use in our operations to review how successful and sound they have been, or to tweak in some improvements.

Testing by taking samples will give us a reasonable idea of what we are testing, providing the samples provide a representative reflection of the subject matter. The more samples taken the better they will represent the average of what we measure.

Also, the quality of the samples taken, and the consistency of the sampling method will all contribute to the best picture of our resources.

Soil samples taken later in fall will give you the best indication of fertility and other parameters before winter going into freeze up. Spring sampling would be more accurate just before seeding but time and field access may prohibit that in some situations. Keep the samples cool and air dry before shipping to your choice of lab or through your agriculture service provider.

Make sure you request results for all the parameters you will need to make your soil management decisions. Packaging and required forms are available through your lab or Ag Service outlet.

Feed sampling is similar in that the more representative samples you collect the more accurate your test results will be for you to make your livestock nutrition management, or evaluation for feed sales. Consult your test lab or consultant on how they recommend your samples should be managed from the farm to the lab for proper shipping and handling. The conditions will vary if the samples are hay, haylage or silage, or grain.

A comprehensive analysis should include macro and micro essential nutrients, but also flag for any components that bear a negative value such as ergot, nitrates, mycotoxins, etc. Once you get your samples’ analysis, it is critical to review the results with your Ag Service supplier or consultant to ensure you will identify where you should spend your dollar for the best returns.

Measuring livestock results may not be as straightforward. There are some hard-number measurements that are obvious like weaning weights, or pregnancy check (either yes or no). However, some are more subjective when it comes to “eye balling” factors like temperament, feet, udders, and general physical soundness.

Evaluating new or modified practices should be part of our measurement processes. Maybe it was that new crop or variety, or piece of equipment, or fertilizer or feed supplement.

Did we do things on a different timeline and what was that result? How did they work for their first time, or this year with different environment or economic conditions? Did they bring more value to the operation? How do we improve them? Are they just right the way they are? Do we need to learn more to decide?



Measuring our efforts and results allows us to track our progress towards our goals. We can make better decisions with more information, and accurate data. Progress towards our target goals can be evaluated or changed with other influencing factors.

There are many things in agriculture out of our direct control, but if we focus on what we can control and measure, then we can make management decisions that will yield more predictable results.

If some of the sampling or testing is new to the regular part of your management, you may want to start with basics. Get some guidance from experienced colleagues or professionals to ensure your efforts will give you the information that you need. Your first efforts do not need to be perfect, but it is important to start somewhere with forward motion for forward momentum.

The Grey Wooded Forage Association will present workshops and information this winter addressing several topics that will help your evaluation and decisions for the next year.

## Mountain Pine Beetle Workshop



PRIVATE LANDOWNERS  
FREE Information Workshop

**Wednesday November 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 at 7:00 - 8:30 PM**  
**Rocky Christenson Center – subway room**



Mountain Pine Beetle is in Clearwater County and, with thousands of acres of pine forest on private land, landowners need to be prepared to manage their shelterbelts and other wooded areas. In this workshop, Pam Melnick from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry will be sharing everything you need to know about how to identify mountain pine beetle, prevent infestations, and manage your trees.

For more information or to preregister please phone Clearwater County Agriculture and Community Services at 403-846-4040 by November 12<sup>th</sup>.





## Southern Alberta Moisture Report—October

*By Ralph Wright, Agrometeorology Applications and Modelling Unit, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry*

Early in October, a large storm system deposited significant amounts of snow across most of the south-half of the province. Lands south of Red Deer received at least 10 cm of fresh snow. At least 20 cm fell across a large area lying west of a line from Rocky Mountain House, running diagonally down to Medicine Hat. Moving westward, snow fall accumulations increased rapidly towards the foothills, with some areas south of Calgary and lying west of Highway 22, experiencing more than one metre of snow. Six mountain stations have reported over 130 mm of precipitation (measured as depth of water), with two stations in the mountains west of Lethbridge, Spionkop Creek and Porcupine Lookout recording 260 and 212 mm, respectively. This translates to about two metres of fresh snow accumulating in less than four days.

For those areas that did not receive snow, north of Red Deer, upwards of 20 mm fell throughout parts of the North East, and southern Peace Region. For the most part this moisture is unwelcome as harvesting operations were currently underway.

Some areas in and around Lethbridge received upwards of 30 cm of snow. Looking back through Lethbridge's historical records as far back as 1961, there was only one year with more snow in September. That was 1968, were it is estimated that nearly one meter of snow fell. This is about three times more than what fell this weekend. Ranked third and fourth are the Septembers of 1972 and 1965, with each receiving nearly 20 cm of snow.

**Please join the Directors and Staff of  
Grey Wooded Forage Association in  
Congratulating LEE EDDY  
On being elected to the board.**

**Lee and his staff at  
Blue Rock Animal Nutrition  
have been a valuable partner  
and resource for your association.  
*Welcome Aboard!***



# Blue Rock

Animal Nutrition Ltd.



The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership Presents

# RANCHING OPPORTUNITIES CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2020  
REGISTER ONLINE AT [www.redbowag.com](http://www.redbowag.com)

\$50 registration fee (student rate \$30)  
Includes lunch, coffee and tradeshow  
Register by February 7th, 2020.

Contact Daniela at Mountain View County for more information:  
Ph: 403-335-3311 Ext. 204  
or [darcher@mvcounty.com](mailto:darcher@mvcounty.com)

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

**AFSC** **LONE STAR**  
**CORTEVA** **RANCH & SALES**

Olds College Alumni Centre  
8:50 AM to 4:30 PM (8:30 Registration)  
\* Free Parking and LUNCH

For the current agenda and list of speakers visit [www.redbowag.com](http://www.redbowag.com)  
**Getting the most out of your pasture with Jim Gerrish**  
**Managing Cattle with Drones**  
Marcus Webber, LandView Drones  
**Low Stress Cattle Handling**  
Dylan Biggs, TK Ranch  
**Producer Panel:**  
Using water as a tool for pasture management  
**Large Animal Emergency Response**  
Dr. Rebecca Husted, Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue, INC  
**Ab Soil Carbon Quantification**  
Kim Cornish, Food Water Wellness Foundation

 [WWW.REDBOWAG.COM](http://WWW.REDBOWAG.COM)

14TH ANNUAL

# Ladies LIVESTOCK LESSONS




## JANUARY 18TH 2020-CREMONA

Thank you to our Sponsors

**REGISTER TODAY**  
The Heritage Centre (Mountain View Events)  
\$50 (Includes lunch, coffee, & snacks)  
View the current agenda & pre-register at [www.redbowag.com](http://www.redbowag.com)  
Registration Deadline: January 14th, 2020

Topics include: Mental Health on the Ranch, Managing Soil Carbon, Canadian Beef Centre of Excellence Tasting & Demonstration, Online Agricultural Tools & Apps, Land Stewardship of Small Holdings, Grazing Management for Species at Risk (topics subject to change).

For more information, registration details & current agenda visit [www.redbowag.com](http://www.redbowag.com) or contact Daniela Archur at Mountain View County Agricultural Services  
Phone: 403-335-3311 Ext 204



## Seeing the Forest for the Trees with ALUS

By Ken Lewis, Conservation Coordinator, Red Deer County

Trees - love 'em or hate 'em - or love'em. In my experience working with farmers, ranchers and other landowners, people pretty much fall into the first (and last) categories. We're particularly blessed with a fairly high diversity of forest types in Red Deer County.

Our three main forest types are: Aspen-dominated forest, White Spruce-dominated forest, and Balsam Poplar-dominated forest. Plus, we've got small areas of the County where we can find forest dominated by Lodgepole Pine, Tamarack, Black Spruce, and very rarely, Birch. And we can't forget those forest areas dominated by the smaller trees and shrubs, especially Saskatoon, Pin-cherry and Choke Cherry, and riparian zones dominated by willows.

When you look at that list, it's easy to see why we are so fond of our trees. We have a long history of relying on our forests for many of our basic needs, from the First Nations, through settlement, to today. Lumber, firewood, fence-posts, shelter for our cattle, snow trapping to fill our wetlands, dugouts and creeks, habitat for the pollinators and other species that help us grow our crops, and of course, food. Those are just a few ways we've relied on our trees and forests for centuries.

One thing I've always found fascinating about the forests of Red Deer County: They evolved under patterns of irregular disturbance and (very importantly) long recovery periods. Disturbances would have included things like fire, herds of bison, floods, droughts and wind storms.

These days, we're not that fond of disturbances like fire or floods impacting our forests, farms and homes. So, to keep our forests healthy, we need to rely on actively managing our forest areas.

For example, cattle (and other livestock) can be managed in such a way to re-create the irregular disturbances and long recovery periods that the bison did before.

This is where ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services) can help. ALUS cost-shares with you on infrastructure, like fences, which you can use to help manage your treed areas for improved forest health. And, ALUS can help pay for the cost of trees and shrubs to plant. Even better, ALUS can pay you annually, for your ongoing management that improves the health of your forests.

To find out more about how ALUS can help you see the forest for the trees, please contact me at 403-505-9038 or [kewis@rdcounty.ca](mailto:kewis@rdcounty.ca). Or call your nearest ALUS Farmer Liaison: Kevin Ziola (West) at 403-352-0662, Tom Towers (Central) at 403-352-6901, Stephen Smith (East) at 403-318-3371.



*A Weston Family Initiative*



### A tale of Two Forests:

On the left is a Red Deer County forest that has not experienced disturbance for a long time. Note how it's dominated by spruce. At some point, it will likely need different management to stay healthy. On the right is A Red Deer County forest that has experienced a lot of disturbance, for a long time. Note how there's not a lot of new trees growing in underneath. At some point, when it gets some different management like a long recovery period, it can return to healthier state.

## The Owl versus The Pussycat: Songbird-friendly Pest Control

By Brenda Kossowan



Otis on beanies. Otis in books. Otis in movies. Otis in wedding pictures. Otis at school.

Carol Kelly, founding operator of the Medicine River Wildlife Centre has lost track of the number of times her great horned owl has been asked to ham it up for an audience in the 16 years since he became her chief ambassador.

Otis came to the wildlife centre south of Raven as little ball of fluff, just a few days old. A farmer had found him hidden in the grass while checking one of his fields. He was suffering from the cold and there were neither parents nor a nest to be found.

The tiny owl thrived and grew with the care Kelly and her crew provided. Normally, he would have been returned to the wild as soon as he was able to fend for himself, but Otis had a calling.

“We made a choice not to (release him) at the time, because we needed one for education so badly,” says Kelly.

These days, Otis plays a major role in helping Kelly show farmers and ranchers how to attract and utilize owls as a preferred means of pest control. Those pests include mice, squirrels, pocket gophers and even skunks.

Yes. Skunks.

“(Horned owls) are the Number One predator of skunks,” says Kelly.

“The only defence (skunks) have is that spray, and birds can’t smell, so horned owls don’t care if they get sprayed. They get the skunk turning to protect themselves and they go for the throat. With a skunk, it is easy to do that. (The owl) grabs a cat and it’s going to rip that poor owl apart.”

Sometimes, when the odor of skunk lingers in the night, that’s evidence that an owl has taken a fresh meal.

With help from Otis, Kelly has been struggling for years to debunk anti-owl prejudice.

“Way back in the beginning, I was asked to be a speaker at a Fish & Game banquet. When I arrived, I had a great horned owl – my first one – in my carrier. Nobody knew what I had. As I was sitting down, (a man) says, ‘They really hate horned owls because they’re killing off all our songbirds.’”

“I was in Parkland Mall doing a booth, and they had a big pedestal with Hoover, our original owl, and this family was coming towards me and there’s two you boys, and they were like, ‘Oh! An owl!’ and they came running towards me, and their mom was right behind them.

“They were all excited, and then dad was behind them. He swaggers up like this, and he goes: ‘(Expletive deleted) chicken killers,’ and he walked away.”

So much of those beliefs are simply wrong, says Kelly. Even the biggest owls cannot take down an adult cat. They aren’t big enough – despite their impressive appearance. While owls will take smaller kittens, adult cats are too big and put up too much of a fight.

Additionally, she says owls are wrongly accused of killing songbirds while outdoor cats are taking them by the millions. Environment Canada scientist Peter Blancher, in an online article published by Nature Canada, estimates that outdoor cats – both pet and feral – kill between 350,000 and 500,000 birds in Canada every year. An article by USA Today states that the impact in the United States is as high as 3.7 billion birds each year.

“Having owls on your farm is super helpful. They’re not going to kill your adult cats. Secondly, you shouldn’t be having so many adult cats outside. Cats are destroying our songbirds.

*(continued on next page)*



## Crazy About Owls (continued from previous page)

“They’re the ones killing the songbirds, not the horned owls.”

Owls have several advantages over cats in pest control, including a wider range of prey without the devastating impact on songbirds, says Kelly.

Therefore, farmers and ranchers seeking efficient pest control could benefit by keeping their cats for indoor duty and attracting owls to set up house near their barns and storage sites. Bonus: Owls are self-sufficient; no feed or vet bills.

Kelly advises farmers interested in attracting owls to set up a few different nesting sites, generally in fall so they can be ready to use in late winter and early spring.

“Horned owls don’t make their own nests,” says Kelly. “Horned owls steal others’ nests.”

She has seen owls nesting in former homes of larger birds, such as hawks and crows.

Providing an owl nest can be fairly simple, starting with a platform or box on the lee side of a sturdy spruce tree or similarly sheltered structure. The nest will need some grass for warmth and some twigs for the baby owls to use as their first perches. Once they’re big enough, they’ll go onto branches to perch.

Various designs are available online, including instructions for a cone-shaped nest built from chicken wire and a liner, and then placed in a tree. A useful search phrase would be something like, “build a horned owl nest.”

Kelly cautions farmers against putting a nest in proximity to cats, because the cats will kill the baby owls.

Kelly observes that the hatred of owls that was so common in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century appears to be dissipating, with more people coming to view owls and other wild predators for the fascinating role they play in nature.

She recalls with horror the story of a Rimbey naturalist who was a frequent visitor at the MRWC.

The late Fred Schutz had moved into the Rimbey area in the 30s and joined a group of naturalists who were active there at the time.

“The first event they had was to see who could kill the most great horned owls. It was a contest. At that point, he quit that group,” says Kelly.

“We’ve come from that to what we are now – this huge leap – it’s been a long time – but it’s still a big leap. Now, people are crazy about owls.”

Kelly says anyone interested in learning more about owls is welcome to call or visit. MRWC is located southwest of Spruce View. Take Hwy 54 west to Raven, and then turn south and follow the signs. Learn more online at [medicineriverwildlifecentre.ca](http://medicineriverwildlifecentre.ca), email [info@mrwc.ca](mailto:info@mrwc.ca) or call 403-728-3467.



**Otis the great horned owl poses with Carol Kelly, founder of the Medicine River Wildlife Centre, during a presentation at the West Country Agricultural Tour on Aug. 20.**



## 16th Annual Cattlemen's Day

### Evergreen Hall

Thursday November 21, 2019

09:30 AM - 4:00 PM



- 9:30 Registration & Coffee**
- 10:00 Kristen Ritson-Bennett with Blue Rock Animal Nutrition**  
Beef Cattle Nutrition - Winter Feeding Checklist in a year of high priced, low quality forage.
- 10:45 Coffee Break**
- 11:00 Dr. Yamily Zavala Ph.D Soil Health & Crop Management Specialist**  
Building Healthy Soil for Forages - What every cattle producer needs to know.
- 12:30 Lunch Break**
- 1:30 Dr. Reynold Bergen. Science Director, Beef Cattle Research Council**  
Beef Sustainability on Steroids - The facts behind sustainable beef production and the environment.
- 2:30 Coffee Break**
- 2:45 Anne Wasko, Gateway Livestock Exchange Inc.**  
Cattle Market Update and Future Outlook.
- 4:00 Door Prizes & Wrap up**

### HANG ON TO THAT TAIL!



The Evergreen Community Hall is conveniently located only minutes away from Rocky Mountain House, Eckville, Caroline and Spruce View.

The trip from Red Deer is only 35 minutes!

**Directions:** From Highway 11, Drive South on Highway 761 for 10 km, Turn East At "Evergreen" Sign (TWP RD 38-0), Drive 4 km, Evergreen Hall is on the left.

**Directions:** From Highway 54, Drive North on Highway 761 for 16 km, Turn East At "Evergreen" Sign (TWP RD 38-0), Drive 4 km, Evergreen Hall is on the left.





## The Happiest Little Critters You Ever Met

By Brenda Kossowan, *Prairie Hog Country magazine* (reprinted with permission)

BUSBY, Alta. – “Pigger! Pigger! Pigger! Piggers!”

A quiet paddock full of deep, green grass begins to tremble, and then bursts into life. Suddenly, pigs are popping up everywhere and running in from all different directions: Red ones, grey ones, brown ones with little black spots, grey ones with big black blotches; all held back by two thin ropes of electrified wire.

“These spotted ones, we call them dairy pigs. They make good pictures,” says Steve Kenyon as he and his wife, Amber approach the fence.

The pigs are snorting, blowing and grunting with excitement, inspecting boots and pantlegs as their human visitors join them in a 15-acre Pig Paradise.

“There’s nothing happier than a pasture pig. If you’re ever having a bad day, you just come out here and sit down and it just cheers you right up,” says Steve.

Grass ranchers currently operating about 3,300 acres of leased land in the Busby region, the Kenyons started raising their own pigs six years ago because Steve Loves Bacon. A nice synergy has developed since then, with the cows turned into the pig paddock twice a year to manage the grass. The pigs are then rotated through a series of cells in the paddock, rooting up whatever delicacies they can find and cooling off as needed in a plastic pig pool at the central watering site.

Steve says their family ranch – Greener Pastures

Ranching Ltd. – is based on regenerative agriculture; the business of building soil.

“My job is to raise my kids with the morals and values and life skills that they need. I just finance that with ranching. We use animals to build the soil and we manage the grass to do that. Our definition of what we do is, modern agriculture grows plants from the soil. Regenerative agriculture grows the soil from the plants. It’s a big difference.”

He and Amber buy their pigs in spring as weanlings, starting them out in a cage at a high point in the centre of the paddock. As they grow, they are released into a larger pen, confined and protected behind a fence of netting. Their final growth stages are spent rotating through the pasture, already grazed once by the cows and sectioned off with two strands of electric fence as well as a perimeter fence in case of escape.

In the six years since they purchased their first pigs, the Kenyons have never had issues with predators.

“When we start out in the spring, they’re just in the cage – they’re little. So we just move that around, and then they graduate into the netting which also not only keeps them in, but keeps predators out,” he says.

“The neighbours across the highway, last year had a cougar attack one of their steers. The neighbor across here has lost lambs and goats for two or three years. We’ve never lost a pig.

“Now they’ve graduated up to the two-wire – it’s a lot easier to move, and we’re basically just doing a big pie all the way around.”

Any predator big enough to tackle a pig is also big enough to be safely deterred by the electric fence. Once they get some size on them, the pigs are pretty good at protecting themselves. Most other animals are afraid of pigs, says Amber. They have a kind of gangster mentality that serves them well. Steve demonstrates by grabbing one of his critters by its hind leg. Its loud squeals bring the whole crew at a gallop, huffing and grunting as they cluster around the alleged victim. Whether they’re interested in protecting their frightened friend or just looking to share in the spoils is in question, says Steve.

He and Amber know better than to get emotionally attached to their pigs, although their daughter once broke a pig to ride. It became quite accustomed to having her sit on its back while it rooted around the pasture.

“They’re little and cute when they get here. They’re adorable. And then they get bigger, and then they’re not as cute anymore and they don’t know their own strength. They’re sweet. They love you. But if you fell down in here, they would eat you,” says Steve.

The pigs are fed a diet of oats, peas, barley and garlic (to manage internal



parasites).

Apple cider vinegar is added to the drinking water and the pool water, and they are fed diatomaceous earth for additional protection against internal parasites. The pigs round out their diet in the pasture. “They love the forage – the dandelions, the clovers, everything else. The grasses, they prefer to eat the roots,” says Steve.

The spot they’re in on the day of this visit is a extra special, because it includes a low area with a natural pond that is especially wet this year after unusually heavy rains through the summer. The swimming pool up on the hill is great, but the natural area has something the pool can’t offer: oodles and oodles of nice, sticky mud.

It’s the sort of environment that would probably be unhealthy for barn-raised pigs that lack the hardiness and immunity to thrive in nature, says Amber.

“We try to find local farmers that are already raising them out on grass so they’re not barn raised, because if we buy them from people that have raised them up in barns, they don’t do as well,” she says. The weaners were started in barns to protect them from winter weather, but they come from sows that had thrived on pasture during the warmer months and are not brought in until it the weather

*(continued on next page)*

## Ag Plastic Recycling Pilot Program

Commencing this fall, grain bag and twine recycling depots will open at 20 locations throughout Alberta, part of a three-year pilot project aimed at establishing an environmentally sustainable program to recycle agricultural plastics. Rolled grain bags and bagged twine can be dropped off, free of charge, at participating pilot sites. Please call ahead for site conditions or if any assistance is required to unload.

There are two collection sites within the Grey Wooded Forage Association's region:

- Lacombe County, 403-782-8970, by appointment only, accepting grain bags and twine.
- Mountain View County Ag Shop, Didsbury, 403-335-3311, by appointment only, accepting twine only

Please note that there are handling requirements to ensure maximum recyclability:

- Grain bags should be rolled tightly and secured with twine
- Ensure twine is lean, dry and loosely placed in the collection bag
- Non-program or improperly prepared material could be subject to additional fees or rejected
- Visit <https://cleanfarms.ca/alberta-ag-plastic-recycle-it-program-details> to learn more about handline materials

Funds for the pilot project were granted by the Government of Alberta and are administered by Alberta Beef Producers.



## Pasture Piggies (*continued from previous page*)

becomes too harsh to keep them outside.

The Kenyons purchased eight weaners in the first year, but later expanded the annual herd to 50 as a means of introducing their four kids to the business of farming. They've cut back in the last two years, however, because of a weakened economy. They've also changed some of their marketing strategy to protect their investment.

Amber explains that they had originally taken orders for pork packages, and then met customers at an agreed location in Edmonton. Unfortunately, some of the customers would fail to show and the frozen pork prepared for them would have to be taken back. The window for keeping frozen pork out is roughly two hours, so that meat would have to be used at home. The Kenyons now deliver directly to their customers' homes, leaving the package at the house if it's cold enough to keep the meat from thawing.

"Honestly, some people wouldn't show up," says Amber.

"When we have their address, it's pretty hard to say, 'No, we don't want this.'"

This year, they purchased two litters for a total of 21 pigs to be processed as they reach market weight.

Asked what they would like fellow farmers to know about their pigs, Steve and Amber focus on attributes of the pork.

"It's the quality of the meat, the flavor," he says.

"The pork steaks are bright red like a beef steak; they're not that pale tan colour you get from a grocery store. You won't find this product in a grocery store."

Amber stresses the nutritional value, saying that meat from grassfed animals is higher in Omega 3 fatty acids and CLAs than meat from conventionally raised livestock.

Parents of four children ranging in age from 10 to 19, the Kenyons arrived where they are today from completely different paths in life. Steve was raised on a farm in Saskatchewan, just a few miles south of Lloydminster. Amber grew up in Vancouver.

"When Steve and I met, he was farming," she says.

"Everything he did for work, I did for fun – so I loved going snowshoeing, hiking, everything.

"So he's like, 'Yeah, you can go hiking, here's a toolbelt, go do some fencing.'"

Steve just grins: "She won't fall for that anymore."







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# Cows and Chaos

## Feed, Forage and Management Strategies

### Webinar Series

A team of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Forage and Research Association and ABP staff are hosting webinars every two weeks addressing livestock producers feed concerns.

Join us at 1p.m to learn about the topics listed to manage your cow herd.

## FACTS

- Feed yard hay inventories are low
- Growing conditions and feed quality varies across Alberta
- Livestock producers may be looking for alternative feed supplies for the winter
- Producers should consider all aspects of the business when making economically viable decisions

Date	Topic and Registration Link
Nov 7	<a href="#">Late season grazing (crop residues, stockpiled pastures)</a>
Nov 21	<a href="#">Feeding bale silage and silage – what you need to know</a> <a href="#">Dealing with ag plastics</a>
Dec 5	<a href="#">Monitoring feed waste – it may be more than you think</a>
More webinars will be hosted in the new year. Watch for details to be released in mid-December.	

Click [here](#) to watch previous webinars

For more information call the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276) or 403-742-7901





## I've got my feed tested... Now What???

By Karen Schiml, Ruminant Nutritionist, Blue Rock Animal Nutrition

Last month, Greg Paranych's article highlighted the benefits of testing your forages and gave guidelines to collect an accurate sample. So, you've spent the time properly sampling your feed and have the Analysis Sheets back from the lab.

Now what? How do you use these numbers to make management decisions for your feeding program?

When I sit down to review feed tests and develop a winter-feeding plan, this is what the process looks like.

First, take a quick look at the method the lab used to analyze your samples; was wet chemistry or NIRS used? Wet Chemistry is considered the gold standard for analyzing nutrient content, in particular for determining mineral levels.

Unfortunately, this method takes longer, requires skilled technicians and is more expensive. Alternatively, samples may be analyzed using the NIR or NIRS (Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy) method. NIRS is an indirect way of sample analysis that compares the light reflection pattern of the sample against a database to estimate nutrient levels. NIR is appropriate for the majority of feeds to determine protein and fibre portions, but Wet chem is necessary for accurate mineral levels which are just as important. You can request the lab run a combination of NIR for protein/fibre and wet chem for minerals. If you are sampling a multispecies crop or other non-traditional feed, ask for a full wet chem analysis as NIR will not have a dataset for comparison.

Next, we want to make sure we're looking at nutrient values in the Dry Matter column. When comparing forages or formulating rations we always use the Dry Matter to remove the dilution effect of water. Removing all moisture allows us to compare the actual nutrient value of a silage (3 per cent moisture) with a dry hay (12per cent moisture). Think of it as now being able to compare apples to apples.

Focusing on the Dry Matter column, the first three numbers to look are the Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN) which is an indicator of the energy value of your feed, Crude Protein which estimates the total protein (some of which may be indigestible) and the Neutral Detergent Fibre (NDF) which tells us how much fiber is in the plant or how "bulky" the feed is.

To help provide context around those numbers, we can look at some rules of thumb for feeding pregnant beef cows over the winter. As these are broad guidelines, it's important that you look at your cattle and take into account a number of other factors.

We can make the assumption that a cow will eat roughly 2.5 per cent of her body weight on a dry matter basis. Some of the questions to ask yourself are 'How big are my cows?' (be honest with yourself!); 'What Body Condition Score are my cows in?'; 'Am I feeding mature cows, replacements, or second calvers?'; 'What is the temperature likely to be at a particular stage of production?'. All of these questions will help determine if you need more or less energy, protein and the amount of feed you can expect your cows to consume.

Based on these Rules of Thumb, if your feed test shows your feed won't meet the requirement for the time the cow needs it, now is the time to consider the options available for supplementation. Conversely, if you are oversupplying energy or protein there is an opportunity for cost savings by diluting the ration with a lesser quality feed source.

Ration Rules of Thumb	Mid-Gestation	Late Gestation	Lactation
Total Digestible Nutrient percentage of Diet Concentration	55per cent	60per cent	65per cent
Crude Protein percentage of Diet Concentration	7per cent	9per cent	11per cent
Neutral Detergent Fibre percentage of Diet Concentration	<60per cent	<60per cent	<60per cent

After we've determined if the feed will meet energy and protein requirements for the animal's stage of production, we turn our attention to mineral levels. Macro Minerals (Calcium, Phosphorus, Magnesium, Potassium and Sulfur) are required in larger amounts (grams per day) and are listed on a feed test as a percentage of Dry Matter. Metabolic diseases such as downer cows and winter tetany are associated with macro mineral imbalances, so we need to both meet the cow's requirement and ensure the ratios are balanced. Macro mineral amounts and ratios will vary depending on the type of forage sampled.

Legumes have a higher Calcium: Phosphorus (Ca:P) ratio while cereals regardless of stage tend to have lower Ca:P ratios. Cattle require a Ca:P ratio of at least 2:1 so the result of your feed test will determine if you feed a 2:1 or a 1:1, or maybe even a 6:1 mineral. Calcium, Magnesium and Potassium are involved in the Tetany Ratio calculation.

Brassicas and volunteer canola have higher sulfur and when levels are above 0.2per cent copper absorption is inhibited. Pay particular attention to the sulfur level in your feed if your water is high in sulphates as the negative effects are cumulative and can lead to polio encephalomalacia.

Micro or trace minerals are required in smaller amounts and are measured in mg/kg or parts per million (ppm).

Copper, Manganese, Zinc, Molybdenum and Iron are commonly found on your analysis. Cattle also require Cobalt, Iodine and Selenium however these minerals are rarely included on a feed test due to their nearly undetectable levels in forages. If the level of Molybdenum is greater than 3 mg/kg copper absorption will be affected, and this may be a strategic fit for chelated copper.

Throughout Alberta and over the years, our feed tests consistently show forages are deficient in trace minerals for beef cattle, which is why a balanced trace mineral supplement program is always recommended, regardless of the time of year.

Although required in very small amounts, trace minerals are vital to maintain immune function and productivity.

The question about relative feed value often comes up, and this is not a number that is useful to determining if a feed will fit into your program.

You have much more information and decision-making power if you know at least the TDN, CP and NDF values of a particular feed.

This is a very quick overview of how to interpret your feed tests. If you're looking for more information some great resources are the Beef Cattle Research Council's website at [beefresearch.ca](http://beefresearch.ca), your local Alberta Ag and Forestry Rep or a qualified nutritionist.

*Editor's note: The Blade will follow up next month with more information about ergot and other mycotoxins.*



# GREY WOODED FORAGE ASSOCIATION

greywoodedforageassociation.com | 403-844-2645

## 2019/20 Membership Application Form

**Membership in the GWFA is open to anyone interested in forage production, grazing management and environment sustainability**

**The fee is \$40 per year, running from April 1 to March 31**

**For information, call 403-844-2645 or email [office@greywoodedforageassociation.com](mailto:office@greywoodedforageassociation.com)**

### Benefits of joining GWFA:

- ◆ Discounts on courses, seminars, workshops and tours.
- ◆ An automatic subscription to *The Blade*, published monthly online. Hard copy is available on request.
- ◆ Assistance with your Environmental Farm Plan.
- ◆ Equipment rental (deposit required).
- ◆ Access to our reference library.
- ◆ Access to our members-only Facebook group.
- ◆ Networking with like-minded producers and advisors.
- ◆ Farm consultation services (farm calls are 55 cents per kilometre, each way).
- ◆ A copy of the GWFA Annual Report.

**Please mail your completed form and cheque to:**

***Grey Wooded Forage Association***

***PO Box 1448, Rocky Mountain House, AB T4T 1B1,***

**Or scan and email the completed form and send an e-transfer to [office@greywoodedforageassociation.com](mailto:office@greywoodedforageassociation.com)**

Renewal ☐ New member ☐

How should we send your copy of *The Blade*: Email ☐ Canada Post ☐

Name:

Email:

Mailing address:

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Cell:

### **\*How do you describe your operation (tick all that apply)**

- ☐ Beef producer
- ☐ Sheep/goat\ producer
- ☐ Dairy producer
- ☐ Annual crops producer
- ☐ Forage producer
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **\*How many head of livestock do you manage:**

Beef cows/heifers \_\_\_\_\_  
Dairy cows \_\_\_\_\_  
Feeders \_\_\_\_\_  
Ewes \_\_\_\_\_  
Does \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **\*How many acres of land do you manage:**

Pasture \_\_\_\_\_  
Hay \_\_\_\_\_  
Crop \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

*\*These questions are voluntary.  
We do not share your information*

How can we improve our service to you?

Please suggest topics you would like to learn more about: