



The Blade

Monthly Newsletter of the
Grey Wooded Forage Association

APRIL 2020



Bulletin Board

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Greetings, Members and Friends

It's business as usual at GWFA.

However, in keeping with government policies and for the protection of everyone,

OUR OFFICE WILL RUN ON **LIMITED HOURS**
UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

We will welcome visitors from **9 A.M. TO NOON ON WEEKDAYS**, but request that you **CALL AHEAD** if you wish to drop by.

Please, stay healthy and stay safe!



GREY WOODED FORAGE ASSOCIATION

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Please call or email to learn more.

Published by: Brenda Kossowan
Cover Photo: Brenda Kossowan

Email your favourite photos and we will consider them for the cover!

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



This publication is made possible in part through funding from The Province of Alberta

Office Report

By Brenda Kossowan, Business Manager



The push is on to bring new people into the front seats of our bus. Grey Wooded Forage Association enters its 36th year with a strong board, committed staff and prospects for some truly remarkable projects leading into the next three years.

We just hope that the provincial and federal governments will continue to support our operations, enabling us to remain independent from corporate funders who may have deep pockets, but whose interests may diverge from those of the farmers and ranchers we serve.

Last month, Hon. Devin Dreeshen, minister responsible for Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, announced the creation of a new agency to manage funding of agricultural research in Alberta. Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) is described as a non-profit, arm's-length corporation set up to manage the \$37 million dollars the province sets aside every year for agricultural research and extension. Its interim board, headed by veterinarians David Chalack (Chair) and Gerald Hauer (CEO), is tasked with getting the new agency rolling over the next few months. The interim team will work on setting up agreements and establishing protocols with a goal of installing a permanent board, officers and research chair during the first quarter of 2021. At that point, RDAR should be poised to manage the money that goes to various research organizations, including GWFA.

Directors and staff from GWFA, its sister organizations and our umbrella group—Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta—were vocal and active earlier this year when the minister called for ideas about how this new corporation should be set up and who should be at the table, making the decisions.

This development comes at a time when the province has put a large number of its key people out to pasture, shutting down a number of programs and services that were key to producers. The General Store, which was part of Ropin' the Web, was shut down and is now being taken over by the Alberta Forage Industry Network. The future of Ropin' the Web itself remains in limbo, with the board at ARECA considering a bid.

Within all of this uncertainty lies the responsibility of groups like GWFA to help connect producers with the information they need to manage their operations for profitability and sustainability, both economic and environmental. Getting back to where I started, that is where we are inviting more people to come to the front of the bus and get involved in the work we do, both as an applied research group and as a group responsible for ensuring that producers are getting the best information possible. The means by which we

deliver that information has changed radically in the last few weeks as people learn to deal with travel restrictions and social distancing protocols set to check the spread of a pandemic virus, covid-19.

Bottom line: It's a jungle out there and we need good people to help whack through the weeds in the quest for a secure path to a strong future.

Now would be a great time for anyone who would like to become more involved in our association to step forward and run for a seat on the board. Really, there isn't a lot of work to do—that's for Greg and me to worry about. What we do ask is that you bring your ideas and opinions to the table once a month and consider how well this bus runs and where it could use a tuneup. Some of the thoughts around the table right now are focused on whether we need to expand our role to fill some of the gap left with the changes that have taken place at the provincial level. GWFA was established to help producers get better results from the grass under their feet. We've come a long way since then, and are now investing a great deal of our resources in areas of soil health, carbon and water quality. I am reviewing evaluations from recent events and plan to contact all of our current and recent members over the next few weeks with questions about where GWFA can serve you better. It's up to the Board of Directors to decide how that information is used, and that's where some new ideas would be helpful.

GWFA will elect its 2020-21 board during the Annual General Meeting on June 11. Nominations are now open for up to six positions that will become vacant on that day. Please get in touch with me if you are interested in getting involved.

In addressing this year's AGM, social distancing restrictions mean that there is no facility available for gathering in person. Therefore, GWFA will conduct a virtual AGM using an online conferencing tool. There is an option to phone in for those who do not have access to reliable wi-fi or who are unable to connect online. We anticipate that the meeting will take less than an hour. So far, there have been no new resolutions put forward, so the major business will include the election, financial review and release of our Annual Report. Once we have decided which service will be best for GWFA, there will be an opportunity for some practice so we don't all have to learn it together on the evening of June 11. I'm certain that, by now, many of you have some experience with webinars and online teleconferencing and would therefore welcome any tips or advice you may wish to share.

Zoom? Go To Webinar? Skype?

You tell me. I'm here to listen.





GREY WOODED FORAGE ASSOCIATION

greywoodedforageassociation.com | 403-844-2645

Casual Employment Opportunity, West Central Alberta:

We have an opening for a physically fit individual interested in helping with agricultural field research during the summer. This includes physical labour and will require that you have solid computer skills and a reliable vehicle to attend research sites.

Please contact field@greywoodedforageassociation.com for a detailed job description and wage offer.

Competition closes May 22, 2020

For Sale

Stafix x6i Unigizer complete with hand held remote and manual. The remote is a great feature enabling fault finding, output monitoring and on/off from anywhere along the fence line.

This unit has been a great work horse, I am upsizing. 600.00



Sandy Loree

GWFA & FFGA member, Olds, AB

Phone: 403-586-1949

Email: tlore@telusplanet.net



Blue Rock

Animal Nutrition Ltd.



AGRISTABILITY DEADLINE EXTENSION

Due to current market disruptions, increased expenses and production challenges facing producers—the AgriStability enrolment deadline has been extended to **July 3, 2020** to allow more producers to benefit from the program.

AgriStability – whole-farm protection.

Sign up today by contacting AFSC.

AFSC.ca • 1.877.899.AFSC (2372)  



Grazing Annual Forages

By Greg Paranich, Agricultural Field Specialist

Over the winter I had the opportunity to hear some valuable words of wisdom from several industry leading forage and grazing experts. I would like to share some of their perspectives on managing a high-performance grazing forage. The forage principles are similar for perennial and annual forages, but in this article let us look at grazing annuals.

I have fielded many questions on grazing annual forages. For the most part, annuals for forage have involved stored feed as silage, greenfeed or baleage. Swath grazing is another way annuals are utilized. It is a grazing application but deferred as winter feed stored in the swath. Grazing in the green season requires a different focus to have excellent pasture.

First, what is excellent pasture? Excellent pasture, whether annual or perennial, will be:

- High in energy (when being grazed),
- Adequate in protein,
- Mineral rich,
- Palatable,
- Species diverse,
- Durable.

The class of animal you are grazing will determine how excellent your grazing material needs to be.

- Very highest energy: Lactating beef cows, finishing stockers, or dairy cows,
- High energy: Late lactating cows, medium growth stockers at two or more pounds per day gain,
- Moderate energy: Late lactation cows, replacement heifers, stockers at one to two pounds per day gain
- Low energy (usually dormant season in fall): Dry pregnant cows, background stockers under one pound per day gain.

Managing the performance of your livestock requires knowledge of what energy rating your forage is at. Profitability is to know when to move livestock into grazing and when to pull them out for adequate residue for regrowth. This is balancing quantity with quality.

Annual forages are divided into several categories: Cool season (C3) and warm season (C4) crops. In Central Alberta, we are best suited for C3 species, especially the more you move west and into higher elevations. Also, we separate them into grasses, legumes and brassicas.



Why use annuals? They give us immediate forage availability and can be managed on an annual basis for high quantity and manage well, high quality grazing. On average, annuals have more energy content than perennials, legumes are greater than grasses and C3 grasses are equal to C4 grasses.

For protein, annuals are greater than perennials, legumes greater than grasses, C3 grasses greater than C4 grasses.

Here are the most common C3 annuals used for grazing in our area: Cool season grasses include rye, oats, barley, wheat, triticale, and annual ryegrass. Cool season legumes include clovers (crimson, berseem, balansa, arrowleaf, ball) and hairy vetch. Brassicas include turnips, kale, Swedes and radishes.

What annuals can do for you depends on how they are managed. You can get productive pasture in mid-summer when many pastures are at a lull in production. They give us high quality grazing when it is usually in short supply. When actively growing, annuals can be used on any class of livestock as high energy feed. A note on winter annuals (spring seeded): They can complement spring annuals in summer grazing but can also extend grazing into the fall, and even provide early grazing the next spring.

Keeping an eye on the maturity of annuals is important to be able to capture their optimum quantity and quality balance. Ideally, they should be grazed just prior and into the “boot” stage. That is, past the fifth leaf (in grasses) and just at or before head emergence. This is the peak energy and good quantity stage for grazing. Each day past the boot stage, the plant loses .5 per cent digestibility per day. In 16 days, you can lose eight per cent of total digestible nutrients (TDN). Suffice to say that in a grazing cell the first day’s consumption will be more productive than the last, therefore, some rapid movement across the grazing cells (strip grazing) will give the best animal performance.

Some rules of thumb:

- Understand the explosive nature of the growth rate potential of the plants in your annual stand,
- Know when the plant(s) will mature and how that will impact grazing timing and performance,
- Species diversity may give some maturity differences to spread the “peak energy” across the grazing mix for a time.
- Do not let it become a jungle. If it gets too rank you will lose more to trampling. It will probably become more mature at this point and your high-performance grazing falls into maintenance quality.
- Brassicas are good in a mixture with grasses and legumes. They give you excellent quick and early growth, however, manage low seeding rates so they do not dominate the stand. Aim for 30 per cent or less. Any more and you may out compete your other players in the mix. Also, high stand percentages can lead to excessive sulphur consumption, nitrate issues under stress. They deteriorate rapidly in fall/winter so are not suitable for fall or swath grazing.
- Graze according to the eyes-to-nostrils guideline: Observe cattle with their head down while grazing. If you cannot see their eyes, you may have too much growth. If you can see their nostrils, you have grazed too low.

(continued on following page)



Grazing Annual Forages (continued from previous page)

We want to enter stand at the optimum and rising energy and leave with enough residue for regrowth (some say 30 per cent, others say 50 per cent). This is a very general guideline, but if you are the type to rate your forage from the back of a horse or quad, this could be helpful.

- Cover crops in your mix can serve 2 purposes being forage supply above ground, and soil health below ground. The amount of residue you leave at the end of the grazing season will determine which benefit you will gain. On an annual crop you can choose which is your priority, or depending on the growth season, your immediate need for feed.

Whatever combination and application you use, we can see that proper management can gain some very productive forage and high animal performance with annuals as part of our grazing plans.

They give us some versatility in keeping high value grazing when perennials are typically dropping off, as well as emergency access to protect perennial stands during drought or stressful growing conditions.

Please contact me with any questions you may have or strategies you may want to try for this season.



www.afac.ab.ca



Clearwater County's 2020

Conifer Tree Seedling Program

Beautify your property & help the environment with affordable white spruce and lodgepole pine



Application forms are available on the County's website at clearwatercounty.ca
At this time, only **EMAIL** applications are being accepted until **May 22, 2020**.
For more information & to submit an application email dens@clearwatercounty.ca



Connecting with ALUS in Leduc and Wetaskiwin Counties

Did you know that Wetaskiwin and Leduc Counties run a joint ALUS program? The Wetaskiwin-Leduc ALUS program began in 2016 and has been growing modestly since, recognizing ecosystem producing services from over 700 acres. Our community has been focused on building sound and reliable processes that producers can trust.

Ken Lewis from Red Deer County ALUS has supplied many excellent articles about their ALUS program for The Blade. ALUS programs across Canada follow similar principles. However, ALUS programs are also community led and farmer driven. Therefore, there are similarities across all ALUS programs along with aspects unique to each community.

Wetaskiwin-Leduc ALUS cost shared with producers on the following project types.

These projects can provide multiple ecosystem services:

- Project
- Ecosystem Services
- Wetland and Creek Riparian Fencing
- Water quality, wildlife habitat, biodiversity
- Riparian tree planting. Eco-buffer. Pollinator planting.
- Cleaner air, carbon sequestration, habitat, biodiversity
- Off-site watering systems
- Water quality



Evolution of a watering hole: Wetaskiwin-Leduc ALUS participant Brad Robins and his father Dwayne installed a well and wetland fencing on a new parcel where livestock previously sourced water from the wetlands. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.



Fall, 2017



Summer, 2018



Summer, 2019



**Ecosystem Services
Produced Here** ALUS.ca



NOTICE OF **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Grey Wooded Forage Association,
a non-profit society registered in the Province of Alberta,
will hold its Annual General Meeting at

7:00 p.m. on June 11, 2020.

This is a change in time from our previous announcement.

*Due to ongoing measures against the covid-19 pandemic,
this meeting will held by teleconference.*

Further details will be provided to all members.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Review financial statements and appoint an auditor
- Review any special resolutions put forward to amend bylaws
- Elect new directors to fill vacant seats on the Board of Directors
- Present an Annual Report to include details of the association's ongoing business.

Nominations are now open for any person with an interest in the operations of the GWFA. This is a challenging and rewarding opportunity that normally requires between four and eight hours of your time each month.

Nominations are now being accepted by the business manager and may be made from the floor during the election portion of the meeting.

Proposed changes to the bylaws must be put forward by special resolution and are to be advertised for at least three weeks before the meeting.

Please submit special resolutions to the business manager by noon on Friday, May 1, 2020.

Contact: Business Manager Brenda Kossowan
Office: 403-844-2645
Cell: 403-844-1621
Email: office@greywoodedforageassociation.com



GREY WOODDED *FORAGE ASSOCIATION*

Think you have a closed herd? Think Again

By Karin Schmid, Alberta Beef Producers, reprinted with permission from BCRC Blog



A surprising proportion of producers believe they run a closed herd. The 2017 Western Canadian Cow-Calf Survey requested reasons why certain management practices were not employed on individual operations. Out of the approximately 25 per cent of respondents who did not vaccinate their cows and heifers against reproductive diseases such as IBR and BVD, over half of those reported that their reason for forgoing those vaccinations was because they had a closed

herd. Similarly, over 20 per cent of respondents did not vaccinate their calves against respiratory disease (BRD), and 30 per cent of those indicated having a closed herd was their main reason for not vaccinating.

This high rate of mistaken belief in having a closed herd is not just a Canadian phenomenon. A 2019 UK survey of almost 1,000 producers indicated that over half of those who stated they ran a closed herd had purchased cattle within the past two years. According to the US Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) 2007-08 survey, over 88 per cent of operations with 50 head or more brought new cattle onto their operations in the past three years. Often a closed herd is simply interpreted as just being closed genetically, where replacements and clean up bulls are all home raised, artificial insemination is the main breeding method if new genetics are



desired, and non-home raised cattle never enter the operation. But like most things, it's a little more complicated than that.

A truly closed herd will not only eliminate the introduction of non-home raised cattle, but also eliminate as many sources of disease transmission as possible.

A closed herd will have no contact (even fence line) with any other livestock or wildlife and will limit visitor/service provider access to areas where cattle are never present. In a closed herd, non-home raised animals (even horses, dogs) never set foot on the ranch and any animal that leaves home never comes back. All personnel, visitors, and service providers are following extraordinarily strict biosecurity measures – almost exactly like those implemented in the swine and poultry industries.

You either have a closed herd or you don't. Just like there is no such thing as "sort of pregnant," there is no such thing as a "pretty closed herd," or a "mostly closed herd." Those herds are open. While a closed herd is optimal from a biosecurity standpoint because it's difficult to introduce disease to a completely isolated

population, it certainly doesn't mean you are home free as far as vaccination is concerned. Let's face it, fences break, gates get left open, and some cattle just seem bound and determined to end up places they're not supposed to be. This can be devastating in a naïve herd that hasn't been exposed to disease through prior exposure or vaccination.

Closed herds are often tricky to maintain in practice, being more labour and cost intensive, and they may also carry certain risks of amplifying recessive genetic conditions or reducing productivity through inbreeding if not managed carefully.

Have you:

- Bought replacement open or bred heifers? Bred or open cows? Pairs?
- Bought an orphan calf?
- Bought a nurse cow?
- Bought or leased bulls?
- Bought or borrowed colostrum?
- Used clean-up bulls you didn't raise after AI season?
- Calved out some of the neighbour's cows on your place, with your cows?
- Bought feeder or backgrounder cattle that could potentially mingle, even accidentally, with the main herd?
- Taken cattle, sheep or horses to a show and turned them out with the herd immediately after coming home?
- Utilized a community pasture, shared a grazing lease or other pasture with other producers?
- Shared fence lines with a neighbour? Water sources?
- Taken an animal to a vet clinic and brought it back home only to immediately turn it out with the other cattle after treatment?
- Shared a trailer? Had someone haul cattle for you without a thorough cleaning and disinfection of their trailer? Hauled cattle for someone without a thorough cleaning and disinfection of your trailer?
- Had an unsold animal returned to your place from an auction market or consignment sale?
- Had an animal jump the fence, or a neighbour's animal end up on your place?
- Had a herd of deer, elk or other wildlife in with your cattle? In your feed storage areas?
- Mingled different types of livestock in the same area (e.g. cows and sheep)?
- Used your own horses at a neighbour's branding or roundup, brought them back home, and turned them out with the cattle? Allowed neighbours to use their horses at your branding/roundup?
- Allowed service providers (vets, nutritionists, feed trucks, etc.) or oil and gas traffic access to your operation without a full disinfection protocol?
- Purchased used equipment and operated it without thoroughly disinfecting it?
- Hosted a branding or get together at your place without a clothes change & boot disinfection protocol?
- Toured visitors through your herd without a clothes change and boot disinfection protocol?
- Visited another farm, auction market, show, sale or other event where cattle are present without a clothes change and boot disinfection protocol once you got back home?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you do not have a closed herd. It is open. *(continued on Page 10)*

Realities of a closed herd

(Continued from Page 9)

Even without running a closed herd, there are easy and practical things producers can do to limit the risk of disease spread. Vaccination and implementing basic biosecurity protocols (e.g. quarantines, boot washes, etc.) are the most important of these. Production surveys across Canada indicate that bulls are an under-vaccinated class of cattle, with only about 50 per cent of bulls receiving any vaccinations. More attention should be focused on keeping bull vaccinations current.

This article may ruffle a few feathers, as the idea of a “closed herd” or “one-iron herd” (a term often heard in southern Alberta, meaning that the all the cattle on a particular ranch only have one brand) is often a point of pride for producers.

I recently heard a veterinarian say during a presentation that closed

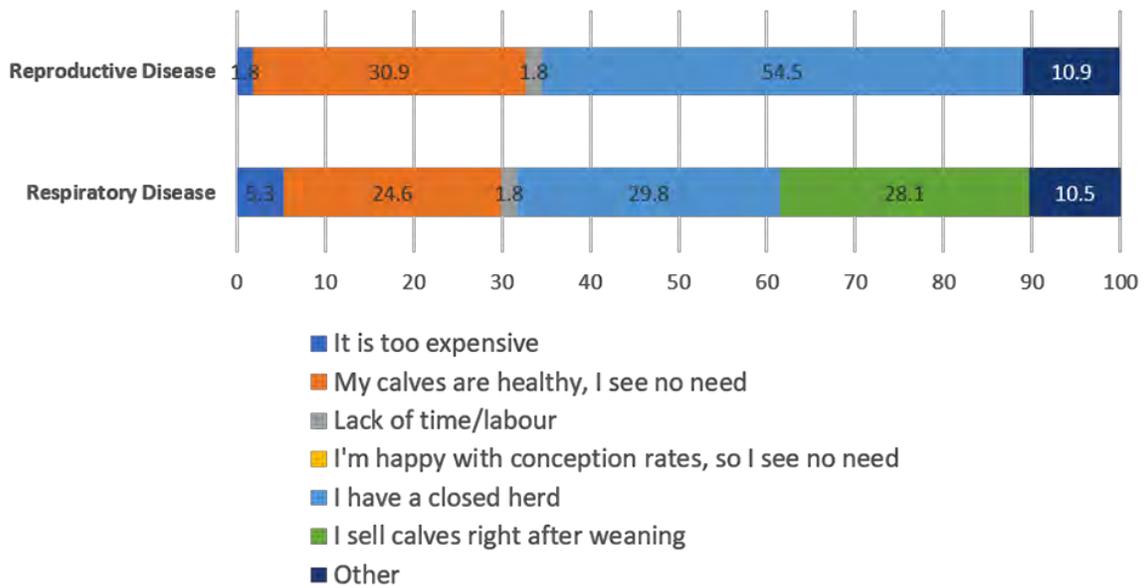
herds are like unicorns, often talked about but seldom seen. A horse that has a cone strapped to its head is still just a horse.

This article was originally published on March 31, 2020, in the Beef Cattle Research Council Blog and is reprinted with permission.

Please visit www.beefresearch.ca for more information about research and innovation for beef producers.



Why don't producers vaccinate?



Source: 2017 Western Canadian Cow-Calf Survey



AFIN
ALBERTA FORAGE INDUSTRY NETWORK

Taking Our Extension/Public Awareness Programs into the 2020s

By Ken Lewis, Conservation Coordinator, Red Deer County

March 2020: When extension went digital.

A fundamental principle about agriculture extension has always been that the “best” extension was face-to-face. Field days, demonstrations, lectures, field trials, trade shows, conferences, workshops, etc. all have had one thing in common: Get agriculture people together, face to face, in a room, pasture, field or research station, to learn about the latest agriculture practice or technology.

In recent years, extension practitioners have started to see a shift in that, as more and more extension could be done digitally. Here in Red Deer County, we have talked about the need to adapt and move in that direction, but it has been tough to get past just dipping a toe in.

Then, COVID-19 happened. All of a sudden, we simply cannot do face-to-face extension, at least not until the pandemic is dealt with. So, all of a sudden we’ve had to make the leap with both feet.

We’ve scrambled to deal with this “new normal” for extension, and learned very quickly, some new technologies and best practices. Here are some of the things we are doing, as we shift to digital extension:

- a. Hosting Webinars about agriculture and environmental topics such as the ALUS Program. These will be both live and recorded.
- b. Producing “How-to-Videos” that teach people how to use on-line tools like Google Earth, on the farm or ranch.
- c. Having large-audience “Virtual Movie Premieres” of features that increase the general public’s awareness about agriculture, like the recent on-line showing of “Guardians of the Grasslands” by our Know to Grow Project
- d. Building community-of-practice “Facebook Group” pages, where people can get together virtually and discuss specific topics in a secure on-line setting, away from trolls and spammers. So far, we have built these Facebook Groups for the Know to Grow Project, and for ALUS farmers and ranchers. To find us, go to Facebook, and search “Know to Grow connect relate cultivate” or “Ecosystem Services Produced Here”. Or send us an email and we will connect that way.
- e. Showcasing “virtual tours” of on-farm ALUS projects. With a few videos and/or photos and some recorded narration, we can take people to ALUS Projects up close, and explain what our farmers and ranchers are doing to increase ecosystem services on their operations.

- f. One-on-one phone calls to help producers tackle things like Environmental Farm Plans or CAP funding applications.
- g. Sharing information about the many other fantastic extension activities that others are doing.

With time and experience, this digital extension should get better and better. And, we’ll learn new ways to do it. There are many advantages to this approach, not the least of which, is that digital extension offers maximum flexibility for our audience / participants. That said, eventually we can get back to ALSO doing face-to-face extension again, like field days and tours. We’ll just have a larger number of tools in our extension toolbox.

To find out more about Red Deer County Agriculture Services’ digital extension efforts, please email us at agriculture@rdcounty.ca, give us a call anytime at 403-342-8654 or visit www.rdcounty.ca. If you have a topic that you would like us to tackle, please let us know.




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GREY WOODED FORAGE ASSOCIATION

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2020/21 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

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

Renewal New member How should we send your copy of *The Blade*: Email Canada Post

Name: _____ Email: _____

Mailing address: _____

Landline: _____ 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: