



GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS



Unit 4A, 710 Centre St. SE, High River, AB T1V 1E8

Phone: (403) 995-9466 ~ www.foothillsforage.com

April 2018

Director's Note- Andy Hart

Greetings from the banks of Willow Creek! Sometimes the hardest part of writing these directors notes is coming up with a theme. No shortage this winter. Snow and lots of it, and feed shortages. This has been an old fashioned winter that I believe the Old Farmers Almanac predicted. It wasn't ideal timing for producers south of Highway One. After stifling drought last summer and short feed supplies, this winter has been a trial.

We are fortunate to have some irrigation and a reasonably good crop of swath grazing which actually gave us a couple of weeks more than we had budgeted for, this in spite of feeding a large mob of mule deer for most of the winter. The explosion in the deer population could be the topic for a whole other article. However once we started feeding bales in February the tedium of daily chores quickly lost its lustre, especially when one considered the cash market value of each bale as we hauled it to the cows.

A grain farmer friend of mine was saying that by the end of the first week of April last year they already had over 2000 acres in the ground. I'm no expert, but I cant see that happening this year. When we do finally get into the field, crop decisions will be based on expanding our swath grazing potential and replenishing our bale yards which I expect will be completely empty. We have purchased a couple of loads of hay to get us into May. I do not want to write anymore of those cheques before spring grass arrives. Come on sunshine.

This is my first directors note as the newly minted chair of FFGA. On behalf of the membership and the board of directors I wish to thank Graeme Finn whose term has come to an end as director. We will miss your voice at the board table. I would also like to thank Sean Labrie who has stepped down after three years as chair but continues as a director for another two years. I know I have big shoes to fill. We elected two new directors at the recent AGM. We welcome Justin Blades of Nanton for a return engagement as he previously served as a director a number of years ago. We also welcome a brand new director in Mike Roberts. Mike is and has been the manager of the Waldron Grazing Co-op for the past ten years . He brings a wealth of experience in grazing systems and should be a real asset to the board and to FFGA.

By the time this is circulated we will be welcoming Laura Gibney back from her maternity leave to resume her role as Manager of FFGA. Which means we will also be bidding farewell to our interim Manager Jennifer Duckering. Jennifer has done a very capable job filling in for Laura and keeping our board and FFGA on track. She took a leading role in helping organize the Western Canada Conference on Grazing and Soil Health last fall, which was highly successful and no small task. Jennifer has also organized the move to our new office in High River. Thank you Jennifer for all you have done.

May your calving go smoothly and spring work be successful and safe. May you have rain when you need it and the heat to make things grow. We will see you down the road at FFGA sponsored events this season.

Happy Trails
Andy Hart

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Managers Note

I am excited to report that 2017 was a very successful year for the FFGA! We partnered in the record setting delivery of 24 events with attendance totalling over 1,600 producers from across our region and beyond. Event highlights from 2017 include the Nicole Masters Soil Schools, Jim Gerrish 3-day Grazing School and the Western Canada Conference on Soil Health & Grazing. Our membership has increased by over 100 new Farm Business Units in just one year to a total of 265, which quantifies the significant growth of the association.

As Interim Manager for the past 14 months, I have found producers who are Foothills Forage Members to be forward thinking, passionate and very receptive to the leading-edge information from researchers, producers and industry representatives that are showcased at our events. New faces are showing up at our workshops and new members are joining us from adjacent counties asking us to deliver our services there as well. Recently this year, Cardston County joined us as a partner and we are thrilled to be delivering extension events to Cardston residents this year!

The past year has been a very rewarding experience and I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting the dedicated FFGA members, Board of Directors, government representatives, staff at our sister associations and our county and corporate partners. The passion for forages and regenerative agriculture in this community is electric and inspiring. As I return home at the end of April to take care of my two farmers-in-training this summer before my eldest starts school in the fall (PreK!), I will happily look back at my time here and cheer on the future growth of the FFGA. With more funding and staff, the potential for Foothills Forage is vast and impressive and I am excited for Laura to pursue this endless list of opportunities and offer even more to the growing membership.

It has been a privilege to be a part of this team. Thank you to the membership for sharing your energy, knowledge and passion for agriculture with my family and I.

Sincerely,

Jen Duckering

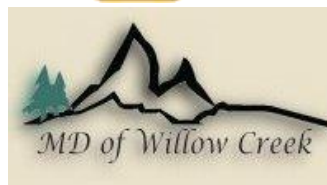
Jennifer Duckering, P.Ag.
Interim Manager



Thank you for your support!



Mountain View
COUNTY



Where do all the cows graze in Alberta?

While the Alberta cow herd has stopped shrinking, it has not yet rebounded back.

“The positive returns for the cow/calf producers over the last few years indicates the Alberta cow herd has finally stopped shrinking,” says Herman Simons, farm business management specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. “In fact, the total beef cow numbers for 2016 show a small increase of about 13,500 head as compared to 2011.”

The largest reduction in cows since the 2006 census inventory was in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor in 2011.

“Since then, this region has rebounded somewhat while the North-East and the West have continued to shrink in total head of cows,” says Simons. “The southern region (all counties below Calgary) seems to have rebounded the best – however, this region also saw the lowest reduction in numbers. The south had a reduction of 48,000 head in 2011, as compared to 2006, which is ‘only’ an 11% reduction as compared to most of the rest of Alberta (Peace, West, North - East and the Edmonton-Calgary corridor) which saw cow herds reduce between 28 and 37% in the same period.”

Simons says it is welcome seeing some stability, and even a minimum amount of growth, in a sector that plays such an important role in the Alberta economy. “All regions (other than the West and North -East) have seen an increase of cow numbers since 2011. Most of that occurred in the South (8% increase from 2011) and East (5% increase from 2011).”

At the same time, he says, the number of farms is reducing. “This decline seems to be faster for the beef sector in Alberta as compared to the average of all Canadian farms. There was a reduction of just over 10% of Alberta cow/calf producers in 2016 from 2011, as compared to the Canadian average of about 6% for the same period for all farmers.”

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Final Reminder to Renew 2018 Foothills Forage Membership and stay on the ‘*information hi-way!*’

\$30.00/year

Payment & Renewal Forms Available
ONLINE at:

[www.foothillsforage.com/
membership](http://www.foothillsforage.com/membership)

We hope you join us!

**Memberships are valid from January 1 to
December 31 of the respective year*

***FFGA Membership covers one farm business
unit or family and 1 vote at the Annual General
Meeting*



SAVE the DATE!

JULY 24th-25th, 2018

15th Annual!

Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women

Stavelly, AB

TOPICS INCLUDE:

Verified Sustainable Beef Program

Grazing Research

Utilizing Electric Fencing

Range Health

Plant ID

Grazing Principles and Practices

Riparian Health

For more info contact:

Kristi Stebanuk @

403-382-4345

kstebanuk@cowsandfish.org



Follow us on Facebook!
“Grazing School
for Women”





Agri Stability

AgriStability: What is in it for the producer?

Agriculture is one of the vital sectors of the economy as it constitutes the backbone of food security for a nation. But it is also one of the riskiest due to its dependence on weather phenomena that producers are unable to control.

Because of the importance it carries and the risks it faces, governments have always supported agricultural sector in a number of ways, including by offering insurance programs for agricultural producers. AgriStability is one of the most comprehensive of such programs, maintained under Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), the new federal/provincial/territorial cooperation framework to support farmers nationwide.

The concept on which AgriStability is based on was first instituted as a provincial program in Alberta in 1995 under the name of Farm Income Stabilization Program (FISP), and continued until 2002 after its name was changed to Farm Income Disaster Program (FIDP) in 1996.

In the meantime, the federal government also started a similar farm income stabilization program in 1998, which lasted until 2002. In 2003 Canadian Agriculture Income Stabilization (CAIS) was introduced, merging federal and provincial farm income stability programs to ensure consistency throughout the country.

It was in 2007 that the program assumed its current name and was enacted as part of the Growing Forward I framework and was maintained in Growing Forward II and most recently in CAP with minor changes along the way.

Changes that have been introduced under the CAP agreement are aimed at making enrolling and participating in the program easier for new and returning participants. The changes provide for a more streamlined process for calculation of fees and reduced information requirements for program participation. Details can be found in the new AgriStability booklet available at AFSC branch offices throughout the province.

Benefits of AgriStability

One of the most important aspects of the AgriStability program is the holistic approach it takes to farming operations: It provides whole farm protection against significant margin declines that may result from a range of factors, including production loss, price declines and increased input costs. With such a comprehensive scope, AgriStability allows farmers to benefit from coverage that may not be provided under other business risk management programs.

And such coverage comes at a quite a low cost: The premium is \$315 per \$100,000 of coverage based on the historical margin of the farming operation. The minimum fee to participate is \$45 and the annual administration fee is \$55. In return, the program provides assistance to producers who suffer from margin declines greater than 30 per cent due to the factors mentioned above. The fact that the coverage under the AgriStability is specifically based on the history of a farm's unique operational data makes the program even more fitting to any farmer's risk management options.

The 2016 program year was a difficult one for farmers throughout Alberta, mainly because of the early onset of winter which left almost a million acres unharvested and a decline in cattle market. As of March 20, 2018, AgriStability has processed 56 per cent of the 2016 program year claims. For 24 per cent of that 56 per cent, eligible participants have received \$135 million. It is estimated that the 2016 program year will payout over \$200 million. This figure compares with over \$158 million in payments for the 2013-2015 period.

And there is further benefit to be derived from being a participant in the AgriStability program: A farmer's participation can be used as security to access credit options under the Advance Payments Program (APP), a federal loan guarantee program that allows producers to access low interest cash advances, up to \$400,000 per program year, with federal government reimbursing the interest on the first \$100,000 to the producer.

Deadline to enroll in the AgriStability program is April 30. More information on the program is available on the AFSC website (www.afsc.ca) and AFSC branch offices throughout the province.

Mustafa Eric,

Media Coordinator

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation



FIELD CROP DISEASE

The Alberta Plant Health Lab (APHL) is looking forward to spring and would like to extend a friendly reminder about the services offered at the lab. Research associations, such as Foothills Forage, can continue to submit plant tissue*, weeds and insect samples for testing (*currently not including clubroot testing).

The lab is equipped to diagnose field crop diseases, including bacteria, fungi, some viruses, as well as other disease-causing agents. Weed and insect specimens can be identified to the species level.

The lab provides the ability to accurately diagnose both existing and new plant pests, to provide regulatory support to target groups. Diagnostic testing is free of charge to research associations, and samples can be sent in through these channels. Specific sampling is required and full information can be found at:

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/prm16058](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/prm16058)

The lab is open and does accept samples year-round (greenhouse, post-harvest or storage pathogens as well), and we look forward to continue working with you this growing season!

Contact Us

Alberta Plant Health Lab
Crop Diversification Centre North
17507 Fort Road NW
Edmonton Alberta T5Y 6H3

Dr. Jie Feng, 780-644-3436
Krista Zuzak, 780-638-3996
Yalong Yang, 780-638-3998
planthealthlab@gov.ab.ca

June 15 - 16, 2018 Beaupre Community Hall RANGE & PASTURE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Topics Covered Include:

- Grazing Strategies & Range Health
- Stewardship Programs
- Watering Systems
- Plant Identification

Everyone Welcome

Most of Saturday will be spent in the field identifying common rangeland plant species. Dress appropriately for the weather, bring water and snacks.

Call or email Andrew Richmond to Register *Limited Space

403-673-3611 ext. 241

andrew.richmond@mdbighorn.ca

Registration Deadline: June 8th

Workshop Cost: \$20 per person

Includes Saturday Afternoon BBQ

FREE Camping Available on Site (no water, power)



WATER

& Agriculture Conference

SAVE
the
DATE

NOVEMBER 22, 2018

Learn about: Managing environmental risks, How agriculture and wetlands can coexist, Understanding what the Alberta Wetland Policy means to you, Projects for grazing sensitive areas, Repairing riparian areas to increase profit, Identifying and rehabilitating buffer zones, Making the most of marginal land, Agriculture water footprint & social license

SAVE THE DATE

9TH ANNUAL
CFGa CONFERENCE

NOV. 14-15, 2018
CALGARY, ALBERTA | SHERATON CAVALIER

FOUNDATION FORAGE: BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP

CANADIANFGA.CA



Canadian Forage & Grassland Association
Association canadienne pour les plantes fourragères

JOB OPPORTUNITY

University of Alberta

Ranch Foreman

Mattheis Ranch,
Duchess, Alberta

Details available at:

<http://www.careers.ualberta.ca/Competition/S108135369/>



Connect with the FFGA on social media!



"Do you have lands that are adjacent to a stream, river, lake or wetland?"

Join Rocky View County in a two-day workshop on May 31st & June 1st. Learn how to conduct a site assessment, assess the health, benefits and potential uses of riparian (green zone) lands on your property. This \$20 course will include a visit to a local property and help you develop a plan for your own property. The location and agenda will be released on the Rocky View County Agricultural Events Page and FFGA website soon so be sure to watch

<https://www.rockyview.ca/Agriculture/AgriculturalEvents.aspx> or www.foothillsforage.com for additional information. This workshop is being held in partnership with Rocky View County, AWES, Cows & Fish and FFGA."



BURSARY RECIPIENTS

Foothills Forage and Grazing Association is pleased to introduce the recipients of the \$500 Scholarships awarded to 2 deserving applicants. The Association believes in fostering youth advancing in the industry and giving back in their communities.



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

I would like to extend my greatest thanks to the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association board and member community for choosing me as a recipient for the annual bursary. Out of most people in the world, ranchers know the value of a dollar and are quite effective at stretching those dollars as far as they can go. As a student, it is no different and this bursary will go very far in helping me finish up my degree program in December of 2018! I look forward to meeting new friends this summer at one of the events and wish everyone the best in the upcoming season!

Graydon Garner



I would like to thank the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association for selecting me as a 2018 bursary winner and supporting my post-secondary education. My name is Jack Vergouwen and I grew up on a ranch east of Strathmore where my family and I run a mixed cow/calf and grain operation.

I am currently in my 3rd year at Olds College, pursuing a degree in the Bachelor of Applied Science - Agribusiness Program. Following my 3rd year at Olds College I will be travelling to New Zealand and Australia to finish my degree. By obtaining a degree in this program, I hope to get a job in the agriculture industry and eventually be able to apply my knowledge to my family farm and contribute to its future success and sustainability.

Thank you again for supporting my post-secondary education as well as the future of the agriculture industry.

Jack Vergouwen

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Continued from page 4...

This reduction in the number of farms means herds are getting larger. In the last 15 years, the average herd size has increased by 50% from 63 cows to 95 cows per farm. There is a large difference between the different counties. Larger farms are found in the counties of Ranchland No. 66 (average herd size of 231 cows), Special Areas 2 & 4 (173 & 194 head respectively) and Cardston County (170 head). The counties with on average the smallest herd size are Mackenzie (34 head), Strathcona (40 head), Fairview (52 head), Lamont and Sturgeon Counties (54 head each).

Simons says cows are also moving away from their traditional areas. "For instance, the counties along the Hwy 2 corridor between Edmonton and Calgary have seen a drop of close to 40% in number of cows since 2001, when almost 500,000 head were grazing in this region, to just over 300,000 in 2016. High land value and improved crop revenue are likely to have played major roles in this."

Southern Alberta seems to be one of the exceptions to this as cow numbers have rebounded to pre-BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) levels of about 398,000 head and are almost at 404,000 head in 2016. "The current challenges related to the bovine tuberculosis (TB) issue are not included in these numbers, as TB became an issue after the census data was collected. The counties of Cardston and Cypress are notable as the cow herd increased from 2001 levels by about 12,500 head to just over 107,500 total in 2016. With almost 62,000 beef cows, Cypress County had the highest numbers in Alberta in 2016."

Eastern Alberta has mostly recovered in cow numbers as well. The current numbers are at about 374,000 head in 2001, down to just over 371,000 in 2016.

"The only other region, other than Southern Alberta, that has seen an increase in cow numbers is the Peace, likely due to lower land values and the availability of more marginal land. Cows numbers there have increased by about 15% from 2001 to about 123,000."

As always, says Simons, it's clear that profitability is the driving force behind decreases and increases of production. "Having said that, it also seems that other factors are at play that determine the location of the beef herd. Grassland is competing with crop production and it seems that where good productive dryland is available cows are slowly moving away as that grassland is converted into crop. These animals are instead moved towards areas where there is more low cost, marginal land that is more suitable for grass and forage production than for crop."

[www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/anim14733](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/anim14733)

This information published to the web on February 10, 2016 **Herman Simons** 403-742-7571

Regions:	Number of Beef Cows by Region				Year to Year Changes				
	2001	2006	2011	2016	01 to 06	06 to 11	11 to 16	06 to 16	01 to 16
Ed'ton-Calgary Corridor	489,970	420,812	292,057	301,990	-14%	-31%	3%	-28%	-38%
Peace and North	106,614	187,722	120,050	123,043	76%	-36%	2%	-34%	15%
North East	382,866	381,888	290,427	256,192	0%	-24%	-12%	-33%	-33%
South	398,516	421,291	373,144	403,728	6%	-11%	8%	-4%	1%
East	374,143	437,446	355,114	371,506	17%	-19%	5%	-15%	-1%
West	200,389	182,859	127,908	115,776	-9%	-30%	-9%	-37%	-42%

Board of Directors

President:

Andy Hart

(403) 625-2060

*Vice President and Treasurer
to be announced*

Directors:

Sean LaBrie

(403) 999-3089

Rod Vergouwen

(403) 934-6228

Morrie Goetjen

(403) 863-7484

Tamara Garstin

(403) 333-0376

Justin Blades

(403) 646-5952

Mike Roberts

(403) 625-2348

Alex Robertson

(403) 558-3799

Ben Campbell

(403) 803-9190

Steve Yule

(403) 734-2517

Stan Wiebe

(403) 888-7797

Staff

Interim Manager:

Jennifer Duckering

manager@foothillsforage.com

Cell: (403) 560-0927

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.

