



Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS NOVEMBER 2020

Director's Note - Ben Campbell

Hello Graziers!

Well we certainly had a fantastic fall (aside from a crash in cattle prices)! We had excellent weather and some REALLY great events. The pasture rejuvenation events were well attended and we were able to hold a Northern and Southern event to reach a broader audience. We have been doing our best to stay within the guidelines for COVID-19 while also continuing to provide value to our members through events. Of course we've had huge success with our online webinars with really big audiences which has taught us that we have this extra tool we can use now.

It's always the challenge we have as a non-profit, providing as much value as we can to people while doing it for a cost that people can afford and now we throw in the extra hurdle of COVID. Laura and Sonja have been working really hard to achieve our goals and I think we have been doing really well! We have three online webinars coming up; Maximize Your Fencing on Nov 19, Planning Your Forage Year Using a Systems Approach on Nov 25, and Marginal Land and Hidden Opportunities on Dec 10. We are always trying to hold events on things you guys care about the most so please don't hesitate to tell us if

there's something you want to see us cover!

The great fall weather has allowed us to graze a little longer in spots with only summer water systems. I know I'm sure enjoying that! It also gives us the option to put a few extra pounds on calves if we haven't pre-sold them and have the feed from a wet summer. For me it's been a chance to get all my renovation projects done around the farm which is good, but to be honest, I'm looking forward to a little snow and cold and the rest that comes with just doing farm work rather than everything else that seems to find it's way onto my plate these days.

Happy grazing to you all!

Ben Campbell

Ben and 2 of his sons enjoying a family moment at the ranch!



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Beef producers share insights into certification programs



Two beef producers talk about why they decided to certify their operations and the differences between the VBP+ and EU certification programs

Canadian beef producers are rightfully proud of the cattle they raise. Due to the care they provide their animals and their environmental stewardship, this country's farmers and ranchers produce arguably the best beef in the world.

Increasingly, producers are turning to certification programs like Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) and various European Union (EU) certifications to prove their production practices to consumers domestically and abroad. In addition to supporting public confidence, the programs offer another benefit, too: they provide some of the few opportunities in cattle production today for farmers and ranchers to capture a market premium.

"I like the idea of why VBP+ came about," says Ike Wipf, cattle manager for the Rosetown Hutterite Colony in Rosetown, Sask., which calves out 300 head each year. "The VBP+ program lets me get the message out there that we are raising our animals well and raising a quality

product. We don't just raise beef cows to make money; what I care about is raising quality food."

And, adds Endiang, Alta. cow-calf producer Stuart Somerville, the premiums available from certification are the key to success for some producers.

"Everyone's in the same boat. We're all looking for a leg up. The only competitive advantage that a small outfit like us has is we can go chasing premiums."

VBP+ basics

The Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) certification program allows Canadian producers to showcase that their operation abides by the highest on-farm food safety, animal care, biosecurity and environmental stewardship standards. The voluntary program, developed by beef producers, requires a producer to maintain strict records of their production practices, complete a VBP+ course and open their operation to a third-party, on-farm audit.

For farms that already keep good records, the VBP+ program is not particularly time consuming or difficult.

"A lot of producers are closer than they think they would be towards meeting VBP+'s requirements. It doesn't need to be an intimidating process. We're trying to help producers be recognized for the good things they're already doing," says Melissa Downing, VBP+'s Alberta co-ordinator and a VBP+ certified cow-calf producer herself.

"It's a course and an audit. There was nothing difficult about it," says Wipf. "It's not hard. It's not complicated. It's next to nothing for work."

"We already kept a record of every animal we raise. Every animal that goes through our system gets read by our RFID

tag reader and when it's vaccinated, that information goes right into our computer system. There wasn't a thing other than our handling system that we had to change, and we got funding through the VBP+ program to do that," he says.

Currently, Cargill in High River, Alta.; JBS Canada in Brooks; Atlantic Beef Products in P.E.I. and, just recently, Cargill in Guelph, Ont., have been audited by a third party to ensure they meet the requirements of the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) and are certified to the Canadian Beef Sustainability Framework. As such, they are eligible to supply product sourced from certified sustainable beef operations.

A beef operation that has been audited and certified by VBP+ is also certified sustainable under the framework. Cargill's certified sustainable beef sourcing program provides credits averaging \$18 per head per certified operation (based on payouts from 2019 – Q2, 2020). For example, if an animal moves from cow-calf producer to backgrounder to feedlot, each of those three producers will receive a credit upon the animal's processing. These payments are calculated and distributed quarterly after animals have been harvested.

"This incentive is an example of how Cargill, as a processor, is rewarding producers who are participating in sustainability certification. It also exemplifies their commitment to their retailers who are seeking to supply certified sustainable beef to their customers," says Shannon Argent, the VBP+ program's business manager.

To qualify for Cargill's program, the animal has to spend its entire life on certi-

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On the Cover: Participants at the Grazing Management for Soil Health Workshop at the Waldron Ranch learn about physical indicators of soil health. Photo by Sonja Bloom, FFGA

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fied operations. Producers also need to opt in to the program through BIXS, which tracks whether an animal comes from a certified operation and allows producers to share that information with buyers.

Premium domestic markets for EU certifications

There are several different EU certifications currently available. The most common stand-alone (and the base requirement of all EU certifications) certifies beef as free from growth-promoting enhancements; others include certification that the cattle were managed in specific ways, such as being fed specific rations.

Somerville completed his farm's basic EU certification three years ago. He says the process, though somewhat administration-heavy, is not difficult.

"Your vet walks through the whole thing with you. He or she will become your best friend while you're going through the process," says Somerville. "But, the actual certification isn't that much work. If you're keeping basic records, you'll be able to transfer them over without too much trouble. If you're using RFID tags like we're all supposed to be anyway, your life becomes a lot easier. It's filling in a lot of blanks but very doable."

Somerville has been finishing his own calf crop — typically about 200 head per year — for the past six or seven years. He says the market premium is key to his business model.

"We're a smaller operation. We don't have the same economies of scale that a bigger feedlot would have. So, we started looking around for areas that would have a premium. If you can find a market, there are premiums to EU certification of anywhere from \$0.15-\$0.25 per pound. We need that leg up."

The premium is worth the effort, he adds.

"It's certainly not more work than it is worth. The actual certification and cost to get professionals to look at (your program) — you pay that off very quickly. You lose some efficiency on your feed (from not using growth-promoting enhancements), but in our experience you still definitely come out ahead."

Increasingly, the Rosetown Colony is feeding out its own calves. Last year, they fed 50 per cent of their cattle crop. This year, they managed 75 per cent. Next year, they're aiming for 90 per cent. They buy all their bulls from Benchmark Angus; now that they're EU-certified, all the

animals they feed will be destined for Benchmark Angus's processing arm, Ben's Quality Meats in Picture Butte.

"What Ben's Quality Meats does is process the very best quality for specialty buyers. There's a chain of high-quality hotels; that's where a lot of our beef goes," says Wipf.

Interestingly, little to none of the EU-certified beef raised by either Somerville or the Rosetown Colony has actually sold into the EU. Instead, it's selling to domestic customers who value the attributes the EU program ensures.

"As of now they don't need to because they can sell all of it domestically," says Wipf. "At the same time, a year from today, two years from today, they might want to ship to the EU. If they want to, they'd be ready to."

While the premium is a big incentive, capturing an EU-certified premium market requires more than just cattle production skill, cautions Somerville.

"It takes some hunting to learn who's who. You gotta start calling cattle buyers and finding out what they're interested in, who they know, what they want. At the beginning, you'll be on the horn a whole lot."

Wipf agrees. In fact, he says there's little reason to pursue EU certification without a buyer in place.

"I'd definitely recommend the VBP+ program. It's good for the individual and good for the whole industry. EU certifica-

tion? I guess if a person wants to, fine, but I don't know if I'd go as far as recommending it. Unless you have a market, there's no point."

Wipf isn't alone in seeing value in the VBP+ program. Downing reports that, in Alberta, there's been a 30 per cent year-over-year increase in each of the last two years for the total number of producers being audited for the VBP+ program. To date, over half of the feedlot capacity is audited, as well as between 12 and 15 per cent of calves produced.

"The beef value chain is really incentivizing the VBP+ program, which is driving a lot of uptake in the program," says Downing. "Some feedlots are very proactive in seeking out VBP+ calves."

That's a good thing for the whole industry, Wipf thinks.

"I do think (our industry) has to go in this direction. With all the veggie burgers out there and consumers not understanding anymore, we need to tell our story — that we care about the animals, we care about the environment, we're raising a quality product — so the consumer can have confidence."

Author: Madeleine Baerg. Original article can be found at <https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/features/beef-producers-share-insights-into-certification-programs/>

Maximizing Your Fencing Webinar

DATAMARS

Join guest speaker Jason Williams with DATAMARS as he discusses electric fencing in the winter.

Webinar Agenda:

- Maximizing your fencing resources
- Winter electric fencing 101
- Tips and tricks to save you time & money

Thursday November 19, 2020

1:00pm to 2:00pm

Register at <https://www.foothillsforage.com/livewebinars>



Backgrounding basics—easing the transition from weaning to feeding



Photo: Lee Gunderson

Backgrounding calves can add value, but does come with more risks. Learn how to manage those risks and shepherd calves through the post-weaning phase.

Adding weight to calves through backgrounding can be an effective way to increase the worth of both lower-value cattle and feeds. However, beef producers have to do their homework to make sure cattle transition successfully from weaning to feeding.

“If you have a good source of cheap feed, you can put a lot of pounds on in a short amount of time,” says Karin Schmid, research and production manager with Alberta Beef Producers. “There are some management things that are standard across systems, whether you’re feeding your own calves or whether you’re buying them,” she says. For example, producers will need to decide on what type of parasite control to use and determine whether implanting pencils out.

Schmid suggests that producers discuss health protocols with their vet to determine if they have adequate vaccine coverage, particularly for respiratory illness. It’s also important to work with a nutritionist to avoid problems related to ergot or other toxins.

“Until we can get a handle on how ergot can impact gains on feeder cattle, avoid it entirely,” she recommends.

There are different challenges depending on whether you outsource calves or retain your own, she adds.

“If it’s my calves at home, I’m thinking about low-stress weaning, whether that is nose flaps or whether that is fenceline weaning,” Schmid says.

Producers should also assess their facilities. “Unless you are going to make this your job, it doesn’t make a ton of sense to build infrastructure for one year,” Schmid says.

Homegrown advantage

Trevor and Melissa Atchison background home-raised calves on their family operation, Poplar View Stock Farm, near Pipestone, Man. Years ago, they shifted their calving season back from early spring into May and June, and now wean calves in mid-November. They background their steers, targeting them for market at around 700 pounds in March. The heifers are backgrounded, then bred or pastured and sold the following season as yearlings.

Trevor Atchison credits low-stress weaning as a key factor to advancing their backgrounding program. “The biggest thing we do is use the Quiet Wean nose tags,” he says. “The calves hardly know they are weaned and once they come off the cows, they just start eating.

“They don’t pace the pen. They might bawl occasionally but they literally have their mouths full of hay,” he adds. When they run calves through the chute to insert nose paddles five to seven days prior to weaning, they also administer vaccinations. This reduces sickness and helps calves quickly adjust to life without mom.

Another practice Atchison uses to help smooth the transition is to introduce a feed ration to calves while they are still on the cow. A few days before separation, Atchison will start feeding calves a mix of silage or hay. He also puts creep feeders out with first-calf pairs in September to provide pellets to the calves. After weaning, he

sorts lighter-weight calves off, and leaves them on a creep feeder.

“Light-weight calves do quite well on it as opposed to training to a bunk,” he says, adding that it also helps to keep them in a separate pen away from bigger animals, preventing them from having to compete for feed. As they grow, they are sorted into other pens or left as a group, depending on the year.

Atchison works with a nutritionist to regulate rations as the winter progresses. “If it’s a prolonged cold spell, we need to adjust for that,” he says.

A long stretch of warm weather also requires them to cut their ration back to allow cattle to achieve gains without becoming too fleshy. They also pay close attention to stormy weather.

“If there is a bit of snow in the bunks or it’s cold or windy, they don’t want to come to eat,” Atchison explains, adding that their rumen slows down. “We try to feed them little bits several times a day to encourage them to eat. Even driving by or chasing them to the bunk to get out and move around helps.”

While the Atchisons have recently invested in feed bunks, for years they kept infrastructure minimal and relied on what they had on hand.

“We used existing corrals and added water bowls and changed some simple designs,” says Atchison. They have used portable windbreaks, bale rings and a small grain cart to supplement grain and pellets.

Mixing calves and meeting market targets

Producers interested in backgrounding outside cattle need to manage them carefully. “There’s more risk with death loss, bringing in disease and biosecurity issues,” Schmid says.

Mingling cattle from a variety of sources can result in more stress and higher treatment rates. Just-weaned calves sometimes struggle to find water so shrinking the pen size or removing the water bowl float to show running water can help, she adds.

Larry Schweitzer, manager of Hamiota Feedlot in Manitoba, back-

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Soil Carbon, Soil Health and Carbon Markets



Photo: Sonja Bloom

What is soil carbon?

Soil carbon includes both the organic carbon in living and decomposing organisms, and inorganic carbon in carbonate minerals. Globally, soil carbon represents a significant carbon store in the carbon cycle (see Figure 1 on page 8). The organic component of soil carbon, termed Soil Organic Carbon (SOC), is directly influenced by human activities and land management. The importance of enhancing and sustaining the global soil carbon pool is gaining momentum in discussions on soil health, agricultural resilience and food security, and climate change solutions.

What is soil health and why is SOC important?

Soil health, also referred to as soil quality, is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. As well as removing carbon from the atmosphere, increasing SOC also reduces agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through:

Improved soil structure and aggregation which govern soil tilth and aeration and can improve yield.

Improved water retention and use efficiency which improves tolerance to drought, heat waves, and flood and heavy rainfall events;

Improved nutrient retention and use efficiency which reduces fertilizer requirements, improves water quality, and reduces risk of algal blooms.

Enhanced rhizospheric processes which can help suppress soil-borne diseases.

How can SOC be increased?

SOC levels can be increased via a number of agricultural practices and technologies (see Figure 2 on page 8).

Canada's grasslands and forage lands store a significant volume of soil carbon due to the complex root systems and biological communities within grassland soils. When grasslands are converted to annual cropping systems, soil carbon stores become significantly depleted as the deep roots systems die, biological communities change, and stored soil carbon is broken down and released as carbon dioxide.

What is Climate Change?

Climate change is the scientifically measured increase in global climatic temperatures since the industrial revolution. The changing climate is increasing unpredictability, and the frequency of extreme weather events and climate-induced natural disasters such as wildfires, floods, and droughts. There is clear consensus among the majority of the scientific community that climate change is being caused by human activities that increase atmospheric concentrations of GHGs, including carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.

What is a Carbon Market?

Carbon markets aim to cost-effectively reduce GHG emissions by enabling the trading of units of emission reductions or removals, known as carbon credits or offsets. A carbon credit is a tradable unit representing one tonne of carbon dioxide, or the equivalent of a different greenhouse gas. Carbon credits are created by following an approved method or 'protocol' for a specific activity that reduces emissions or removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, such as increasing soil carbon stores.

Carbon markets enable the trading of carbon credits between entities that reduce emissions or provide increased removals (such as a farmer who increases soil carbon), and entities that

need or want to offset their GHG emissions (such as an oil and gas company). This type of market provides a way for entities that reduce their emissions to be paid for that emission reduction/removal and enables GHG emitters to purchase credits that effectively reduce their operational emissions. Theoretically, the market approach enables the most efficient and cost-effective way to reduce overall GHG emissions by enabling each entity to find the lowest cost way to reduce emissions.

What is the Canada Grassland Protocol?

The Canada Grassland Projects Protocol outlines the requirements for generating carbon offsets from the conservation of Canadian grasslands. The protocol was developed by the Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association (CFGGA), the Climate Action Reserve, and Viresco Solutions. It presents an exciting opportunity for ranchers, farmers and landowners to generate carbon offsets for the continued storage of soil carbon in Canada's grasslands, providing it can be proven that the grassland is under threat of conversion to annual cropping.

What are the Critical requirements?

Land has been under grassland management (tame or native) for at least 10 years.

Land is suitable and at risk of conversion to annual cropping – this takes into account soil capability, physical and climatic limitations, legal restrictions, and financial pressures.

A conservation easement will need to be placed on the land to prevent cropping. Parcels with easements already in place may not be eligible depending on when the easement was sold, and the restrictions included in it.

Extensive grazing and moderate haying are allowed.

Minimal tillage for weed control or reseeding/pasture rejuvenation will be considered on an individual basis.

Land can consist of multiple discrete parcels, with areas set aside for future development or cultivation as required.

What comes next?

The CFGGA and partners are work-

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Marginal Lands and Hidden Opportunities Webinar

Production & Ecological Benefits



TOPICS:

Mick Plemel-Stronks with Ducks Unlimited Canada

- To seed or not to seed, that IS the question
- How to get back to 'natural' wetlands
- Saline area challenges
- Ecological goods & services - biodiversity benefits & habitat
- Management solutions for riparian buffers

Christine Campbell with ALUS Canada

- What the ALUS program is and how it works
- Financial assistance & annual payments for ecosystem services on marginal farmland

Sarah Nixdorff with SNS Herefords

- Showcase her marginal lands project on her ranch with before and after photos
- Talk about the process, opportunities, and learnings

DETAILS:

Thursday December 10, 2020

1:00pm to 2:30pm

Register at - <https://marginallands.eventbrite.ca>



Cattle and Conservation

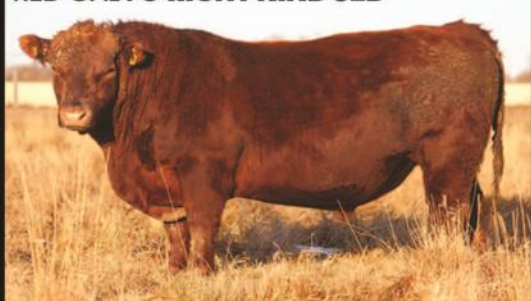


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grounds and feeds thousands of cattle assembled from across Canada. When information on incoming arrivals is limited, he says it's important to work quickly.

"Lots of times the trucks will arrive late at night, so giving those cattle a chance to rest and get long hay and get them processed and settled into their home pens is best," Schweitzer says. Having a dry pen with the finest quality hay available eases their arrival.

A lot of Schweitzer's custom backgrounding clients are other feedlots looking to manage inventory.

"They need cattle to come in at a certain time and a certain weight to target a certain market," he says. "We work with the nutritionist to get on the right path going forward," Schweitzer adds, in order to produce calves that meet specific windows.

"Having a marketing plan makes a big difference," Schmid agrees.

She adds that buying price insurance is something that backgrounders should consider. "Use it in a way that covers your expenses and if you can secure a better price in the marketplace, that's gravy," she says.

Schweitzer suggests that protecting your market risk is especially important since the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some uncertainty.

Anticipating and averting challenges

For Atchison, staying on top of sickness is a number one concern. "Trying to keep tabs on illness if you're short on labour and it's cold and multiple things are happening on the same day can be a challenge," he says.

He adds that ailments can get out of hand in a hurry, and become costly in terms of reduced performance or even death loss. He also says it's important to

have a backup plan for breakdowns.

"Feeding a (total mixed ration) is great, but when your wagon breaks down, what do you do?" he asks.

Finding and retaining employees is a priority for both Atchison and Schweitzer. Schweitzer also says that keeping his employees healthy and preventing an outbreak of COVID-19 is a new challenge to mitigate.

"The people we have at our lot have a very specialized skillset," Schweitzer says. "We don't want to lose those people," he says, adding they would be hard to replace.

Backgrounding calves can be a value-added opportunity; however, managing calves during the post-weaning phase does come with added risk. Planning ahead, leaning on nutritionists and veterinarians and being aware of market risks are top factors that can help producers achieve a successful outcome.

Author: Tara Mulhern Davidson.

Original article can be found at: <https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/features/backgrounding-basics-easing-the-transition-from-weaning-to-feeding/?module=under-carousel&pgtype=homepage&i=>

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ing to develop a 2-year pilot project to test the Canada Grasslands Protocol with landowners.

If you are interested in being involved, please contact ARECA for more information at www.areca.ca or phone at 1-587-200-2552.

Article submitted by the Canadian Forage & Grasslands Association as part of the Avoided Conversion Protocol Project.

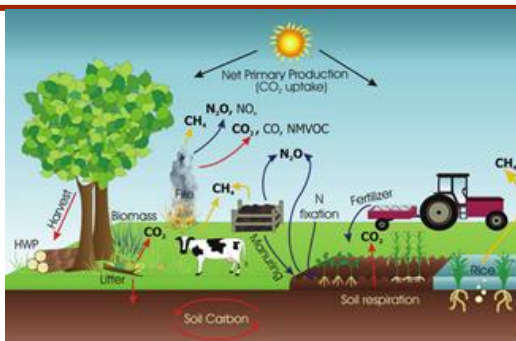


Figure 1: Global Carbon Cycle. Source: Paustian et al., 2006

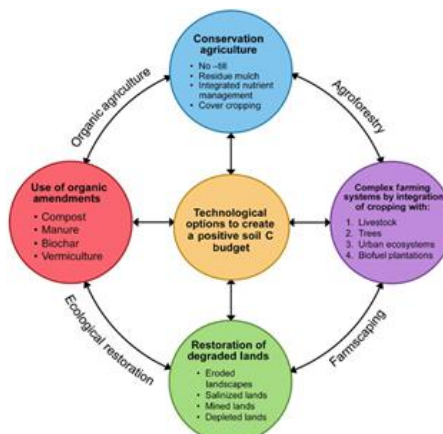


Figure 2: Options for increasing SOC stores on-farm. Source: Lal, R. Soil health and carbon management. Food Energy Security. 2016

Planning Your Forage Year Using a Systems Approach

**UNION
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Join guest speaker Graeme Finn with Union Forage as he gives you tips to think strategically when adopting a systems approach to forages

Webinar Agenda:

- Long season green - maximizing your growing season
- Living roots and their benefits
- Reflections/thoughts on;
 - Annuals & Winter Annuals
 - Biennials
 - Perennials

Wednesday November 25, 2020

7:00pm to 8:00pm

Register at <https://www.foothillsforage.com/livewebinars>



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.

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