The Blade

Creating an Awareness of Forages

Monthly Newsletter of the ***Grey Wooded Forage Association***

April 2018

Message from the Chair

Amy Leitch

I have a word for you this month - Collaboration. Yup, a word we all can mull over. What does collaboration mean to you as a member of the Grey Wooded Forage Association?

As the light of day lengthens, along with the hours of time we growers spend being busy with daily items. Ask yourselves, am I collaborating, and with Whom am I collaborating with? Is this the best choice? Could I make a better one? What is the best use of my time to get me to the goals I have set for my operation?

Collaboration can mean many things to people; the 2008 Colour Oxford Canadian Dictionary meaning is "1 - work jointly. 2 - co-operate traitorously with an enemy." Well those definitions you could lead you in two different directions.

As we move through April, into the momentous month of May. I ask all you readers to really think about the ripple effect of collaboration on and within your operation. How far could that ripple go and what are the positive effects you can measure from it? I know with our Goat Operation here at Will O' the Wisp Paddocks, collaboration is high on our MUST Do List. I am from the culture of it is who you know and karma, that will help you through. This leads collaboration to the fore front for us, as I am not able to do everything I need done or envision for our operation. For example, marketing, publicity, general age experience (I am a mere Toddler in the Farming Demographic), animal husbandry and the list goes on. I collaborate with many from all different walks of life, business operations and views of Agriculture. These collaborations in turn give me many positive attributes which I can return to our operation. We all naturally collaborate, just as the soil, animals, insects, plants and micro organisms do.

I leave you with the word Collaboration to mull over this month. Challenge yourself to make a list of the collaborations you currently have and the ones you'd like to make. Make plans to seek out new opportunities and don't be afraid to remove those that are not returning a positive result.

"Collaboration is the essence of life. The wind, bees and flowers work together, to spread the pollen."

– **Amit Ray, Mindfulness Living in the Moment - Living in the Breath** –

Amy Leitch
Chair GWFA

The Blade is a monthly publication produced by The Grey Wooded Forage Association

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Contact Ginette to be added to our digital mailing list

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GWFA Mission Statement

To promote environmentally and economically sustainable forage and agricultural practices.

GWFA Vision Statement

The community is engaged in regenerative agricultural production methods.

The Grey Wooded Forage Association is a member of ARECA

This publication is made possible in part with funding from:

Alberta

In This Issue:

Manager's Message

Ginette Boucher

Spring time brings new life and changes. Here at GWFA many changes have occurred recently. Devin has recently found other employment and his last day with GWFA will be April 9th. I have some mixed sentiments about his departure. I genuinely enjoyed working with Devin; he is a quality individual with a broad base of skills and abilities. He's been a great asset to our organization and a good working associate. Devin has brought many new ideas to our association and some projects for us to follow up on. He will be greatly missed. I wish him the very best in his future endeavours and much success in the coming years. Congratulations to you, Devin.

Enna Graham, who has been publishing The Blade since May 2017 has informed us that she has found summer employment in Lethbridge, and will not be available for future publications. I want to extend a great thank-you to Enna for her excellent work at publishing the Blade. Enna is a very dependable individual and I would recommend her to any employer. Good luck Enna in your future career.

In this publication you will find an advertisement for a summer intern. If you know of any students who are looking for summer employment please have them submit their resume to gwfa3@telus.net. We will be accepting resumes until April 20th. Only those selected for an interview will be contacted. We will also be looking to fulfill the role of Forage & Grazing Specialist, stay tuned for this future employment opportunity. To start with we will post this advertisement to our membership.

As we prepare for our Annual General Meeting we hope that many of you will join us, and enjoy our choice of entertainment for a Friday evening out. Those of you who have children 15 and under, they are no charge to attend. We anticipate our business meeting to be short and interesting; you'll also find in this publication some by-law changes that the board is requesting. Please familiarize yourself with the proposed changes. We will be advertising for our AGM in the Western Star throughout April and early May as well as in the Mountaineer. Please register at your earliest convenience as we need numbers for our caterer.

We have filled the two auditor positions; Kendra Frank and Brad Hornseth have accepted. Thank-you, Kendra and Brad, for your willingness to assist us in this task.

We've been seeking board candidates to replace those leaving. We have a few prospects, so far none confirmed. We would like to encourage you to consider a board role. We are looking for anyone interested in forage and livestock production who would like to contribute to the future direction of our association.

Ginette

Announcement: New Executive Director for ARECA

The Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA) is pleased to announce that Alan Hall has accepted the position of Executive Director. Alan brings a wealth of knowledge and experience from his career in various positions in Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and most recently at Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund. ARECA looks forward to working with Alan to deliver applied research and demonstration programs through the 9-member associations that make up ARECA.

ARECA is a farmer directed group of 9 applied research and grazing associations serving Alberta Farmers and Ranchers from Fort Vermilion to Pincher Creek.

For more information visit: areca.ab.ca

Sourcing Grass Seed

Devin Knopp, PAg

Spring has sprung, we are officially past the spring equinox. It is getting to the end of decision making time for this coming planting season. Newspapers and magazines are filled with advertisements from retailers and growers selling the best-of-the-best in forage and grass seed. It can be difficult to sift through the advertising noise to determine what seed or seed provider is best suited for you.

Before you go and talk about purchasing forage seed the most important thing a producer must know, is their intended use of the forage seed. That's because hay blends are not the same as pasture blends, though many species overlap. What they are designed to do differs. Not that you can't hay a pasture blend or graze a hay blend, but this may affect it in an adverse way. What I mean by this, is a hay blend is designed to produce robust yields with a moderate recovery time. These blends comprise some or all of alfalfa, timothy, orchardgrass, meadow brome, smooth brome, and in less popularity clovers such as red clover and alsike clover. There are a lot more options for things to put in a hay blend, but these are generally pretty standard in most blends. The grasses in these hay blends are usually bunch grass species. These bunch grasses put a lot of emphasis in above ground yield and maintenance of feed quality during dry down. That is what makes them great for hay. However, their regrowth is not nearly as fast as many other grass species and they are not as grazing tolerant. Grazing them incorrectly could lead to a diminished stand over time.

Pasture blends are filled with species designed for rapid re-growth. They are comprised of meadow brome, creeping red fescue, tall fescue, kentucky blue grass, wild rye and legumes such as cicer milkvetch, alfalfa, and clover. There are also many more species that can be included in pasture blends, but these are generally what commercial pasture blends are comprised of. Contrary to the hay blend, these are typically more rapid re-growing species, and are very tolerant to grazing. They also have the ability to move and colonize within a stand due to their shallower creeping root systems. In pastures it is incredibly important to include a legume that is grazing tolerant, to help maintain nitrogen supply to the soil and provide seasonal nutrition balance for the grazing livestock. Though you can hay these pastures, they are generally not as high-yielding and lose some quality as they dry during the haying process.

Understanding the end use and the management of forage seed is imperative for success. So, where are you going to get it? Many retailers sell preblended grass seed mixes. Over years of selling and listening to customers they've designed these mixes to meet the needs of most people. That doesn't make them perfect for you, or a final product. You have the option to add or remove products, or make a custom blend. If you are going to go down the road of a custom blend you must first remember the difference between percent-by-weight of a blend and percent composition. Percent composition will give you an idea of what you are going to see growing in the field. The percent-by-weight is the total weight of each different species of seed in, for example, a 50-pound bag

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of seed. Forage grasses and legumes all have very different sizes of seed. For example, Timothy is a very small seed, in a pound of timothy grass seed there is somewhere in the ball park of 1 - 1.5 million seeds. Meadow brome, however will have about 140,000 seeds in a pound. So, a blend of grass seed is like taking a big garbage bag and putting medicine balls, baseballs, golf balls, and marbles all together. Understanding that 10% by weight of timothy in a blend will translate to roughly a 40% timothy stand and 10% brome by weight will translate into about a 5-8% stand of brome. Communicating with your retailer or seed provider your needs and desires in the stand is very important. Make sure they can get you what you want. If they can't, move on to someone who can, because there are lots of dealers out there selling products but who know very little about them.

Stay away from brown bag seed. There are going to be a few of you that disagree with me, but certified seed will have a label on the bag that will guarantee what's inside. There will also be a weed seed count, and the name of those weeds, some of which are invasive. Brown bag seed does not have that label on the bag, nor any guarantee. White Cockle is one of the most common weed seed contaminates in grass seed. One of the hottest regions for White Cockle infestation was the Peace Region. That is also one of the most popular forage seed producing areas. Many vendors will source seed from up there, that usually is not an issue, unless they are brown bagging it. They then blend it into their seed mixes, and voila you now have a healthy white cockle contaminated field. Your local county weed inspector is going to love talking to you. Though you may have saved some money up front, it costs you big later.

There seems to be a tendency for producers to buy cheap forage seed. I can sympathize, at $40-50 or more per acre for commercial seed, without adding any other inputs. However, perennial forages are an investment for the future. That initial investment needs to be spread out over the long term, not over one year. I'm of the opinion you pay for what you get. Cheap brown bag seed comes with a lot of risk, in weeds and low germination, but you might be fine. Certified seed comes with guarantees, but is usually more expensive. So, you must weigh the options and risks you're willing to take.

When searching for your grass seed, there is a lot to think about just in purchasing it. You still have to get it in the field. However, purchasing a certified superior product from a retailer or local seed producer will get you moving down the right path. That will make putting it in the ground that much easier. Make sure to communicate your desires and have a good discussion with the people you are buying seed from. This will make sure you are getting the right product to meet your management goals.

Can ALUS help with Calving?

Ken Lewis, Conservation Coordinator | Red Deer County

Spring is here (at least the calendar says so…) and calving is well under way.

How calving happens on your farm, can be benefited by ALUS.

As a reminder, ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services) pays farmers and ranchers for their management that produces increased ecosystem services.

So…what can you do on your farm, to calve cows and produce ecosystem services? Ultimately, that depends on your farm situation and your goals. But, here's some ideas:

1. Use ALUS funding to manage wet areas in your calving areas. Wet conditions in calving areas are a major contributor to things like scours. Wetlands (including temporary wetlands where water pools for a few weeks in the spring), can be fenced (even temporarily) to keep livestock out during calving season. You can get ALUS funding to help cover the costs of that fencing, and you can receive annual payments for the acres involved in this kind of management change.
2. Use ALUS funding to provide clean water to cows and calves. We all know that providing clean water in a trough on high ground, results in much better weight gain in cattle, reduced footrot and other diseases, etc. Of course, this can benefit nursing calves too, as the chance of udders being fouled by mud, manure etc. is greatly reduced. You can get ALUS funding to help cover the costs of providing water in a trough on high ground, and you can receive annual payments for the acres involved in this kind of management change.
3. Use ALUS funding to provide shelter for cows and calves. If cows and their calves are sheltering in the willows around wetlands, the trees along creeks, etc., they are potentially spending more time in wet conditions, risking greater exposure to predators, and accessing areas fouled by accumulated manure (which can also be a major contributor to things like scours). You can get ALUS funding to help cover the costs of providing alternative shelter like windbreaks. These can be moved around on higher ground, away from wet areas, predator-friendly woodlands, accumulated manure, and so on. And, you can receive annual payments for the acres involved in this kind of management change.
4. Use ALUS funding to make checking cows / checking calves easier. When the cows are going to a trough on high ground, or sheltering at the portable windbreaks you've provided, or drinking from the water trough…you can quickly see how checking on them can be easier. I've even heard of people installing remote cameras on ALUS-supported water systems or portable windbreaks, so cows can at least be partially checked from the comfort of your living room.

That's just a few ideas. You've probably got many more. By the time you read this, these ideas might be too late for this year's calving season. But, this also makes it the perfect time to start thinking about how ALUS can help you with next year's calving.

Please give me a call anytime, and let's talk about it (my cell is 403 -505-9038 or email klewis@rdcounty.ca). Or, call one of our ALUS Farmer Liaisons: Stephen Smith at 403-318-3371 or Tom Towers at 403-352-6901).

Keep in mind, you can get up to 85% of costs covered by the ALUS Program, and you can get $30 per acre involved, per year.

May 11, 2018 AGM - Proposed Bylaw Amendments

BYLAW 4: Membership Meetings - Sections A, B, and C; Subsection i) Notification:

Current Wording

A. Annual Meeting– on or before June 30th each year
   i) Notification – shall be advertised in local newspapers and the GWFA Newsletter

Suggested Amendment

A. Annual Meeting– on or before June 30th each year
   i) *Notification* – ***shall be advertised in local newspaper or via electronic means or the GWFA newsletter***

Current Wording

B. General Meetings – shall be held at the discretion of the Board of Directors
   i) Notifications – shall be advertised in the local newspapers and the GWFA Newsletter

Suggested Amendment

B. General Meetings – shall be held at the discretion of the Board of Directors
   i) *Notifications* – ***shall be advertised in local newspaper or via electronic means or the GWFA newsletter***

Current Wording

C. Special Meetings – shall be held at the request of any 2 directors or 20 members
   i) Notification – shall be advertised in local newspapers and the GWFA Newsletter

Suggested Amendment

C. Special Meetings – shall be held at the request of any 2 directors or 20 members
   i) *Notification* – ***shall be advertised in local newspaper or via electronic means or the GWFA newsletter***

Bylaw 6 E: Duties of the Directors and Officers of the Board

Current Wording

E. Staff shall be employed by the board to co-ordinate and carry out Association activities. The board shall determine staff duties. The staff shall be directly responsible to the administrative committee.

Suggested Amendment

E. Staff shall be employed by the board to co-ordinate and carry out Association activities. The board shall determine staff duties. The staff shall be directly responsible to the ***executive committee.***

Grey Wooded
Forage Association

Creating an Awareness of Forages

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

May 11

Dovercourt Community Hall

Hwy 22 halfway between Rocky and Caroline
Doors Open 5:30pm
Dinner at 6pm
Meeting and Entertainment to follow
Adults $40
Children 15 and Under Free

To Register: gwfa-agm.eventbrite.ca

Featuring

BEN CRANE

The Farm Direct Opportunity

Christine Anderson, Local Foods Specialist | Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Increasing interest by consumers about where their food comes from and how it is produced, is creating opportunities for Alberta farms selling direct to consumers. Since 2004, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry has been tracking trends in local food demand in various direct to consumer market channels including on-farm retail, farmers' markets and, more recently, community supported agriculture (CSA). According to the *Study of Local Food Demand in Alberta*, in 2016, food sales at farmers' markets, farm retail and restaurants serving local food in Alberta exceeded $1.5 billion. Local food sales through direct to consumer market channels have more than doubled since 2008, and are expected to have reached $1.2 billion in 2017.

In 2016, Statistics Canada introduced a question in the Census of Agriculture about farms selling food directly to consumers. According to the Census, of Alberta's 40,638 farms there are 2,062 farms (about five per cent) selling food directly to consumers, which is below the national average of 12.6 percent. In Alberta, there is one farm selling direct to consumer, for every 1,972 Albertans. When compared to the national average of one direct to consumer farm for every 1,434 people, there is a clear opportunity for new farms to enter the direct-sales market in Alberta.

Of the 2,062 farms selling direct to consumer in Alberta, 35 per cent were new entrants, with beef cattle farms representing the highest proportion of new entrants (21 per cent), followed by apiculture (12 per cent) and animal combination farming (11 per cent). Among the new entrants, more than two-thirds were small farms with annual sales less than $50,000, 18 per cent were medium-sized and 10 per cent were large, with sales in excess of $250,000.

Most farms (85 per cent) selling food directly to consumers sell their products at a farm gate, stand, kiosk or U-pick operation, while about 20 per cent sell at farmers' markets and 6 per cent through CSA. Census data indicates, that direct marketing farms yielded higher than average profitability compared to farms that did not sell directly to consumers. The profitability ratios of some direct marketing farms were further improved if they sold value-added products, through farmers' markets, or CSAs.

Farms marketing direct to consumers also showed a higher average of gross farm receipts to farm area at $442 per acre, compared to farms that did not sell directly to consumers with $349 per acre.

Direct marketing farms also revealed a higher percentage of female operators (38 per cent) than other farms (31 per cent). Interestingly, Alberta has more female direct marketing farm operators than the national average, which is 36 per cent.

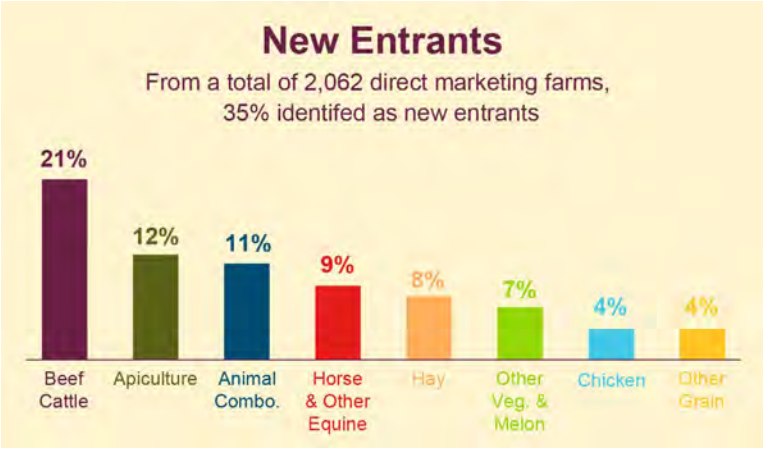
The data also showed that young operators (under 35) are more involved in farm direct marketing in Alberta — 9 per cent compared to 8 per cent province-wide in all agriculture operations.

For a more information on opportunities in direct to consumer marketing please visit Explore Local at www.explorelocal.ca or contact me directly at christine.anderson@gov.ab.ca.

Direct Marketing Farms in Alberta

Type of farm	Number of farms	Profitability ratio*
All farms	2,062	0.81
Beef cattle ranching and farming	543	0.85
Animal combination farming	236	0.80
Hay farming	167	0.99
Apiculture	162	0.74
Other grain farming	140	0.79
Other vegetable (except potato) and melon farming	84	0.72
All other misc. crop farming	78	0.77
Other misc. animal production	58	0.85
Chicken egg production	53	0.90
Oilseed (except soybean) farming	39	0.80
Nursery and tree production	30	0.87
Other food crops grown under cover	22	0.85
Floriculture production	22	0.62
Other	428	--

operating expenses to gross farm receipts ratio



The Benefits of Being a Better "Cross-Breeder"

Clinton Brons, Gentec

Beef breeders face ever-more complex challenges. In order remain profitable, it is essential to implement technologies and systems that reduce costs and enhance productivity. Surprisingly perhaps, one of the oldest and most proven principles that achieves these ends has just been enhanced via a new tool. That principle is cross-breeding.

It's been a long time since anyone argued that one breed is "the best" or "excels" across all traits that lead to producer profitability. In particular, the commercial herd has worked to pair breeds or help them to best meet their production goals. In its simplest form, this is known as cross-breeding, and is done to take advantage of breed complementarity and increase hybrid vigour or "Vigour."

Encapsulated in Vigour is the idea that a cross-bred animal (and thus, the herd) will perform better than the average of the two parental lines. This has been referred to as "anti-inbreeding."[1] Many producers embrace the concept of Vigour but unknowingly risk inbreeding depression by managing their herd to maximize uniformity (homozygosity at the expense of heterozygosity). Uniformity is immediately recognizable to buyers but the costs are hidden… and paid for in full by the cow/calf producer.

This is because a lack of Vigour decreases survival and reproductive traits, both of which can be improved via cross-breeding **but…** cross-breeding two low-Vigour animals, even of different breeds "can't negate the inferiority of the parents."[1] So as cow/calf producers, we must select for breeds that complement each other to reach our production goals, and then carefully select animals from within those cross-breeds that are of high quality (Vigour).

The benefits of a production system following these general principles are two-fold: first, and most important, the ability to manage maternal Vigour improves cow fertility and longevity that significantly reduce the cost of developing or acquiring replacement heifers. Second, the calf crop from such a system also benefits from optimized Vigour through improved survivability, an increased growth rate and "collectively, these improvements result in a significant advantage in pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed, and superior lifetime production for crossbred females."[2]

Factors to consider when deciding on the best cross-breeding system for an operation include the size of the cow herd, breeding pastures, labour constraints, availability of feed, marketing strategies employed, and bull supply.

For many producers however, simplicity is the critical element—which is why it's important to emphasise that optimizing Vigour doesn't have to be complicated. A two-breed rotational cross from which replacement heifers are kept and then mated back to one of the original breeds is one of the simplest. In subsequent years, animals are mated to the opposite breed of their sire. Assuming natural service, this system does require two pastures, and it will see the degree of Vigour stabilize at approximately 67%. An additional advantage is that through the use of cross-bred cows, the pounds of weaned calf per cow exposed increases by approximately 16% compared to that of the average of the original two breeds crossed.[3]

A similar, slightly more complicated three-breed rotation would see Vigour stabilize at approximately 86%, and result in an expected 20% increase in the pounds of calf weaning weight per cow exposed in excess of the average of the parent breeds.[3]

An even simpler system is well suited to smaller herds. It can be used in a single pasture operation or where labour is in short supply. Here, a herd with (or moving towards) consistent breed composition and degree of Vigour requires a single, appropriately-selected bull. By properly managing the breed composition and selecting heifers carefully, a consistent and high Vigour (fertile) cow herd would produce a relatively consistent calf crop of high Vigour calves with high survivability and growth and carcass characteristics consistent with the breed cross (or crosses) used.

DNA technology can determine the parentage, breed composition and Vigour of an existing herd and be an important management tool. In research conducted at Livestock Gentec (UofA), led by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's John Basarab of the Lacombe Research Station, and validated via Cow Calf Health Management Services in Alberta, herds have demonstrated significant economic advantages in using this technology.

This is the third in a series of updates from Delta Genomics on EnVigour HX™ and other herd management insights provided by the Genome Alberta-funded project led by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's John Basarab of the Lacombe Research Centre with Livestock Gentec.

To find out how these strategies might benefit your herd, email Delta Genomics at envigourhx@deltagenomics.com or speak to Michelle at (780) 492-2538.

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[1] Crossbreeding and the Benefits of Heterosis. Matt Spangler, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Beef Genetics Specialist

[2] Crossbreeding Beef Cattle. Scott P. Greiner, Extension Animal Scientist, Virginia Tech

[3] Richie et. al., 1999

Grey Wooded Forage Association
Creating an Awareness of Forages

Summer Intern

Job Description:

As a Forage Association, we focus on extension for our members. You'll be needed to assist in planning, advertising, and completing the extension events and responsible for overseeing the social media sites and promotion of our organization. As the Summer Intern, you will be working closely with staff, assisting in data collection and project site maintenance as well as the development of new field projects. We are looking for an energetic and independent person who can both work outdoors and in an office setting. This position is a **Full-time temporary position (based on 36-hour week)** from **April 30, 2018 through to August 31, 2018.**

Minimum Qualifications

- Must have a valid class 5 driver's license
- Proficient with Microsoft programs such as Word, Excel, and Publisher
- Ability to work outdoors in all conditions
- Above average organizational skills
- Ability to complete tasks with little or no supervision in a timely manner
- Willingness to work both independent and with a team
- Strong verbal and written communication skills
- Positive Attitude

Background in agriculture is an asset but not a requirement. Website management or development skills would be an asset. Training will be provided.

Location

Grey Wooded Forage Association is located at:
5039-45 Street
Rocky Mountain House, Alberta

Application Instructions

To apply, please include a resume and cover letter. Email your applications to: Ginette Boucher at gwfa3@telus.net and reference the job title in the subject heading. Applications will be accepted until April 20, 2018. Only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

Employment is pending funding

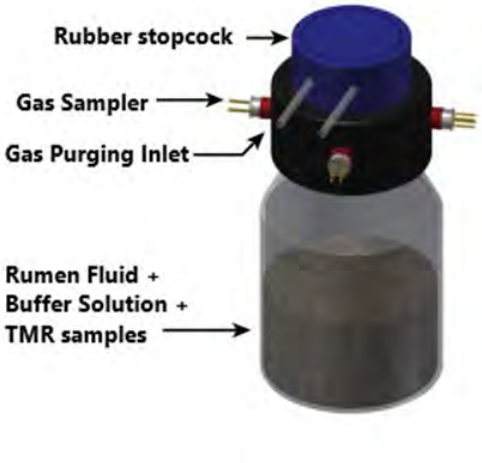
In Vitro fermentation Method (IFM) - New Research Methodology at Olds College that will help the animal industry | Part I

Helio Lima-Neto, Phd, Olds College

Thanks to funding from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Technology Access Centre (TAC), at Olds College, offers resources and services required to move the livestock industries technology needs forward. Olds College's vertically integrated beef program allows for technology and products to be tested at every step in production (seed stock, cow-calf, feedlot, animal feedstuff). In order to ensure that the Technology Access Centre's services and facilities are flexible and responsive to the needs of the Canadian livestock industry, a dedicated group of producers, experts, government officials, academia, and industry stakeholders provide direction and industry insight as members of the TAC advisory board members. TAC, managed by Shannon Argent, has now a fully operational Animal Research Laboratory that is currently testing novel animal feedstuff. The laboratory, equipped with the *in vitro* fermentation method, can also be used to test novel forages and compare their fermentation profile with traditional forages such as alfalfa, barley or corn.

What is the *In Vitro* Fermentation Method?

The *In Vitro* Fermentation Method (IFM) is a diagnostic tool that simulates rumen fermentation in the laboratory, to evaluate the effects of new forages or feed additives on ruminal fermentation and/or nutritional value of a TMR (total mixed ration), by measuring *in vitro* degradability and end products of fermentation (*in vitro* dry matter degradability, volatile fatty acid (VFA) profile and gas production (methane and CO_2). So, by measuring what is being produced in our test tubes (artificial rumen – see diagram bellow) we can predict how specific diets/products will behave when fed to ruminants. For more information, visit: https://www.oldscollege.ca/research/areas-of-focus/livestock-meats/index.html



Schematic diagram on the side demonstrates how the system works: we collect rumen fluid from slaughter houses and incubate in the flask or test tube. Also we add a buffer solution to mimic the animal's saliva, CO_2 to make the environment anaerobic (lacking oxygen) and the sample to be tested. After 24h of incubation at 39°C, we sample the system and measure the pH, ammonia levels, the concentration of volatile fatty acids, and how much of the tested product was broken down by the bacteria (the so called in vitro degradability). Lastly, we use the gas sampler to measure the total gas produced during the incubation and the methane concentration.

Calving Season In Full Swing Alongside WLPIP's Calf Program

Mustafa Eric, AFSC Communications Coordinator

As cattle producers are getting busy with their calving season, the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program (WLPIP) also marks the start to the 2018 WLPIP-Calf program year. While the season is new, the basic procedures of the calf program remain the same: Dates to purchase in 2018 are from February 1 to May 31; every week on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday tables with coverage and premiums will be published on the program website (www.wlpip.ca), indicating what the market is doing that day; and policies will be available to purchase from 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

2017 was an interesting year for the WLPIP Calf program. By the end of May, WLPIP had insured about 18 per cent of eligible calves in Alberta. This became the program's second biggest sales year since its inception in 2011.

"We are happy to continue to provide Alberta cattle owners the opportunity to manage their price risk," said Bill Hoar, WLPIP Product Owner at AFSC.

"When these 2017 Calf policies came into expiry, the market soon after started to rally. For September expiring policies, we paid just under $1 million in indemnity, and while we didn't pay any calf indemnity into October, November, or December, we were pleased to see the market perform well to the benefit of the cattle producer."

When considering purchasing a WLPIP policy, cattle producers should be reminded of a few points drawn from previous experiences:

1. All policies are to be insured in name to match the way the cattle will be sold; For example, if the cattle are owned by a company, the insurance will be put under that company name. If the cattle are sold in an individual's name, the insurance should be matching.
2. Insurance is purchased based on the expected sale weights. Clients should review their production and sales records to narrow in on this insured amount. On the plus side, it may save a little bit of money on premium, too.
3. It is recommended to align the insurance expiry date to the time the policy owner plans on selling the cattle. Even if there is a more attractive coverage in a different expiry, it will not represent a good hedge for the policy holder's own cattle.
4. Since the numbers on the premium tables are only available the day they are published, it is important to watch the premium tables to get familiar with coverage and premium costs prior to the day an insurance purchase is to be made. Another good practice is to utilize some free online tools (Alberta Ag.) to calculate break-evens which will better enable a producer to make risk management decisions.

In 2017, the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program undertook a producer survey, which provided the opportunity to collect interesting information regarding producer marketing and risk management decisions. Some highlights include:

1. Sixty-seven per cent of cow-calf producers surveyed indicated they had an increased use of risk management tools over the past five years;
2. The breakdown of tools used by cow-calf producers in 2016 can be seen in the chart below
3. Of all survey respondents, 43 per cent expect to increase their use of WLPIP in the next three to five years;
4. The highest factor taken into account when using a risk management tool is the coverage level, followed by premium cost in a close second. Rounding out the top four were convenience and policy length.

With 44 offices throughout the province ready to serve clients, AFSC and its staff will be happy to discuss the upcoming calving season with cow-calf producers and how WLPIP can help them manage future price risks.

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Put some Zing in your Grazing Program . . .

The Greenedge ABC's and the "Short-cuts"

Lloyd Quantz, Greenedges

As signs of spring start to show, thoughts of grass and pasture start to stir. If you are just getting into precision grazing here's a brief "walk-thru" on some of the basics and a few tips on getting started on a soil and grazing boost.

Good pasture management is actually about good soil and root management using the health of the leaves to drive the sun's energy to the whole plant, soil, and root system. Most certainly, the health of the soil-root zone will show up in the resilience and productivity of the above ground growth. We get there through effective grazing controls to maximize the nutrient and energy balances of plants and animals. You might be thinking, aren't there any shortcuts. That sounds like a lot of work?" Actually, the answer is "yes, there are short cuts". I.e. short cuts, as in short-duration-grazing-passes!! Harvesting the top growth with adequate recharge time between passes is the only proven shortcut to healthy, long term, productive grass and livestock.

Our "Green – edge" technology – is designed to capture the green edge of plant growth – maximizing the solar activity benefitting the forage growth and limiting any root depleting stress.

Mathematical calculations, drones and mechanical measuring devices can be a great teaching/thinking tools but should not replace careful observation of eco-system behaviors, health and strategic analysis. These are the highest form of husbandry – soil, plant or livestock. Over the decades most people have found that the basic idea of rotational grazing watching plant growth indicators can be useful but the real payoff comes from finding your own "grazing sweet spot" given the uniqueness and specifics of your land, vegetation and livestock. Like playing golf – the other spring pursuit requiring grass -- learning the basics is useful but mentally and physically working with these basics makes for a better score.

But some basic records and pasture plans are essential for continued tweaking and building up the profitability of the precision grazing project. We can't improve what we can't measure and part of measuring is comparing data from one place or period to the next. Records of pasture moves and production outcomes should be compared with the original objectives of the plan so that we don't either get 'caught in the weeds' or using 'rose colored glasses' in analyzing year-over-year results.

The ABC's

If you're taking your first swing at setting up more controlled grazing, here's a brief list of the **ABC's** we've found useful as a starting point.

A's – Designated acreage area, animals and annual (year-round) plans.

The plan should begin where you're at. The total **ACREAGE AREA** and types of **ANIMALS** along with the **ANNUAL** estimates of nutrient requirements by month. The **ACTION PLAN** should be developed including any prior results to establish the starting point and should

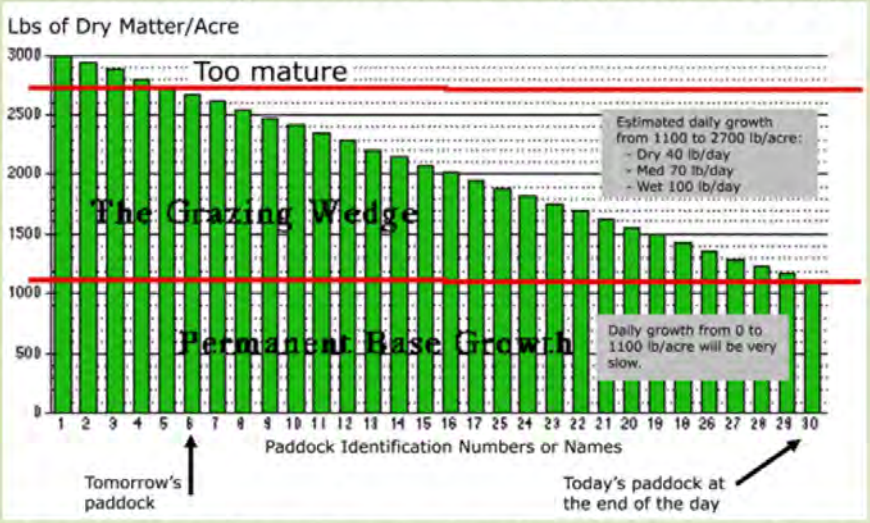
anticipate greater annual increase in pasture carrying capacity. Eg. Like adding more land –free- each year. Any excess, early-season growth or 'too-soon-mature' late season growth can be stockpiled left standing or swathed for winter or early next season grazing. Depending on land suitability some may even be cut, baled and pasture fed where organic matter is most needed.

Greenedge Precision Fence has been able to assist many graziers in establishing permanent electric perimeter fences to enable versatile connections to internal portable fences. High quality perimeter fences also make good neighbors and essential barriers against unwanted large wildlife intrusions or stray bulls!!

B's – Boundaries of the unique biome and natural, internal land-form borders for grazing management and long term biological improvement divisions.

BOUNDARIES that group similar **BIOME'S,** that is, some uniformity in the ecology of the units - being slope, moisture, soil type, sun exposure and trees or type of vegetative cover. These are best managed if defined and well-fenced, semi-permanently. Protected riparian and other erodible areas should be fenced out of the grazing area. The soil **BIOLOGY** will determine any unique management needs of these units. These **BORDERS** are internal to the total area and define the necessary livestock handling infrastructure such as gate breaks, alley-ways, working corrals, watering locations and any linkages to the total area being managed. These distinct units will be further subdividable depending on daily/weekly grazing control plans using temporary hot fences.

C's – Control technology and calculation of the wedge produces the grazing calendar.



The daily, internal **CONTROL** of grazing will almost always benefit from electric fences – generally the very portable, single-line, polywire type. Guiding the progress of seasonal grazing, many set up a paper based or computer based **CALCULATION** of a 'wedge' showing the likely order of rotations by paddock name. This results in a **CALENDAR** of plans for moves and return harvesting throughout the grazing year. Many in our rather brittle climate have found a sweet spot at about 12-15 distinct paddocks allowing for 2-3 days on and 30-40 days leaf rest and recovery. Remember – top third, grazed; middle third, solar collection; bottom third, essential plant base and soil cover. Happy Gra-Zing!

For more assistance contact a proven grazing specialist or the author. A useful online tool set is provided free at: https://onpasture.com/troys-grazing-charts-and-how-to-use-them/ or by linkages/email on our Greenedge Precision Grazing website at www.greenedges.com. ***"Adding The Zing in Grazing"***

Grey Wooded Forage Association

2018/2019 Memberships

Memberships are $40.00 and run from April 1 to March 31

Memberships are open to anyone interested in forage production, grazing management and environmental sustainability

For information call 403-844-2645

Membership Benefits:

- Receive discounts on courses, seminars, workshops, and tours
- Receive The Blade
- Receive Environmental Farm Plan delivery
- Free Equipment Rental (deposit required)
- Access to the GWFA library
- Access to our Member Facebook Group
- A chance to network with like minded producers
- Free Farm consultation service (phone, email, and in person in the office)
    - Farm calls are $0.55/km travel each way
- Receive an Annual Report

Please fill out and mail the portion below with a cheque or e-transfer of $40 to:

Grey Wooded Forage Association
Box 1448, Rocky Mtn House, AB, T4T 1B1

Renewal_____ or New Member_____

Name/Company Name:_____

Address: _____

Town/City:_____

Province & Postal Code: _____

The Blade: Email____ Canada Post ____

Phone: _____

Mobile Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please print clearly

How would you describe your occupation

- Beef Producer
- Sheep/Goat Producer
- Dairy Producer
- Annual Crops
- Forage Producer
- Other _____

How many head of livestock are you managing?

Beef Cows/Heifers:_____
Dairy Cows:_____
Feeders:_____
Ewes:_____
Does:_____
Other:_____

How many acres are you managing?

Pasture:_____
Hay:_____
Crop:_____
Other:_____

What topics are you interested in learning more about?_____

_____

How can GWFA better serve you?_____

_____

_____