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# OCTOBER 2019

## GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

### VICE CHAIR'S NOTE—ALEX ROBERTSON

#### Howdy Folks!

Funny enough, I find myself able to finally devote some time to putting some thoughts down on paper because we are having our second major snow event this fall. The September storm gave us over 20" of snow, and this October storm so far has us looking at a little over 6", with no end in sight just yet. The forecasters were pretty spot on with their weather warnings, only they predicted the snowfall in cm, and it came in inches. It's anyone's guess what the coming weeks or months will bring, but it seems we might have a bit of winter coming our way.



*Alex & Carol moving cattle on the Cross U Ranch.*

To say the least, anyone facing harvest this year is having a tough time of it. Southern Alberta is fairing a lot better than the rest of the province, but areas to the north have a long way to go. The above average rainfall this summer helped us in the south suspend the effects of the drought from the last couple of years, but there are certainly areas in the central and northern regions that, due to all that moisture, didn't

even get their hay crops off. Today's snow storm certainly won't be helping their situations at all.

This brings us to acknowledge that being a farmer or rancher isn't without its stresses. Mental health advertisements have started to show up on social media, as well as on television and radio. A great organization called "Do More Agriculture Foundation" ([www.domore.ag](http://www.domore.ag)) is a non-profit organization focusing on mental health in agriculture across Canada. They have organized a concert series called "Three Chords and the Roots Songwriter Circle" featuring musicians Duane Steele, Blake Reid, Joni Delaurier, Dustin Farr, and Troy Kokol. These fabulous musicians will be playing in five venues across Alberta. The East Longview Hall on Friday, October 18, the Cremona Heritage Centre on Saturday, October 19 (call Tanya at 403.899.1019 for tickets), Three Hills on Friday, November 1, Edmonton on Friday, November 8 - during Farm Fair, and Wednesday, November 20 in Standard. You can find the poster for the Longview show on the back page of this newsletter or you can check out the Blake Reid Band website for information on the other venues. In most cases, the concert is hosted by a local 4H Club, and all proceeds are in support of the Do More Ag Foundation. It's a great and important cause, right for our times, and the entertainment will be fantastic, please attend the one closest to you.

Another topic that seems to need our voice is the promotion of our industry. It seems that the opponents of agriculture have been continuing their campaign against methane producing cattle and their part in climate change, inhumane treatment of livestock, cattle on public lands, land being used for grazing instead of cropping, beef being bad for health, and the list goes on. Although we have many good people and organizations responding to these claims, our work is not done. We have the support of our provincial government, as was evident with Premier Kenny's announcement last week to introduce legislation this fall that will protect farmers from trespassers, and we have some very good organizations like the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Alberta Beef Producers, and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association that continue to support and promote our industry. As individual ranchers we do need to continue to do our part as well. To do just that, keep memberships current to organizations that support our

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industry, and stay informed. The Western Producer, Canadian Cattleman Magazine, The Alberta Farmer Express, just to name a few, all publish many science based articles that are great to share and discuss with colleagues, customers and neighbours. Also, with the federal election coming up on October 21, get out and vote.

Now that I have climbed down off my soap box, perhaps I should talk a bit about cows. Weaning season is upon us, and if the snow clears, or even if it doesn't, folks will be getting calves vaccinated and

ready for winter. Marketing plans will also be put in place and the feed supply will be made ready. On my place, I have marketed 40% of the calves through a video calf sale where I found this year's prices to be somewhat down from last year. Heifer's are all preg tested and turned out for the fall, and calves will be delivered and cows processed in November. Sometime before then, I'm told that we are building a new deck. I kind of like the snow now.....

So take care, be safe and come out to support the Do More Ag concert series. I'd also love to encourage anyone

to attend the Western Canadian Grazing conference in Edmonton in December, but it appears to be sold out. If you didn't make the list in time, remember that the FFGA is hosting some great events like the Environmental Farm Plan Workshop, in October and November, Get the Dirt on Soil Health in October, and the Winter Feed and Water workshop in November. I hope to see you somewhere along the road.

*Alex Robertson*

## The roots of life and health: Elaine Ingham's theory of the living soil



*Elaine Ingham—photo supplied*

Modern agriculture - even among organic farmers - is often seen as a matter of soil chemistry, writes Lynda Brown. But an alternative view is gain-

ing ground: that it's really about soil life. Nurture your soil-dwelling micro-organisms, and your crops look after themselves.

Earlier this year, US soil microbiologist Elaine Ingham, of Soil Foodweb Inc. fame, caused several gasps at the Oxford Real Farming Conference with her controversial lecture, 'The Roots of your Profits'.

Put bluntly, Ingham's message is that if you are interested in health, you have to be interested in soil. This lecture, and her work in general, brilliantly explains why.

Time to take a deep breath, prepare to

have conventional thinking about soil turned on its head and find out why soil biology should matter to you.

As most of us have realised, soil is not merely a prop for plants or 'terra firma' for the biosphere; it is an infinitely complex underworld and inter-dependent web of micro-organisms such as bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes and micro-arthropods to name a few.

It is this hidden world that allows our planet and our society to thrive. It is every bit as important to our health as breath itself. But far from nurturing the soil that feeds us, agriculture often destroys it. Every time the soil is disturbed, or artificial fertilisers and pesticides are applied, soil life is killed and soil structure compromised.

Soil erosion, the leaching of water and nutrients, anaerobic conditions, pests and diseases all follow. The system gradually collapses and eventually the soil - now bereft of soil life - is degraded so much it becomes mere dirt.

It's a self-perpetuating cycle of destruc-

tion, and farmers then have to devote their energy to dealing with the destructive knock-on effects.

### Myth bashing

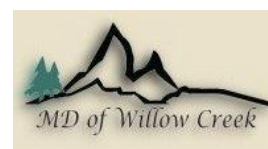
For Ingham, agriculture should be the art of nurturing soil life. It's essential to understand what makes the life in soil tick - and conversely what destroys it - as well as how to manage soil life so it works to overcome the challenges that producing food presents.

Get your soil biology right - ensuring the 'good guys' (aerobic micro-organisms) flourish and are in balance - and the rest falls into place.

Forget the latest farm app: the most essential piece of equipment a farmer or grower can have is a microscope. And the one skill she or he needs above all else is how to make aerobic com-  
post and compost teas. It is these that contain the necessary microorganisms for soil health. Applied correctly, this is the only magic bullet you'll ever need. It's as simple as that.

(Continued on page 4)

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(Continued from page 2)

But Ingham also goes further. She has no time for wasting money on soil tests, pointing out that during her lifetime the number of plant nutrients considered to be essential has increased from 3 to more than 40. Who can say what a plant needs, except the plant itself?

Applying this mineral or that fertiliser, Ingham says, is also a waste of money. Assays of plant tissues reveal that the nutrients present bear no relationship whatsoever to any soluble artificial nutrients applied. A plant requires all nutrients to a greater or lesser extent, and only it knows what it needs and when - the trick is having all those nutrients in a bio-available form in the soil at all times.

She also blows away the myth of pH, the measure of soil acidity or alkalinity. Since when, she asks, has nature said a pH 6.5 is ideal for crops, when they grow successfully in ranges from 5.5-11? Soil pH varies so widely even along a root hair that an average value is meaningless. It isn't the soil pH that needs analysing, it's the soil's microbial life.

Even more controversially, Ingham points out that all soils on the planet have enough (inorganic) nutrients locked up in their mineral particles (that is, particles derived from rocks) to feed plants for the next 10,000 billion years. What?!

The only reason the Green Revolution worked is that it fed dirt, not soil. Sustainable intensification? Forget it. It won't work because it can't: it still relies on the chemical inputs that destroy soil life. Get your soil biology right, and you don't need to spread manure, rotate crops or till soil. (At this point, even the organic farmers at the Oxford conference winced.)

#### **Nature's elegant solution**

Ingham has spent the past 40 years putting her knowledge into practice and training farmers, growers and gardeners to become soil doctors. She has achieved impressive results. Pasture grasses, for example, have increased rooting depth and protein content has gone up from 5%-25%.

But to understand why her followers achieve the results they do requires a basic primer in the evolutionary relationship between plants and soil life.

Plants use sunlight to make sugars; they then send most of these to their roots as exudates (substances that ooze out from plant tissue) - or, as Ingham puts it, they deliver 'cakes and cookies' to the soil for aerobic bacteria and fungi to feed on, encouraging them to amass

around the roots and prosper.

These 'good guys' have three important functions:

- they form a protective army to fight off the 'bad guys' (anaerobic micro-organisms responsible for disease);

- they contain the necessary enzymes and acids to break down and transform inorganic nutrients in soil particles into organic nutrients suitable for plants;

- and they play a critical role in the formation of soils' structure, which is necessary for water retention, preventing the leaching of nutrients.

Why, then, do you need an armoury of chemicals when nature has already provided a ready-made solution?

#### **Why life needs death and death creates life**

At this stage, the nutrients that plants need are still locked up in the microorganisms, and are only released when the latter die. To enable this, nature has evolved predators - creatures that eat other creatures for their food - to create food chains and thus ensure constant nutrient recycling.

In this case, the predators are protozoa, which eat bacteria, nematodes and micro-arthropods, which eat fungi. These predators then excrete the excess nutrients - now bio-available - into the surrounding soil, creating a constantly replenishing supply of food around the plant roots, where they are needed. Clever, isn't it?

We can see why predators are necessary for plant life, and why we are better working with the fundamental rules of nature than against them. As Ingham has pointed out, Mother Nature doesn't need human beings, but we need Mother Nature. It's a one-way street.

This is why we have to go back to soil biology to reform agriculture from the ground up. As she says, it's the only way forward if human beings are to remain on this planet.

#### **Compost: the key to sustaining life**

The evolution of plant life is intimately bound up with the soil biology prevalent during its development. The types and ratios, for example, of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms determine what crops will flourish, and enable evolutionary succession to take place.

It follows that what grows where is a good indicator of your soil biology; and it provides clues to where the imbalances might be in the soil, which are preventing you from growing the best crops you can. Again, the simple, quick and easy way to

fix this is to 'inoculate' the soil with the correct compost.

This is why compost is the nearest farming gets to a cure-all: it holds the key to sustaining life. It's cheap and easy, and as soils become self-sustaining, the problems go away and crops are more productive - they become stronger, healthier and more nutritionally dense.

No wonder, then, that Ingham is not popular in conventional agriculture or the chemical industry.

#### **It's more than a gut feeling**

As Ingham's lecture illustrates, the vital connection between healthy soils, plants, animals, people and planet is not mere rhetoric but an evolutionary truth. Patrick Holden, Chief Executive of the SFT, has also noted that the parallels between soil and human health are too obvious to ignore.

Just as the 'good guys' in the soil promote and protect soil health, so the beneficial microbial flora in our gut (our microbiome) are essential for promoting and protecting our digestive health, and boosting our immune system.

But guess what? Antibiotics, antibacterials and antifungals impact negatively on our microbiome. One can only wonder, then, what a lifetime of food additives, junk food, pesticide residues, degraded food produced from chemical farming and even GM ingredients do to our internal 'soil life'?

This is why the quality of the food we eat, and how we produce it, is so vital. And it is why we need to take Ingham and other whistleblowers seriously when they warn us that the quality of our soil affects the quality of our food and its fundamental ability to nourish us.

*Author Lynda Brown—Lynda Brown is an award winning food writer, seasoned broadcaster, and author of eight major books, including Modern's Cook Manual and the Shopper's Guide To Organic Food. A longstanding supporter of organic gardening and organic farming, She is a life member and former Trustee of the Soil Association. Article can be found at <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/roots-health-elaine-ingham-science-soil/>*





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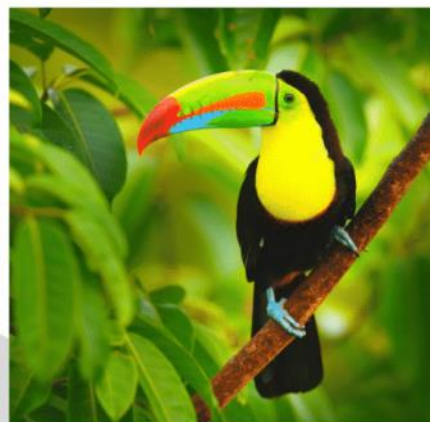
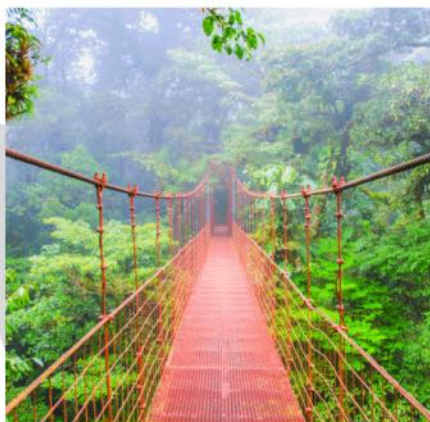
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# Device said to calm cattle for a variety of procedures



Photo: Easy Boss E

Maria and Hank Franken were struggling with a first-calf heifer that wouldn't allow its calf to suckle. It's not an uncommon problem during calving season but it's one that can be frustrating and time consuming to solve.

This time, they had a solution. It was a device called the Easy Boss E, a stainless steel curved esophageal tube that is inserted into an animal's mouth to serve as a distraction.

"She was kicking her calf when it was trying to drink so we put the Easy Boss E in, and my husband put the calf underneath and I held (the Easy Boss E) in and after maybe 20 minutes I took it out and she never kicked the calf again," said Maria, who farms near Rivers, Man.

"She just stayed quiet. The calf could go anywhere. It was just enough to distract her. She had no problems with it after that. Basically what the cow does is she tries to chew on it, so then that completely distracts her from everything else."

Oral distraction is indeed the basic idea behind the simple device.

Dr. Don Finlay, a veterinarian originally from Manitoba who has also practiced in Australia and New Zealand, has established a patent and is marketing the product in Canada.

Finlay did not invent the device but he became aware of it in the early 2000s and saw its merit.

"I don't know if the primal behaviour

of chewing is a happy spot for cows or sheep, but as a prey species people will say they didn't ruminate unless it was safe. They did their feeding at times when they couldn't be captured or caught," said Finlay.

Replicating that sense of safety and the experience of chewing can keep cattle calm for such things as ear tagging, semen testing and branding.

Finlay said a number of veterinary clinics in Western Canada have purchased and are using the devices. Olds College in Olds, Alta., the University of Calgary veterinary school and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology have used them, as have several veterinary clinics across the West.

Finlay has been making the rounds of various trade shows to explain the device's merits and make sales.

"Producers are way faster to adopt this than veterinarians," he said.

Among those producers is Trevor Atchison, owner of Poplar View Stock Farm near Pipestone, Man.

"It certainly has worked in the instances when we've used it," he said, noting he and his crew have used it while semen testing bulls.

"The only difficulty is inserting it in their mouth and once you get that part done ... they keep chewing on it until you're done whatever you're doing."

Finlay said all company data emphasizes that the Easy Boss E is not intended to replace pain management and pain control for extensive procedures on cattle. Its purpose is to make various minor or common procedures less stressful for both cattle and handlers.

That aspect has Franken's vote.

"Being a two-person operation, it's just my husband and I, so for us, safety has always been an issue. Anything that can ... shorten the time where its less stress on

the cattle and safer for us, I'm willing to give that a try any time."

She said she spent about \$100 for one Easy Boss E, which she saw at Ag Days in Brandon.

"If you think about it, there's \$100 that can be spent or you have to call a vet to help you. Or when its -50 C out and it's taking you two hours longer. I heard one guy talking and he said, 'well, I've spent \$100 stupider ways.'"

Finlay said the University of Wisconsin is conducting a trial involving the device but it was also the subject of a 2013 paper from veterinarians at the University of Saskatchewan including Dr. Joseph Stookey.

In a draft of that paper provided by Finlay, researchers indicated positive results.

"The results of the current study suggest that an oral distraction reduces the amount of struggle that steers undergo while in a headgate. Steers that were freeze-branded and those that were sham-branded, with the oral insert, exerted lower average and maximum levels of force on the headgate than those without the oral insert," the paper said.

"This device could potentially be used during veterinary services and routine procedures to reduce the amount of struggle and kicking by an animal. Reducing the struggle in the headgate and chute can decrease the time procedures take, and may increase safety for the animals and humans."

Easy Boss E has a website and numerous videos showing its use, which can be found through an internet search.

Author: Barb Glenn. Original article can be found at <https://www.producer.com/2019/09/device-said-to-calm-cattle-for-a-variety-of-procedures/>

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# Let's seize this historic opportunity in our agriculture sector



Canada won't stay at the forefront of global food production without investing in skills that harness the newest tools: technology and data.

Growing Canada's agriculture sector must be a strategic priority for the next government. Our economic growth in the 2020s and our position in the world could depend on it.

More than two million people earn their livelihood from the agri-food sector, and close to 7 percent of our economic output stems from their efforts. As the fifth largest exporter of agricultural goods, Canadian producers help feed the world. This will become an even greater imperative in the decade ahead as the planet's population approaches 9 billion people, with close to 1 billion more to feed than today.

Doing that in an environmentally sustainable and economically viable way won't be easy. But if we start to see the emergence of new technologies and data systems as a historic opportunity, we can transform and grow our agriculture sector, and add to Canada's relevance in a fast-growing and increasingly complex world.

To start with, few countries enjoy Canada's mix of abundant, arable lands and fresh waters, as well as access to markets as promised by trade agreements with Europe, Asia and the United States. Few countries can tap into as skilled a workforce, either.

But the skills needed to keep Canada at the forefront of global food production are in the early stages of profound change, and they will hold the key to the sector's transformation.

With the right skills and technologies, the agriculture sector could add \$11 billion to Canada's GDP and be worth more than \$50 billion annually a decade from now. This is one of the findings in *Farmer 4.0*, a new report by RBC. That would

make agriculture larger than the combined value of Canada's automobile assembly and aeronautics industries. To get there, government, industry and academia must come together to ensure farmers and food producers have the right tools — from advanced technologies to financial capital to lifelong learning — to keep pace with other countries that are rapidly investing in agriculture.

Already, many aspects of Canadian farming and food production are at the forefront of innovation. Canadi-

ans are at the cutting edge of a new agricultural revolution. To research *Farmer 4.0*, my collaborators and I travelled across the country. We met with Saskatchewan canola farmers working with autonomous farm machines that measure soil conditions. We talked to a Greater Toronto Area builder who has started a vertical indoor farm to grow herbs. And we spoke to Ontario and Quebec dairy farmers, who are employing robotic milking machines to double their production and new data systems to track quality instantly.

There is no shortage of ingenuity on Canadian farms.

Yet it is far easier for a young Canadian to raise capital to start a software company than to run a farm. Many producers I spoke with in the Prairies expressed frustration about that. They want Canadian leaders to create new financing options for people wanting to start farms, to invest in farming technology, to stimulate private-sector R&D in agriculture, and to attract more immigrant entrepreneurs and technologists to the agriculture sector.

Priority needs to be given to the human side of agriculture, to ensure Canada has enough people in the sector to avoid a demographic crisis and the right technology skills to avoid a digital crisis. That speaks to two challenges we must address.

First, over the next decade, nearly 40 percent of the agricultural workforce will be 65 or older. We don't have the pipeline to replace these workers, because every year, 600 fewer young people are entering the sector. To help reverse this trend, the industry needs to do a better job of drawing attention to the exciting and diverse career paths one can take in agriculture nowadays, including opportunities beyond the farm in office towers, data centres and engineering labs around the country.

Second, new skills are required to

manage the farm of the future. The reality is innovative technologies aren't much of an advantage unless their operators have the skills and infrastructure to put them to use, and that includes leveraging data to help a farm boost productivity.

This is all the more challenging given that the capabilities required to operate an aquaculture farm will be different from those required to operate a vineyard or raise cattle. We need to rethink how we train youth, knowing that the challenges and opportunities vary greatly in each part of the country.

To better understand our challenges in this area, in Canada about 20 percent of farmers under 40 have a university degree. Compare this with the situation in the Netherlands, where 75 percent of young farmers have a bachelor's degree or higher. A leading Dutch institute, Wageningen University, is helping the country sustain its global comparative advantage in greenhouse horticulture by developing the know-how in applying the Internet of Things to sustainable food systems.

Among its recent initiatives, Wageningen launched a global competition to create autonomous greenhouses to grow cucumbers in four months, drawing interest to Dutch agriculture from Microsoft, Intel and the Chinese technology giant Tencent. The results have been stunning. Canada has 46 million hectares of agricultural land; the Netherlands has only 900,000 hectares. Yet, per capita, the small European country exports three times the value of agricultural products that we produce.

To be sure, Canada is home to excellent agriculture schools; 6 of our universities rank in the top 100 agriculture and forestry programs globally. What's more, the number of students enrolled in these programs is expanding rapidly, as Statistics Canada shows. For example, enrolment has risen by 29 percent over the last 10 years. (Many graduates do, however, go on to work in value-added areas such as processing.) But training the next generation of producers will require innovation across our schools, including more interdisciplinary studies to blend the study of farming, food and land systems with non-agriculture courses such as computer science.

An enhanced focus on agriculture can't wait for post-secondary education, either.

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The earlier this integration of agricultural and non-agricultural learning can be done the better, starting in K-12. This is all the more important given the fact 26 percent of young farm operators entered the industry directly from high school, according to 2016 census data from Statistics Canada. Australia is already there, exposing children to agriculture and food issues in kindergarten and then expanding their awareness of opportunities in the field as they advance through school.

All those new skills will need new technology, too. Unfortunately, Canada lags behind its global competitors in the development of advanced agricultural technologies and processes, despite significant public dollars directed to research and development, according

to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Even accounting for Canada's smaller size, private investment in R&D is a tiny fraction of what US firms spend. As a result, Canadian producers told us they often rely on second-generation technology that's been in use for a decade or longer in the market next door.

In our cross-country conversations with producers, public officials and academia, a number of recommendations emerged that will help producers take full advantage of an agricultural revolution.

Clearly the federal government needs to play a role. Many people we spoke to want to see Ottawa convene a national skills strategy for agriculture, together with farmers, food processors, educators and industry groups, to plan for future labour needs. That would include a re-examination of our immigration policies

for the sector, which relies heavily on foreign labour. One idea is to establish a dedicated referral channel for agriculture workers under the Global Skills Strategy, which is a federal government initiative to reduce processing times for high-skilled labour in select industries. Currently no such channel exists for the agriculture sector.

At the same time, industry groups want a more coordinated effort, perhaps even a bold campaign, to attract more young people, women, Indigenous people and highly skilled immigrants to agriculture and to retain them.

Other recommendations in *Farmer 4.0* are focused on the need to prepare the next generation of producers for a more digitally enabled world of farming. From our consultations with producers, industry representatives and academia, there is a clear desire to incorporate agriculture into Canada's new work-integrated learning strategy, a program that provides post-secondary students with real-world work experiences. This could be an effective way to increase exposure for non-agriculture students across the agri-food industry.

And there is a desire to see all major research and development initiatives link education and skills development. We see some early promising signs in this regard initiated by the Protein Industries Super-cluster, an industry-led, not-for-profit organization created to position Canada as a global source of high-quality plant-protein- and plant-based co-products.

In all of this, we have heard a chorus of voices declaring that agriculture must be treated as a strategic priority for Canada. Feed the world, grow at home: that should be our clarion call.

Original article written by John Stackhouse and found at <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2019/lets-seize-this-historic-opportunity-in-our-agriculture-sector/>

## ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN SERIES

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# The importance of pregnancy checking the cow herd

Knowing which cows are pregnant can help with culling the herd when feed supplies are tight

In a year where feed supplies are tight, knowing which cows are pregnant and which ones are open provides options that may not otherwise be available.

“Feed can amount to two-thirds of a beef operation’s total costs,” says Ted Nibourg, farm business management specialist at the Alberta Ag-Info Centre. “Carefully considering the feeding program could mean the difference between profitability and red on the bottom line of the balance sheet. With feed costs on the rise, keeping the open animals could cut into profitability.”

Strong culling practices can also help reduce the feed requirements of the herd. “Feed costs could vary from around \$1.80 per cow on a straw/grain/canola meal diet, with straw valued at 3 cents a pound and \$160 per tonne for barley, to around \$2.50 per cow if she is fed a straight hay diet and the hay is valued at 7 cents a pound,” explains Barry Yaremicio, beef and forage specialist at the Ag-Info Centre. In a herd of 100 cows,

the cheaper ration would save \$76 per day.”

Knowing the status of each cow provides the chance to wean her calf early if she is open and to take advantage of the market. “If an open cow is thin, weaning early allows easier fattening for market,” says Andrea Hanson, livestock extension specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. “Preg checking yearling heifers early allows the open ones to be sold at an age that would still bring top dollar.”

New ultrasound technology means that a pregnancy can be detected as early as 40 days. “Speak with your veterinarian to determine what they require and their schedule,” says Hanson. “Then, develop a game plan for preg testing this fall.”

Hanson adds that some producers have tightened up their breeding season as a way to identify the most fertile females in the herd. “They are exposing replacement heifers to a bull for 30 days, with a 45 day exposure for the rest of the cow herd. Adequate bull power is very important in this scenario to ensure the females who are fertile are bred in a small

window of time. While this system for breeding may seem extreme, in a year when feed supplies are tight and costs high, looking for excuses to cull are not a bad idea and will create a very productive herd for the future.”

For a commercial cattle producer, profitability of the operation depends on the GOLD management indicators: G – growth of the calves, O – open rate, L – length of calving, and D – death loss. “Bottom line is pounds of calf weaned to cows exposed to the bull,” notes Hanson. “Any cow not pulling her weight by raising a calf needs to be culled so she isn’t eating up the profits of the operation.”

As for the economic value of preg checking, Nibourg says that it depends on the cull cow market price, the producer’s management system, feed and overhead costs, as well as veterinary costs. “Higher cull cow values in the spring and additional weight put on in the winter may offset higher feeding costs. The Canfax factsheet [The Economics of Preg-Checking](#) provides some useful context. Higher feed and overwintering costs favour pregnancy checking and

cull cows in the fall. With more residue in the cropping fields, extending the grazing into the fall show more potential than the past few years.”

Cow value is often a more important factor in the economics of pregnancy checking than either overwintering or veterinary costs. Explains Nibourg, “As of September 27, 2019, cull cow

(Continued on page 11)

## LAND FOR SALE - Pekisko Creek 240 Acres of Native Pasture

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(Continued from page 10)

prices are tracking between 72 and 88 cents per lb. Knowing the body condition score of the cows is also critical. It is often helpful to get a second opinion on the cows' conditions. For a 1400 pound cow valued at \$80/cwt now and feeding for maintenance for 150 days at \$2.10/day feed cost (that's 35 lbs of hay at 6 cents per pound); keeping her pencils out to break even at best. Take that same cow in fair body condition who could gain 200 pounds before selling her, even with the same fall selling price, adding that weight and using the same feeding cost there is a net gain of about \$150. The key is that the cow is gaining valuable weight and not just maintaining it."

Watch for declining prices from fall to spring, as this will encourage pregnancy checking. The Beef Cattle Research Council has developed the [Economics of Pregnancy Testing Beef Cattle Model](#) which is simple to use and effective in showing the economics of pregnancy checking"

For more information contact the Alberta Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276).

Article supplied by Alberta Agriculture.



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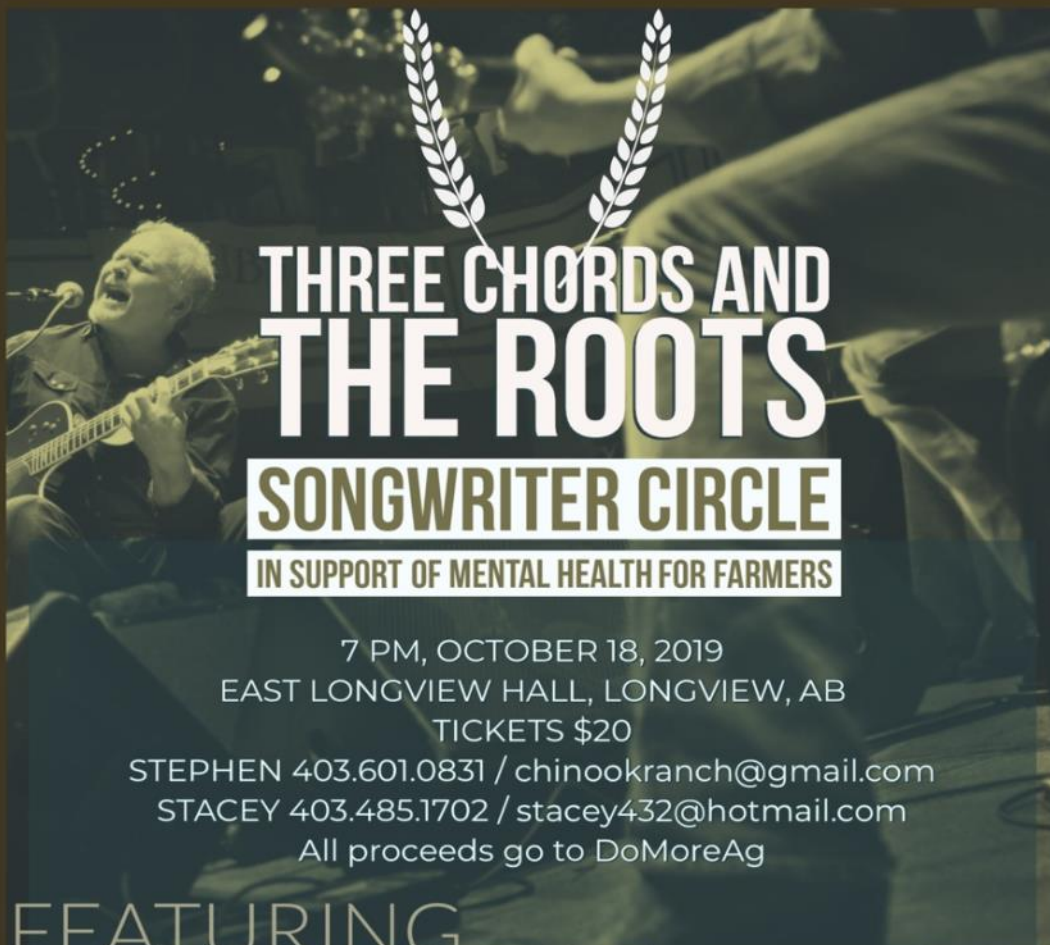
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