



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

Unit 4A, 710 Centre St. SE, High River, AB T1V 0H3

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

GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS DECEMBER 2021

Director's Note - Tanis Cross

Howdy folks!

I hope this note finds you all healthy and well, this is our last newsletter of 2021. Sending you all the best celebrating the holidays and bringing in the new year.

These mild temperatures through the fall have me grateful. The winds may be strong, but it has been helpful for many, not having a few inches or a few feet of snow to gather the pairs in for weaning. It has made shipping out nice and smooth with dry ground. Here at the A7 Ranche, we have successfully transitioned over from a cow/calf operation to a grass yearling operation. Feeling thankful that our springs held up over the dry months to water our yearlings. We have learned a lot about our gravity fed water systems here. We were able to experiment on the SW end of the ranch with a water containment set up as well as a float system in our troughs. The experiment held up well and we are looking forward to developing more in the new year.

This year was our first year grazing straight grass-fed yearlings. Our grazing program has been a big learning curve for me and will be a continual learning for sure. We have been able to graze as many grass yearlings as we have due to our water. We are thankful to be located in a mild part of Alberta where we are fortunate to have good springs and moisture. The shorter the graze periods with a large herd size, is how we've been able to graze successfully. Rest periods are important and adjustable, I learned this year that we can be flexible. I get so caught up on going right by the book or stick to the equation. Learning from many, that it's helpful to determine your goal, then work back from there. Soil health has a lot of science to it, sometimes I get scared away from that topic. Remembering to

go back to the basics, go back to nature, go for a walk, dig a hole in a few different fields, using your eyes and hands you can learn so much. A new challenge for me this fall was being on the ball with record keeping, scanning cattle in and out, buying and selling at the same time. Thankful for a great program, Herd Trax, their support and patience teaching me has been so helpful

I am excited to report that we completed our EFP for our ranch. Thanks to Sonja and Kayla for training us to get through the report. I would recommend booking in with them, I'm sure if I did it alone, I would pick it up and put it down for weeks until its complete. Having the girls support and training, we were able to complete it in one day.

At the FFGA, we are proud to be able to put on more in person events this winter. I feel that a lot of us head home with a lot more motivation after being able to chat with other producers/grazing operations. December's event is fast approaching, on December 8th head out to Wheatland County to our Managing Risk event. We've got three great speakers lined up. The vent will be held at the Administration Office, just east of Strathmore.

Happy Holidays from our home to yours,

Tanis Cross

Photo: a7 Ranche celebrating 135 years this year. 1887-2022



IN THIS ISSUE

Feeding cattle this winter is all about striking the right balance

2 & 3

Producers say beef boom passing them by

5

Matchmaking: Select cattle genetics that are a fit for your operation

6

Feeding cattle this winter is all about striking the right balance



Photo: Barry Yaremciio

Determine your priorities, feed test, and then take a look at alternate feed sources

“Keeping the rumen healthy has to be a priority but that doesn’t mean hay or silage has to be 100 per cent of the ration,” says feed expert Barry Yaremciio.

Whether feeding in a normal year or through a drought, cattle producers need to look at nutrition from a “40,000-foot vantage point” to make the most of their feed.

“No matter what we’re doing, we’re always striving to get that perfect mix and perfect balance so that everything is used to its optimum,” Barry Yaremciio of Yaremciio Ag Consulting said during a Grey Wooded Forage Association webinar early this month.

“We’re always trying to get an improvement in the overall nutrition of that animal.”

The two most limiting factors in a cow’s diet tend to be protein and energy, and those requirements will change

depending on where the animal is in the breeding season.

“That’s what makes feeding beef cows so difficult. There’s a lot of variables here,” said Kristen Ritson-Bennett, a ruminant nutritionist at Blue Rock Animal Nutrition and another webinar presenter.

A cow’s greatest requirements are at peak lactation and calving, which generally happens during the winter months in beef cow feeding systems in Alberta. The lowest requirements are at weaning in the late summer and fall.

So when building a ration, it’s important to target a cow’s total digestible nutrients (TDN) at 55 per cent during mid-gestation, 60 per cent at late gestation, and 65 per cent at lactation. There’s a similar strategy for crude protein, with targets of seven per cent, nine per cent, and 11 per cent for each of those different stages.

It’s also important to target less than 60 per cent neutral detergent fiber (NDF), which are the fiber components in the feed.

“For dry-matter intake, we’re aiming for about 2.3 to 2.5 per cent of the body weight,” she said. “But it’s going to limit dry-matter intake if it goes over 60 per cent.”

So in a year like this one, where feed availability is limited, it will be critical to focus on quality — and, of course, that will also be a challenge be-

cause of the drought and heat wave.

“Maturity of the plant is certainly going to have an impact (on feed quality),” said Ritson-Bennett. “More mature plants have higher quality. But this year, a lot of immature plants were harvested, and that’s reflected in the feed tests that we’re seeing so far.”

It’s the opposite when grazing crop regrowth, though, added Yaremciio.

“Cereal crops, canola crops, pea crops — almost anything can be grazed,” he said. “The big thing is, the younger the plant material is, the higher the quality.”

Developing a winter-feeding plan starts with determining whether energy or protein is your greatest need, says Kristen Ritson-Bennett. “Corn is the cheapest form of energy, but it’s the most expensive form of protein,” she says.

But when feeding a crop that’s been stressed by drought (or any other environmental factor), producers need to consider nitrate accumulation in all forage crops and the high sulphur content specific to any canola regrowth.

“Unfortunately, when you get over one per cent nitrate, you can have problems with nitrate toxicity,” said Yaremciio. “The most common symptom is that cows are found dead by hypoxia.

“But with proper acclimatization, you shouldn’t have any troubles feeding one per cent nitrate.”

(Continued on page 3)

On the Cover: Winter Feeding Tour 2007, Cows in Corn Photo: FFGA

Thank you to our municipal supporters!



Kneehill
COUNTY



(Continued from page 2)

Sulphur, on the other hand, should be kept below 0.4 per cent.

“Bacteria and micro-organisms in the rumen are sensitive to lower pH and die off,” he said, adding that can contribute to issues such as polio in cattle.

“There are some reports that say that high-forage rations can be fed up to 0.55 per cent Sulphur, but if I want to sleep at night, I usually keep it at 0.4 per cent.”

Supplementing feed

Beyond that, it's important to consider which feed alternatives will have the best fit on the farm.

“This year what we're finding is that a lot of people are being forced to use straw or other material that is generally considered to be lower-quality protein than normal, but some of the options we have available are peas, lentils, and corn or wheat distillers' grains,” said Yaremicio.

“Granted the price is high, but they're all up in the 20 to 30 per cent protein range and the energy contents are good.”

Cows can eat “any kind of fiber,

as long as it's balanced,” he added.

“You have to keep the rumen healthy and functioning properly. It does not mean you have to feed hay or silage at 100 per cent of the ration.”

Oats, super oats, barley, wheat, triticale, and corn can all be used to supplement energy requirements.

“They're all really good options, but we have to evaluate the cost of these things,” said Ritson-Bennett. “So what I did this year — and I probably reinvented the wheel — was break it out so that I could easily and quickly identify what was the best value for my money.”

The first step is identifying what you actually need — protein or energy.

“You have to look at it from a value per pound of energy or protein,” she said. “In this case, corn is the cheapest form of energy, but it's the most expensive form of protein. So if you needed protein on farm, corn would not be your best choice.”

That's where feed testing comes in, and in a year like this one, that will be more critical than ever.

“I sure like taking the guess-work out of it. I hate guessing,” said

Ritson-Bennett, adding that it's important to take representative samples and ask to include tests for Sulphur, nitrate, ergot, and other potential issues in the feed.

“If you've feed tested, you can evaluate which commodity is going to be best suited for your farm. It's not going to be the same everywhere — it's really going to depend on your operation. But if we have some parameters to work around, that's definitely helpful.

“We can meet the requirements of the animal at whatever stage she's in and identify problems, whether that's mycotoxins, nitrates, sulphates, mineral imbalances, or an energy or protein shortfall. At the end of the day, that's going to save you money, so why wouldn't you do it?”

Author: Jennifer Blair

Original Article: [https://](https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/livestock/feeding-cattle-this-winter-is-all-about-striking-the-right-balance/)

www.albertafarmexpress.ca/livestock/feeding-cattle-this-winter-is-all-about-striking-the-right-balance/



2022 Bursary

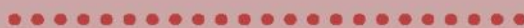
Calling all post-secondary students!

Are you enrolled in a full-time program that will contribute to the future of the forage & livestock industry? If that is a 'yes', this bursary is for you!



To apply visit:

<https://www.foothillsforage.com/bursary2022>



Deadline to apply in January 9, 2022. All qualification requirements can be found online when applying for the bursary.

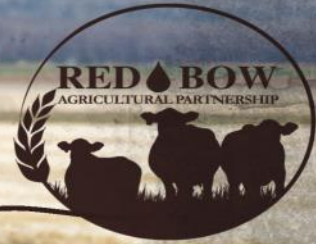


The Red-Bow Agricultural Partnership presents the

Ranching Opportunities Conference

save the date!
FEB 03.2022

Ladies LIVESTOCK LESSONS



Rosebud, AB

21.2022

January

Save the Date

This year's sessions will include information about managing pasture for pollinators and their benefits, invasive species identification and control, multi species, horse and sheep pasture management breakout sessions, and practical solutions for managing drought conditions in your pasture.

Find out more at
www.redbowag.com



Producers say beef boom passing them by



Soaring beef prices endured by consumers don't reflect what farmers and ranchers actually earn for their cattle, leading an industry leader to fear for the future.

Although costs ranging from feed to fuel "are going through the roof," producers aren't seeing any increases in cattle prices, said Melanie Wowk, chair of Alberta Beef Producers.

"There's two large packers in southern Alberta that are responsible for 80 percent of the slaughter of Canada's beef market. And so, the question is exactly why is there such a discrepancy between what we're getting, and what the packers and retailers are making?"

The financial strain on cow-calf and feedlot producers led Wowk to fear that "what's going to end up happening is this is just going to put more and more people out of business and shrink our cattle herd even more in Canada."

The sector was hard hit by heat waves and drought that affected much of Western Canada this summer, causing shortages of feed that forced many producers to downsize their herds.

Wowk estimated beef prices in grocery stores had more than doubled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. She sought to reassure consumers that producers are not behind the increases.

"We're looking at ground beef in northeastern Alberta. I noticed that the Co-op was \$9 per pound, whereas I think about a year-and-a-half ago, it was anywhere from \$3 to \$5 ... I'm

starting to wonder how the average Canadian family can afford to buy beef."

However, Cargill said in a statement Nov. 22 that current prices in the beef market are ultimately the result of supply and demand.

"In part due to a shortage of labour, the industry is not currently able to process as many cattle as ranchers are able to produce. This, when combined with other backups of cattle due to COVID/

weather events, plus an increase in demand for beef, accounts for the disconnect between live cattle prices and wholesale beef prices."

Wowk said it is difficult to say what the federal or provincial governments can do to help beef producers doing business in a free market economy.

"And we don't want to go to the supply management route ... but there is such dominance at the top with two major companies (Cargill and JBS) that we're just feeling the crunch right now."

During a tour Nov. 18 of Olds College in Alberta, provincial Agriculture Minister Nate Horner said the provincial government "is well aware of the situation" and is working closely with ABP.

"We have a very strong demand, as everyone's seen the price in the grocery store. And we have feeder (cattle) margins that have largely been underwater for the last three years, and a lot of producers are feeling the pinch."

Although he said leverage is expected to shift to feeder cattle producers in 2022, the current situation "is what happens when you have a bottleneck (in the) consolidated processing sector, so we're aware of the same things happening in the United States, and we'll continue to monitor it and see where it goes."

Besides collaborating with the provincial government on competitiveness research, "ABP is also working on a thorough supply chain

review," said the organization in a statement.

"From barriers facing local processing facilities to large-scale processors, the issues facing each level of processing are diverse and have impacts that are felt right down to producers. The industry needs to come together to find a solution to create equity and profitability throughout the entire supply chain."

Horner said beef producers could be further impacted by a potential strike at Cargill's plant in High River, Alta.

United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW) Union Local 401, which represents more than 2,000 workers at the plant, served notice Nov. 10 that unionized workers will go on strike Dec. 6 if a contract deal is not reached with Cargill.

Two people died and hundreds of people fell ill due to a COVID-19 outbreak at the plant last year that was the largest in North America, forcing it to close for two weeks. Employees seek things such as better pay and working conditions as they continue to grapple with the ongoing pandemic.

Horner said "I look at it like we're Team Alberta — from the producer to the processor, to our employees, our processing facilities, and then the consumer — so we'll continue to monitor, but we're hopeful they find an amicable, timely solution."

Author: Doug Ferguson .

Original Article can be found at <https://www.producer.com/news/producers-say-beef-boom-passing-them-by/>

Connect with the FFGA on social media!



Matchmaking: Select cattle genetics that are a fit for your operation



Putting cattle into an environment that doesn't suit them is like jamming a round peg in a square hole — you might be able to make it work, but it's going to take some effort.

"Genetic selection is really about putting DNA into production," said Vermilion-area beef producer Sean McGrath. "You're buying DNA and you're selling performance — and really, it's about what performance fits your ranch and what performance your ranch can support.

"I really get a kick out of trying to match cattle to the system rather than adapting the system to the cattle."

When producers bring in new genetics through bull purchases, they don't always think about how those genetics will fit into their operation long term, McGrath said during a Beef Cattle Research Council webinar last month.

"What we're actually buying when we're buying bulls is DNA that's going to go into our cow herd and produce something that hopefully fits our environment," he said. "A bull is just an automated delivery system for the DNA that we're buying. So we really need to focus on the DNA that those sires contain."

Think about the environment those cattle will be raised in and source your genetics accordingly, said Stacey Domolewski, the council's research and innovation coordinator.

"When you match your environment to the class of livestock that you have, it just makes more sense. It's less input from both sides," she said.

Take Brahman cattle, for instance.. This breed is built for hot environments and doesn't do as well in Canada's cold winters, so they may require extra bedding, shelter, and feed to survive the cold.

"It takes a lot more effort on the behalf of the producer to make sure they grow and are managed in a way that is both good for their welfare and their performance." Sometimes, though, the mismatch is less obvious, she added. "Usually it's minor things. Maybe there are certain cows that just don't do as well in their pastures, or that won't maintain condition as well," said Domolewski.

"Sometimes you'll have to feed a cow through the winter more than all of the rest of them.

"It tends to be not glaringly obvious things, but those little management things that add up over time — and their costs add up over time."

Shooting at the right net

The first step to fixing that is looking at your production environment and comparing it to your goals for your genetics.

"It's really down to understanding your environment and knowing what you're going to put those cattle through, and selecting accordingly," said Domolewski.

McGrath likens it to making sure you're "shooting at the right net."

"There's no point in buying genetics that have performance that our environment won't support," he said. "There are some that will be happy medium in your operation that will work really well."

And 'environment' doesn't just mean weather conditions, added Domolewski.

"It can be anything and everything about your operation and how it works," she said. "What are some of the things that are unique to your area that you want cattle to survive and thrive in?"

"Then think about what traits you're looking for that will thrive in the conditions that you're going to provide for those animals."

On McGrath's operation, for instance, feed availability is limited, so he's selected genetics that will accommodate things like reduced milk production.

"Our cow herd looks like our cow herd because we're on 85 per cent native rangeland. We have very minimal cropland resources," he said. "We'll be selecting a totally different profile in

terms of what we're trying to accomplish."

Other producers might focus on feet and leg structure for animals that are walking long distances, added Domolewski.

"If you have big, huge pastures where they have to walk a long ways to water, that's a lot more important than it would be in a smaller pen."

But choosing the right traits ultimately comes down to "prioritizing what's most important to you on your operation."

That includes management practices that make your life easier.

"Sometimes that early calving season is important to producers because they're also grain farmers and they can't be calving at the same time they're seeding," she said.

"For them, that management practice isn't movable, whereas for other producers, it could be and might work better for the class of cattle they have.

"It's about prioritizing the parts of your system that need to happen a certain way because of your lifestyle."

Good record-keeping can help with that.

"It can help you to identify some of these things so you can really do a good job of tweaking those genetic input choices," said McGrath. "Your records are... there to help you understand your own ranch. If you understand your ranch, you can start to understand what cattle fit in there better."

But the genetics you choose today can take a long time to bear fruit, so it's important to be thinking about the long-term plan you have for your operation, he added.

"It doesn't take long until we're four or five years down the track with what we're trying to plan," said McGrath. "It's important to think about how we're going to be producing and marketing cattle in five or 10 years. That should really be part of your decision on the genetics you're sourcing today."

Author: Jennifer Blair

Original Article:

<https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/livestock/matchmaking-select-cattle-genetics-that-are-a-fit-for-your-operation/>

Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Workshop

***save
the
date***

When?

February 9, 2022

Where?

Rocky View
County Hall



Registration Information:

- Visit www.foothillsforage.com/events to register for workshop
- Workshop will begin at 10:00am and wrap up around 3:00pm. Lunch will be provided
- Please bring laptop or tablet
- Information on your water sources & water bodies
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder; please bring it as this can be helpful

Please Register before February 4, 2022



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY
Cultivating Communities

Thank You to Our Corporate Sponsors

Gold Sponsors



**UNION
FORAGE**

DATAMARS



maia grazing
AFSC
Insurance • Lending • Income Stabilization

Silver Sponsors

Brett Young





FTGA Board and Staff