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# JULY 2018

## Director's Note - Rod Vergouwen

*Greetings Foothills Members!*



Happy Canada Day to all. We were able to spend the weekend with friends and family boating, fishing and enjoying time away from the ranch. Calving has just wrapped up here and we are going to put up some hay in the coming weeks to rebuild our slush fund of winter feed and make plans for the coming winter. Last winter proved that we need to have plan A,B and C in your management structure. Our cows swath grazed until the middle of March and then we bought silage to get through till the snow left before we could get to stockpiled grass. This changed our management from 45 minutes every 3 days to 2.5 hours per day which increased feeding cost dramatically. The cows were able to dig through 2.5 feet of snow with no trouble and snowshoes made it easier to move fences. Winter feed costs can be one of the highest expenses of cow herd management so don't abandon low cost strategies because of one bad winter. We try to make winter feeding plans in summer (at the lake) and summer grazing plans in winter (by the fire).

Keep calm and fish on

Rod Vergouwen



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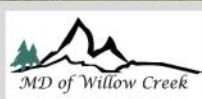
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# Fencing; Back to Basics



File Photo

The growth of electric fencing, both as a necessary tool on farm and a way to maximize ROI from newer crop/forage varieties, has been steep to say the least. Unfortunately, with that increased usage, we see a lot of the basic steps overlooked and these are crucial for a successful experience. I find myself responding to the same scenarios over and over, so I thought an educational article might be helpful!

The conversation often starts with a concern over lower than desired voltage on the fence and can usually be solved by a few simple steps.

We need to start by understanding the need for galvanized ground rods (1 ground rod per 2 output joules is a starting point). A good grounding system is needed to keep the most voltage available for the fence, and to encourage the pulse to travel through

the soil back to the ground rods after animal contact. These must be galvanized—rebar or anything made of mixed metals can rust, which creates an insulated covering on the steel.

Therefore, the pulse cannot be drawn back through the soil to the ground rods. We see only limited or no shock on fence when using rebar. So basically, no ground = no shock. Because the galvanized rods are connected to the negative terminal, the pulse runs back to the fencer where it “completes the cycle.” It is at this point that the animal feels the shock. FYI—I’m not talking about a live ground/return system (that’s for another article!)—I’m assuming all wires on the fence are live to keep it simple.

Next, we have to get our minds around how easy (or hard) it is to move power around your fence structure. Just buying a fencer that has a lot of joule power available doesn’t mean you have built a structure to utilize or encourage that power to move around the fence. I hear a lot of ranchers say they have just bought a fencer 2x or 3x more powerful than their old one but don’t see any more voltage on the fence. This all comes down to flow and resistance. One single strand of 12.5-gauge high tensile fence carries 56 OHMs/mile of

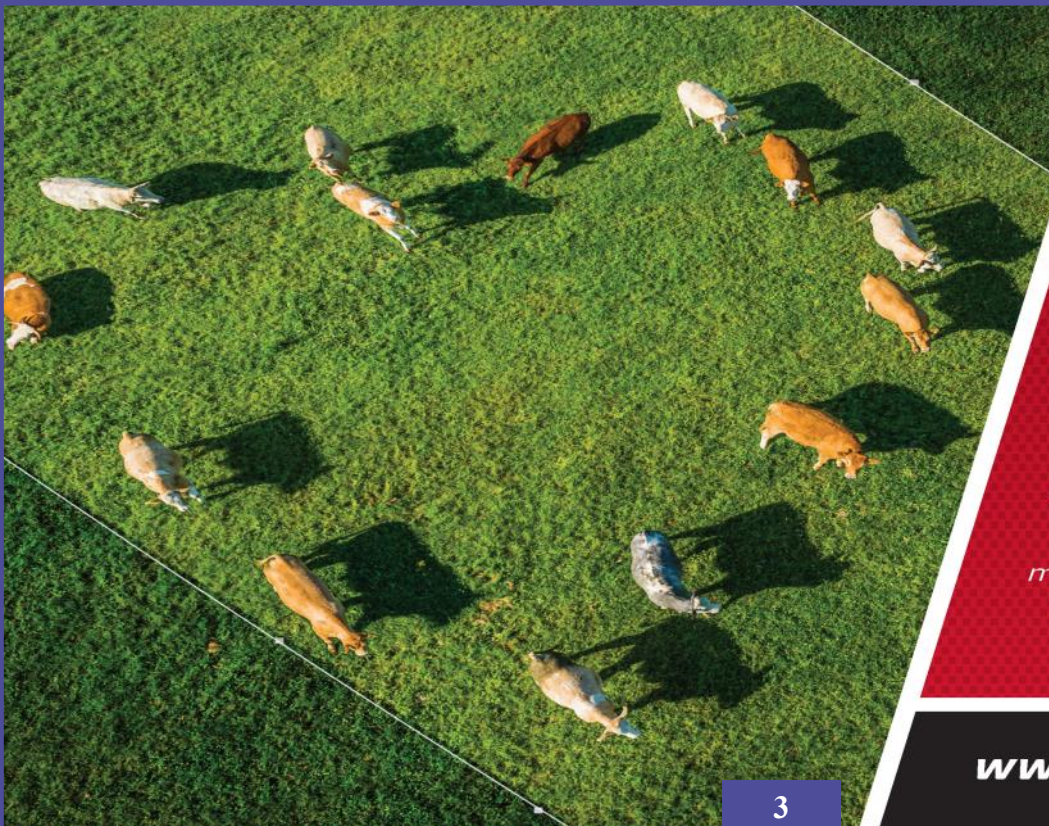
resistance. Two strands of 12.5-gauge wire on the fence structure lowers the resistance by half—28 OHMs/mile and so on. Thus, the more strands on the fence, the easier it is to move power.

You can think of this like water flowing through a pipe. Water will flow much easier through a 2-inch pipe than a ¾-inch pipe. Power works the same way—more strands on the fence creates an easier flow for the electricity. Without enough flow even the largest energizer simply cannot release its potential power.

You also need to think about flow when hooking a lead-out cable up to the red or hot terminal. If you lead out with a single 12.5-gauge wire, you are instantly choking off the flow directly at the fencer, because again, it’s restricted to 56 OHMS. I recommend using 10-gauge aluminum undergate cable to go from the fencer to the structure. This is 8x more efficient (think of it like 8 strands of 12.5-gauge wire), so you can utilize all available power. You should also use this aluminum cable to go under gateways etc., to prevent other power choking points.

The majority of the time, addressing these two issues will greatly

*(Continued on page 4)*



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# Fencing; Back to Basics

(Continued from page 3)

increase the voltage found on the fence itself, and you will sleep a lot sounder this summer!

In closing, as a reminder, if you have seeded crops to be grazed this winter, get those animals trained EARLY—don't try to accomplish this at turnout...in a blizzard...on icy ground!

- Electric Fence Vocabulary-
- High-tensile: very strong under tension
- Fencer: Machine that transfer power from source to fence (charger, energizer)
- Joule: Unit of power
- Output Joule: Actual power put on fence
- Stored Joule: Power capacity (not

actual power)

By Jason Williams, Electric Fence Specialist at Tru-Test Group

## Are You Ready for a Drone?

Drones are a relatively inexpensive way to locate cattle in big pastures so you know where to ride and start gathering.



John Church, an associate professor in the natural resource sciences department of Thompson Rivers University at Kamloops, B.C., an area with semi-arid grassland, forested range and many large ranches, says some ranchers in this vast range country hire helicopters to find lost cattle. "It's expensive, at \$1,000 to \$1,500 an hour. You could buy a drone for that, and fly the area many times," says Church.

Church is also the B.C. regional innovation chair in cattle industry sustainability. His job is to bring new technology to the table, to try and make ranching more sustainable. He first started working on drones five years ago when he watched children playing with them in a park. "This is a great way to extend your vision — and a huge benefit to cattle ranchers," he says.

"If you want to look at what's over the ridge or in a group of trees, or some other place you can't access readily or immediately, this is a nice tool. We did

tests, out of curiosity, to see how fast you can get across a pasture to look at water troughs. We had a person on a quad, versus one of my students using a drone. There is no comparison; the drone was so much quicker. It can save time and labour in simple things like checking water troughs, mineral feeders or inspecting fence lines," he says.

Before you turn cattle out on summer pastures you could send a drone around the fences to see if a tree blew down on the fence over winter, or a herd of elk tore down a section of fence — or if gates were left open by hunters.

"In the past it took a lot of time to check fences, and when you find a problem you need to have the right tools and materials to fix it. If you already checked the fence with a drone, you could go right to the problem and have the proper things for repair.

You'd know whether you might need to take a chain saw to get trees off a fence, or some new posts. Twenty minutes of flying time could save hours of travel in rough terrain. Then you'd only have to go to the areas that need repair.

Drones can also come in handy for checking water troughs and gates in remote locations. If a water trough quits working, you could know about it sooner, and go fix it. You can pre-program drones to run a route, such as checking a fence. With a drone, you can check pastures more often or more closely, to find out if there is something unusual, or if the neighbour's bull is in with your cows.

If you want to use a drone for checking and monitoring cattle, take a

little time to get them used to it, advises Church.

"The first time we fly over they may look up and might move away a little, but if you don't herd them and nothing happens, they quickly accept it. The next day, they realize it won't hurt them. The noise is a continuous hum and doesn't startle them. The larger drones actually disturb cattle less because they don't have the higher-pitched noise of a smaller one. Cattle seem to get used to the bigger drones very quickly," explains Church.

### Potential uses

New technology has potential, including the active RFID tags. Passive RFID tags must be within one or two metres of the reader but active RFID tags could be read from a distance. Instead of having to scan the whole pasture to know where the livestock are, the drone gets high enough to see them, and might be able to read those tags.

"We're thinking of building an antenna to read RF2 ultra-high-frequency cattle tags. We've been able to pick up signals from the new RFID ear tags three to five miles away and have been testing solar-powered ear tags from a company in Utah," says Church.

"For the future, we are also trying to get some network tags that can talk to each other. This means that if you find one cow, you can find them all, since those tags are all linked together. We can get that information (GPS positions) into the Cloud. You can know where your cow is, and also get temperature information."

Cameras are now built into the

(Continued on page 5)





# CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

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## Canadian Agricultural Partnership

The *Canadian Agricultural Partnership* is a five-year, \$3 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the agriculture and agri-food sector.

The *Partnership* features:

- simplified and streamlined programs and services that are easier to access
- key enhancements to programs that help farmers manage significant risks that threaten the viability of their farm and are beyond their capacity to manage

## Federal Programs and Activities

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada delivers federal programs under the *Canadian Agricultural Partnership* aimed at generating economic growth in the agricultural sector.

## Cost-Shared programs by federal, provincial and territorial governments

Federal, provincial and territorial governments are also continuing to work towards bilateral agreements. This investment will be cost-shared on a 60:40 basis and delivered by provinces and territories to ensure programs are tailored to meet regional needs. To be eligible for

## Here's to the RANCHER

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funding producers must have a current (within 10 years) Environmental Farm Plan.

Programs that are currently accepting applications from producers in Alberta are;

- 1) Environmental Stewardship and Climate Change – Producer
  - Grazing Management (follow the link to see what grazing entails)
  - Manure and Livestock Facilities Management
  - Agricultural Input and Waste Management
- 2) Farm Water Supply
  - Projects identified, by an Agriculture and Forestry Water Specialist (prior to starting project and incurring any expenses), as a Long-Term Water Management Plan (LTWMP)
- 3) Irrigation Efficiency
  - New low-pressure centre pivot (replaces gravity, side-wheel or high-pressure centre pivot)
  - Retrofit high-pressure centre pivot to low-pressure centre pivot; including booster pumps, nozzle packages and pump modifications
  - High-efficiency sprinkler nozzles & related equipment to upgrade an existing low-pressure centre pivot
  - Variable-rate irrigation equipment
  - Control panel upgrades
  - Surface or subsurface drip irrigation to replace gravity, side-wheel or high-pressure centre pivots

For more information on these programs or to see if your project qualifies contact 310-FARM (3276)

### Improvements to business risk management programs



Photo credit: Sonja Bloom

Under the *Canadian Agricultural Partnership*, BRM programs will continue to help producers manage significant risks that threaten the viability of their farm and are beyond their capacity to manage.

For more information please visit; <https://cap.alberta.ca/CAP/Programs/role/Primary%20Producer-Farmer-Rancher>



For more information on CAP and the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan (including Renew-al) please contact Sonja Bloom—Environmental & Communications Coordinator with FFGA at 403.995.9466

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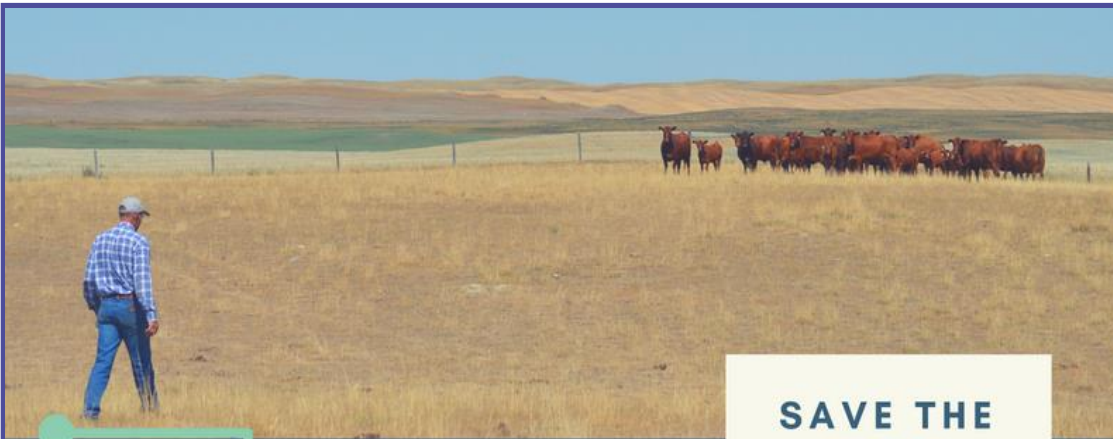


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## FFGA MISSION & VISION STATEMENTS

**Mission:** Assisting producers in profitably improving their forages and regenerating their soils through innovation and education.

**Vision:** We envision a global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

This Publication is made possible by our two major funders - the Agriculture Opportunity Fund and Alberta Agriculture and Forestry.



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