



GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

Photo Credit: Lee Gunderson



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September 2016

Director's Note

As I report from Longview, it has been quite a year so far. From the nicest winter in years, we moved into the best weather for calving we could ask for. No matter what month fits your management, it was a great season.

As May and June came in so dry, our two most critical months for moisture, in hindsight a snowstorm in April would have been welcome. Then along came July with our June rain only a month late. It was the wettest July on record and with it came the hail. One neighbour had hail on 6 different occasions. Luckily none of the storms were really bad but the cumulative damage does add up.

Haying has been another story. The start of August was damp and quite challenging for haying, and here we are in the middle of September and we are still not done. Which brings to mind Jim Gerrish's book "Get the Hay Out" - perhaps he's right as in years like this it can be so frustrating.

In August FFGA had a three day course with Jim and I was fortunate enough to host it. With a focus on grazing and pasture management, he discussed estimating yield to establish unit animal days per acre, and we spent a great deal of time out in the fields doing this on both native and tame pasture.

We looked at the available farm and ranch mapping tools using Google Earth Pro, and we studied advanced grazing cell design.

While out in the fields we discussed watering systems, installation advise specific to costs and benefits, as well as the flexibility your water system can bring to your grazing cell design.

Jim also gave a more in depth look at the economics of grazing different animal classes such as cow/calf, yearlings, or cull cows, leaving us all with a bit of a doomed outlook for the market over the next little while.

He finished up with talking about the benefits of grazing high legume pastures which coincided with a tour of FFGA's alfalfa/sainfoin site. Jim was a great speaker and well worth the 3-day school. We appreciate his knowledge and are glad it was so well received.

In early May FFGA took on a High Legume Extension Project in cooperation with Alberta Agriculture. On our place, we planted 10 acres of alfalfa and sainfoin, along with meadow brome, orchard grass and tall fescue.

It was slow to start due to lack of moisture, but certainly caught up by the time of Jim's school. It's been measured, counted, and grazed. As it turns out, it was a good year for establishing new pasture. Too bad I didn't do more than just 10 acres.

As we head into fall, we hope for our summer to finally arrive, but if you believe in the Farmer's Almanac, winter should come early, stay long, and be cold.

Good luck everyone,

Alex
Robertson



Jim Gerrish Grazing School August 22, 2016

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Advanced Soils School

with **Nicole Masters**

November 17&18, 2016
Airdrie Ag Centre

Back by popular demand, Nicole of Integrity Soils is returning to Canada from New Zealand to host an advanced 2 day school related on soil health. The school will go into depth on:

- ◆ Enhancing the C, N, and water cycles
- ◆ Soil microbes
- ◆ Cover crops and diversity
- ◆ Weeds as indicators
- ◆ Soil minerals and the role of major nutrients
- ◆ Mineral & microbial synergy

The class size will be limited to allow for more a more personalized experience. Be sure to register to hold your spot!

Register at: <https://advancedsoils.eventbrite.ca>

- * \$200 for members
- * \$220 for non-members
- * \$175 for students

*Lunches included

Call 403-995-9466 for help with online registration



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The Facts on Feed Testing



Photo Credit: Rachel McLean

Management skills can improve by learning how changes in production practices affect the quality of your forages.

- * Livestock are most productive when fed a balanced ration. Unfortunately, many rations are balanced using average values which result in over- or under-feeding certain nutrients. More economical and better balanced rations can be formulated using nutrient concentrations determined from feed analysis.

forages or other feeds not commonly raised or fed, and test feeds produced under adverse weather conditions. These feeds often contain a different nutrient concentration than anticipated.

- * Sight, smell, and touch are misleading indicators of feed value. Stage of maturity at harvest, foreign material or pests, color, and leafiness can be detected visually but provide limited nutritional information.
- * Nutrient analyses most commonly are done by extracting important compounds in a laboratory and determining their amount in the feed. When representative feed samples are tested chemically, accurate predictions of performance can be made.
- * Near infrared reflectance (NIR) spectroscopy is a rapid, reliable, low-cost, computerized method to analyze feeds for their nutrient content. It uses near infrared light to determine nutrient contents.

By: Alberta Agriculture & Forestry

For more information visit:

www.foragebeef.ca

Source: [http://](http://www1.foragebeef.ca/$foragebeef/frgebeef.nsf/all/ccf11)

[www1.foragebeef.ca/\\$foragebeef/frgebeef.nsf/all/ccf11](http://www1.foragebeef.ca/$foragebeef/frgebeef.nsf/all/ccf11)

- * Nutrient concentration can vary considerably in feeds, especially forages. Protein in alfalfa hay can range from 10 to 25 percent or more; grass hay will contain between four and 18 percent protein.

- * Use feed tests to target specific feeds to different livestock. Feed high quality forage to animals with high nutrient needs, and lower quality forage to animals with lower nutrient needs.

- * Feed tests can help establish the dollar value of a forage. Use these tests to establish the value of your forage and to help determine what forages to feed, buy, or sell.

- * Forage tests are useful to evaluate production practices like fertilization, time of harvest, or method of harvest.

- * Analyze all feedstuffs that can substantially influence ration cost or animal performance. Analysis is especially important when potential differences between estimated nutrient composition and actual composition are great. For example, high moisture feeds should be analyzed for moisture. Without this analysis the amount of the feed to be included in the ration cannot be accurately determined.

- * Analyses is most useful when the forage is to be fed to livestock especially sensitive to nutrient level in the forage, such as young growing livestock, and nursing beef cows.

- * Always test non-traditional

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FFGA is a
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Profit Per Cow or Per Acre?



Lee Gunderson

If we focus on profit per acre, there will be a tendency to seek the right-sized cow for our environment and best practices for economic efficiency and profitability.

Last month, I discussed three profit driving ratios – cows per person, acres per cow and fed vs. grazed feed. I also indicated that “revenue per acre” needed to be considered.

As livestock producers we often focus on productivity per cow. But that focus, along with intensive selection for growth, hasn’t done much to improve ranch profitability over the last 40 years.

In fact, it could be argued that, in constant dollars or buying power, profit per acre has even decreased. Thus, the real measure should be profit per acre or whole ranch profitability. When we change our thinking from per cow to per acre, we begin to think of ways to improve whole ranch revenue. That’s good if we remember that “war

on cost” is one of the essentials for successful ranch management.

Please understand that I don’t have a problem spending a dollar if I can reasonably expect it to return \$1.50, but I don’t want to spend a dollar if it will only bring back 50¢. Too often, in our attempts to increase revenue per acre, we fail to account for all of the costs. When we attempt to increase revenue per cow, it can get even worse. We forget that when cows get bigger and produce more milk, we have to run less of them or spend significantly more for feed and supplements.

I consider money spent for water development and fencing to facilitate good grazing to have a very good cost/benefit ratio. However, you must plan well to have effective, low-maintenance structures that also have a reasonable cost relative to the expected return. In areas of good rainfall, or where irrigation is used, it’s quite easy to project a good return for grazing management.

I’m currently working with a rancher who talks about the number of sections in a pasture, or cows per section. In this scenario, the cost of water development and fence per acre compared to the potential new revenue must be carefully evaluated.

Fence is an issue, but water development is a big issue. The area has brief and sometimes heavy rains which could provide water for manmade ponds or catchments. However, in its present condition, there is a lot of bare ground resulting in silt deposits filling the catchments. The well-water quality is poor and small particles tend to adhere to the inside of pipelines making them smaller as time goes by.

In low-rainfall areas with poor water distribution, costs must be considered very carefully. The revenue increases will come from increased productivity – but at much lower rates than in higher rainfall areas – and from using areas of pastures that were not previously used for lack of water. So, assessing options is much more difficult than in situations with ample water of good quality and with greater initial carrying capacity.

While I find it relatively easy to justify spending for fence and water in most range and pasture management situations, it’s not as easy to justify the use of some other cattle improvement techniques – artificial insemination (AI), estrus synchronization (ES), individual animal records, feed supplements, etc. Though I’m sure that many of these tools have their place, I’m also sure that some can’t be cost-justified on some ranches.

Profit Per Cow or Per Acre?

Considering AI in conjunction with ES, for example, it's important to ensure that you itemize all the costs.

These include materials, drugs, semen, equipment, labor, animal gathering and handling costs. Then there's the performance lost due to animal gathering and handling, etc. You must also make sure you don't inflate the expected results, while deflating the results of natural service.

Sometimes, it may prove to work nicely with heifers but not with cows. Try to imagine all the unintended consequences –both good and bad. Ask yourself,

“What if it were 5% better or 5% worse?”

Certainly, many ideas and techniques for animal improvement have a justifiable place, but they often have intrigue and attraction beyond their value.

As you complete your analysis, remember to get to the added net income per acre.

It's very easy to get caught up in production or profit per cow rather than profit per acre or whole ranch profit. The result can be fewer cows and poorer performance that results in less production per acre or a bigger supplementation bill – perhaps both.

If we focus on profit per acre, there will be a tendency to seek the right-sized cow for our environment and best practices for economic efficiency and profitability.

In the final analysis profit per acre is much more important

than profit per cow.

By: Burke Teichert, consultant on strategic planning for ranches, is retired as vice president and general manager of Deseret Ranches. He can be reached at burketei@comcast.net.

Source: <http://m.beefmagazine.com/blog/profit-cow-or-acre?intlink=rceoc>

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association

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.

Thank you for your support!



ROCKY VIEW COUNTY
Cultivating Communities

Environmental Farm Plan Workshop

Call:
403-700-7406
To Register

Wheatland
County Office

October 25, 2016

9:30 am—2:00 pm

Learn About
Funding Incentive\$ and
Grant Requirements

Lunch & Snacks
Included!



*Laptop recommended but not required

Individual Assistance with the
EFP Workbook

Environmental Responsibility,
Risk Management, and
Operational Efficiency

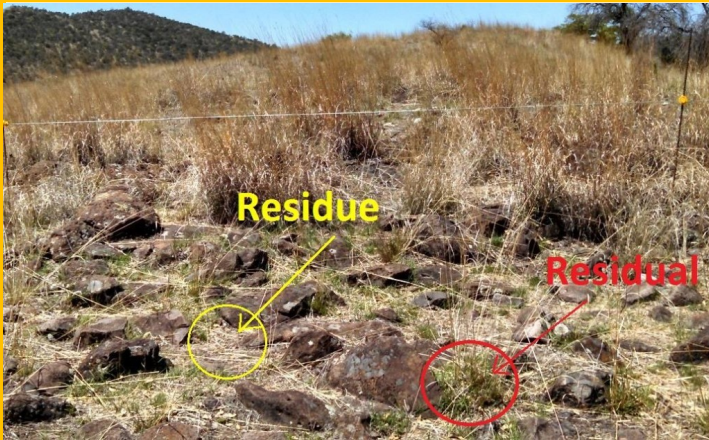
Maintaining a healthy environment is essential to the success of Alberta's agricultural industry. The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program helps you identify and address environmental risks in your operation. It will also increase your understanding of legal requirements related to environmental issues.



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Is It Residual or Is It Residue?



A lot of people in grazing circles seem to use these terms interchangeably, but in grazing science they mean two very different things.

Residual is the living plant material left behind after a grazing event. For clarity we often say 'post-grazing residual'. Residue is dead plant material left on the soil surface. It is synonymous with litter or duff.

Post-grazing residual is what we leave standing in the pasture following a grazing event. In the growing season in a temperate environment, the residual should be green and leafy.

Leaving the appropriate residual largely determines the recovery rate of the pasture. The more green leaf residual, the faster plants regrow.

Residue is the dead or soon-to-be-dead plant material at the bottom of the canopy and in contact with the soil surface. Residue decays from the bottom up to become incorporated into the soil organic fraction. Residual provides the regrowth base for the next grazing crop.

Leaving the appropriate residue is

an essential component for moderating soil temperature and building an effective water cycle. In a thinner pasture stand with low density of living plants we want to make sure the entire soil

surface is covered with residue (litter). We always want to leave green leaves behind as well.

In rugged rangeland environments keeping the soil covered is critically important to developing a functioning water cycle. We can only create residue (litter) by growing plants above ground. Long recovery periods are the key to building residue in drier environments.

We are always tempted to graze more severely in the dormant season because we have the idea that grazing severely won't hurt a dormant plant. We need to be thinking about the bigger picture of the total soil-plant-animal interface. Leaving adequate residual and residue protect the soil even in the winter and moderates soil temperature.

The greatest challenge of grazing in arid environments is growing enough above-ground plant material to still have enough residue left after grazing to create the litter layer.

Both residual and residue are important management considerations and affect almost all soil-plant-animal relationships.

Let's try to

we use the right terms in our conversations so we know what one another are trying to express!

By: Jim Gerrish

Source: <http://onpasture.com/2016/02/15/is-it-residual-or-is-it-residue/>

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Foothills Fall Pasture Tour

October 19, 2016

Join Foothills Forage for our fall pasture tour near **Milo, AB.**

We will be joined by local producer Chad Monner, soil scientist Dr. Yamily Zavala, Sundog Solar's Marvin Jackson, and cover crop specialist Graeme Finn who will speak to **high sugar feed, cocktail mixes, and off-site waterers.**

The day will also feature grant funding options through Growing Forward 2.

Milo Hall and Chad Monner's Pasture

10:00am-4:00pm

***Includes Lunch**

Call 403-700-7406 or email rachel@foothillsforage.com to register by October 17, 2016



Photo: Lee Gunderson