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# AUGUST 2019

## Summer Student's Note - Jodi Giles

Howdy Folks;

My name is Jodi. I have had the amazing opportunity of being Foothills Forage and Grazing Association's Summer Student. I started working with Foothills at the beginning of May and wow how summer has flown by. I have grown up on a mixed cattle and grain operation south of High River. Agriculture has always been an important part of my life and at a young age, I knew I wanted to have a career in Ag. I have recently finished my Agriculture Management Diploma at Olds College this past spring and look forward to continuing my education in Agribusiness this fall at Lethbridge University. Growing up and being involved in agriculture on my family's farm has given me many valuable experiences, and life lessons.

Working with Foothills for the summer has allowed me to meet many producers who are trying new and innovative production models. No two producers' operations look the same and I feel I learned so much from everyone. Over the summer my eyes were opened to many new opportunities that I can someday use on my own operation.

Many of my summer days were spent working on the Alberta Soil Benchmarking project. This summer we sampled 57 sites ranging from Olds down to Maycroft. Our soil samples consisted of compaction, water infiltration, bulk density, chemical, and microbial analysis. As I became familiar with sampling protocols it was very interesting to begin to better understand the impacts of different soil structure, texture and environmental factors on soil health and productivity. I am looking forward to getting more results back from our testing and seeing what producers will do to incorporate these results into their management.

My summer was filled with fun events such as manning a booth at the Calgary Stampede Cattle Trail, field days and tours. We covered topics such as soil health, electric fencing, and grazing management. I hope all who attended were able to learn as many new things as I did and start to think of ways to apply them in your operation.

As my busy summer starts to come to an end, I have been taking the time to reflect on what I have learned over the past 4 months. One of the most important things I have learned is that what works for one producer may not work for another. It is important to take ideas and adapt them to what works for your operation and find out what works best for you. I am excited to investigate further into possible alternative forage sources that could be grown on my family's farm to produce high-quality feed and extend the length of our grazing season. I also hope to incorporate higher density rotational grazing to allow for a more even graze across the whole pasture.

Well, that's all from me, thanks for the great summer and to all the wonderful people I had the pleasure to meet and work with. Happy grazing!

*Jodi Giles*

*Jodi hammers in a soil core earlier this summer on Rocking P Ranch*



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# Conservation Finds a Home on the Range: DUC Supports Beef Industry for Environmental Sustainability With ABP



*Tom Lynch-Staunton, ABP's government relations and policy manager, and Mickenzie Plemel-Stronks, DUC's cattle industry liaison, will be working closely on several initiatives to support the cattle industry and its efforts to conserve native grasslands and wetlands. They are pictured here on a ranch located near Lundbreck, Alta.  
Photo Credit: Bennett Whitnell*

Hot on the trail of its work with the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) are teaming up to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable beef production and to advance wetland and grassland conservation.

For decades, Canadian cattle producers have made conservation part of their operations, and presently, these efforts to conserve wetlands and grasslands are setting new standards for beef sustainability on working landscapes. This scenario places DUC and ABP in a unique position where they will work together to implement varying tactics that result in positive contributions towards resolving issues relating to climate change, environmental protection, consumer demands and global markets. It's a perfect fit.

"As a leader in wetland conservation, Ducks Unlimited Canada is in a unique

position to recognize the steps that the beef industry has taken to be a leader in sustainability," says Mickenzie Plemel-Stronks, DUC's cattle industry liaison. "We also recognize the industry's commitment to science and its effort to be solution based. With that in mind, our conservation programs are a great tool to help beef producers address specific needs on their farms, while playing a key role in maintaining the land and its natural areas."

Tom Lynch-Staunton, ABP's government relations and policy manager agrees. "Cattle producers have always been environmental stewards," says Lynch-Staunton. "We appreciate the recognition and support from DUC and look forward to further collaboration on the importance of grazing for optimal wetland and rangeland health and conversation. Grasslands are fundamental to cattle production and this partnership plays an important role in preserving our natural habitat."

Partnering with those who produce food, including cattle ranchers, has been central to DUC's mission since 1938. In those early years, DUC's founders worked

alongside farmers and ranchers as extreme drought devastated much of the country. They banded together to put water back on the land, not only to support the crops and animals under their care, but also to safeguard these natural areas and the many benefits they provide. Today DUC continues to support farmers and ranchers with programs that help provide grasslands for livestock by offering incentives to landowners for converting cultivated land back into perennial cover.

During the next three years, ABP and DUC will engage in several events and public awareness campaigns that will help Albertans gain a better understanding of how cattle and conservation work together to support sustainable agriculture practices, the environment and food security.

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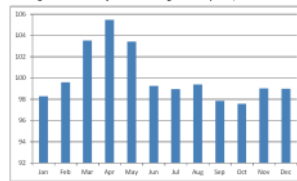


# Understanding The Cattle Market Sliding Scale



sons. **Figure 1** shows the seasonal price pattern for finished steers in Alberta. The chart shows seasonality with an index of 100 representing the annual average. The March bar, for example, shows that during the eight year period, from January 2006 to December 2013, A1 and A2 steer price in March tends to average 3.5 per cent above the annual average. The September price tends to average 2.2 per cent below the annual average.

Figure 1: Seasonality of Alberta slaughter steer prices, Jan 2006 - Dec 2013



## Introduction

A cattle feeder should be able to answer these three questions: 1) when will the cattle "finish", 2) what is the expected price of fed cattle by that time, and 3) is feeding those animals likely to make money? Factors that impact cattle feeding probability include the price of feeder cattle, the price of fed cattle, feed cost, feeding costs, rate of gain, death losses and interest rate. A producer should be aware of the seasonality of prices and the sliding scale in order to make better marketing decisions.

When feeder cattle prices are quoted, animals are typically classed by gender and weight. The relationship between price and weight varies seasonally and over time. Regular or average cattle price changes within a year are captured by the **price seasonality** concept. A "**price slide**" is often used to adjust for the differences between the actual weight of the cattle and the base weight on which a base price is established. These two factors affect the final price the seller (buyer) would receive (pay) for the finished cattle. The concepts are explored in greater depth in the following sections.

## Understanding Feeder Cattle Price Spreads

Different supply and demand situations result in seasonal price patterns during the year. Seasonality is measured by an index stating average prices over a particular time (usually in a specific month) relative to annual average prices. Different classes of animals have their distinct price seasonality patterns. For instance, fed cattle prices tend to peak in late winter or early spring before moving lower into summer due to supply and demand rea-

This seasonal price pattern for fed cattle results in a fairly predictable pattern in the feeder cattle price spread. For example, in late summer, mid-weight feeders in the range of 600 to 700 pounds may have a small price per pound discount compared to feeder calves in the 500 to 600 pound weight range. If placed in a finishing feedlot at the beginning of September, a 650 pound steer would finish in about 210 days, around the end of March when slaughter cattle prices tend to be seasonally strong. Alternatively, a 550 pound steer, if placed in a finishing feedlot at the beginning of September, would not finish until the end of April. Perhaps after fed cattle prices have peaked.

As we move through the fall, 600 to 700 pound feeders become less desirable to buyers for two reasons: 1) If placed in a feedlot in late November at 650 pounds, they will not finish until mid-June, when fed cattle prices tend to be seasonally weaker. 2) A 650-pound feeder, if "backgrounded" at a lower rate of gain, would become a 900- to 950-pound heavy feeder by spring. The 900- to 950-pound feeder at the end of April would not be as desirable for the "grasser" market. If placed in a finishing feedlot, it would be ready for slaughter about mid-August, when prices tend to be seasonally lower.

However, a 550-pound steer in late November could be backgrounded through the winter and sent to grass in the spring. Alternatively, it could be placed into a

finishing feedlot as a 800-850 pound feeder. It would then be ready for slaughter in October, when prices are typically starting to improve from their summer lows.

**Figure 2** shows how relative prices change during the year for different weight classes. The chart shows an eight year seasonal index price comparison between 550 lb (blue bars) and 850 lb (red bars) feeder cattle for Alberta. Much of the relative price difference can be explained by a combination of:

when those feeders would finish if placed in a feedlot, and the seasonal supply and demand for the respective weight classes. Moving from winter into spring, the supply of 550-pound calves becomes less. Meanwhile, heavier weight feeders become more plentiful as cow-calf operators sell their backgrounders. Feedlots are not usually aggressively bidding for those heavy weights since they will finish at a time that fed cattle markets are seasonally weak and because there are more of them marketed at that time. Into the fall, heavy weight feeders become more desirable since they will finish when fed cattle prices are seasonally stronger, while lighter weight feeders are plentiful in supply as a considerable amount of calves are weaned and sold in the fall.

Figure 2: Seasonality comparison 550lb vs. 850lb weight calves, Jan 2006 - Dec 2013



## Understanding the Sliding Scale Mechanism

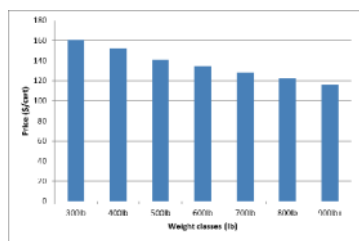
Usually lighter weight feeder cattle are sold for a higher price per pound. **Figure 3** indicates the 5-year (2009-2013) average steer price for different weight classes in the month of September for Alberta. Prices for steers decrease as weight increases. In cash forward contracts both the buyer and seller encounter risk from weight differences at the time of delivery compared to the time the contract was entered into. A "**Price slide**" is the usual approach to deal with this type of uncertainty. The sliding scale enables bids for cattle to be presented by the buyer to the

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

seller prior to actually weighing of the animals.

**Figure 3: Five year average prices for different weight classes of steer in Alberta**



The numbers used in a sliding scale should be derived from the market. Here is an example. The cattle owner must be aware of current market prices for similar cattle to determine the fairness of a bid and the slide being offered. This means the producer must visit auction markets to observe cattle sales, watch internet or satellite sales, consider the seasonal price trend of various feeder cattle weight groups and seek market opinions from others in the industry.

Suppose the current average price for 650-weight steer calves is \$1.27/pound, the average price for 550-weight steer calves is \$1.33/pound, and the average price for 450-weight steer calves is \$1.41/pound. Now, consider a group of average quality steer calves bid on at the farm. The buyer estimates their average weight at 550 pounds. Based on the current market conditions, that group of 550-weight calves should be worth about \$1.33/pound. However, since the weight of those calves is just an estimate at this point, the buyer and seller may wish to build an adjustment factor into the offer to account for any difference between the estimated weight of 550 pounds and the actual weight of the calves to be determined later upon weighing at delivery.

Since the current market price for 450-weight steer calves is \$1.41/pound, or eight cents a pound more than 550-weight steers, it would be appropriate to positively adjust the price of the farm calves by eight cents a pound for every hundred pounds that the actual weight is less than the 550-pound base weight.

On the other hand, the current price of 650-weight steer calves is \$1.27/pound, or six cents a pound less than 550-weight steers, so it would be appropriate to nega-

tively adjust the price of the farm calves by six cents a pound for every hundred pounds that the actual weight is greater than the 550 pound base weight. If these adjustments became part of this bid, the bid would be \$1.33/pound for a base weight of 550 pounds, with a "06" up and a "08" down slide.

Using this sliding scale, often called "zero-six up" and "zero-eight down", and a base price of \$1.33/pound for 550-weight steers, here is how the price would be adjusted after the cattle are actually weighed. If the actual average weight of the cattle is 575 pounds, or 25 pounds greater than the base weight, the final price would be  $\$1.33 - (25/100 \times .06)$  or \$1.3150. If the actual average weight of the cattle is 530 pounds, or 20 pounds less than the base weight, the final price would be  $\$1.33 + (20/100 \times .08)$  or \$1.3460.

The price slide can reflect anticipated feeding efficiencies. For example, higher performing feeders may have a smaller slide adjustment than less efficient feeders.

#### *Other important Notes:*

Other factors affecting price spreads between feeder cattle weight classes are demand-related to the backgrounding, grasser, or breeding heifer market. Rising feed grain prices tend to disfavor the value of lighter feeders compared to heavier weight feeders since it costs more for the cattle to gain weight on a higher cost grain-based ration. Ample forage supplies tend to favour the value of light-weight feeders as forage owners bid up the feeder price in an effort to turn their low-value forage into beef. Feeder heifer demand for the breeding market usually improves when bred cows become relatively high-priced. Conversely, when the beef industry is in contraction mode (declining beef cow numbers), the demand and price for feeder heifers tends to drop relative to steers.

#### *Summary*

This article sheds some light on different relationships between price and weight of cattle. Price and weight as well as gender relationships vary in different ways. There is a relationship between weight and price at a specific time for any class

of animal. Also, the price of any weight class of animal has a seasonal pattern. The time when prices tend to peak is different for different weight classes. Sometimes, there is a time gap between contract and delivery of the finished cattle. A sliding scale of prices can be used to account for differences between estimated and actual weights. Understanding all these trade-offs helps a producer make a better decision.

Original article can be found at <https://www.alberta.ca/understanding-the-cattle-market-sliding-scale.aspx>

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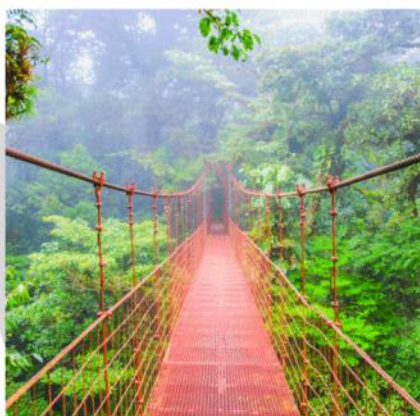
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# Rains bring some relief to hay markets, but not much

Recent rains may result in hay prices softening a bit — but not by much, say experts

“We have got rains and some of the pastures are rebounding,” said Ed Shaw, a hay exporter from Olds. “The yields are going to be lower than normal because it was a slow season and it got started late. Some of the areas may only get one cut this year because it was so late.”

The situation can vary dramatically from one region to another, but Shaw doesn’t see much relief for producers facing a struggle to feed their cows over the winter.

“Prices for feeder hay will soften but not a lot,” he said, adding that’s mostly because prices are already at elevated levels. “Last year the prices for feeder hay were unusually high. There were farmers who told me that they were selling round bales for \$250 a ton. That’s going to soften.”

However, hay prices are not usually firm until the end of October, said Ted Nibourg, farm business management specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry.

“At that time, we have a good idea of what came off ... (and) what we’re looking at for winter,” he said. “We have a good idea of what the cattle market is doing, too. If calves are all going to the feedlot rather than back-grounding, there’s a decreased demand for hay.”

And while many areas have received a lot of rain, parts of the Peace, the south, and eastern areas remain very dry. On the other hand, it’s rained so much in some areas, it will be hard to get hay off in a timely fashion, which means quality will suffer.

The situation is especially tough because there was no carryover from last year, noted Shaw.

“There was immediate stress in the spring and there was no feed,” he said, adding feed was coming in from Montana.

But it’s never cheap to move hay, and that’s especially so this year.

“What we’re seeing is that some of the trucking companies are taking ad-

vantage of it,” said Nibourg. “We’re hearing prices in the \$6.50 range in miles to move it. If you’re going 20 miles, that adds another \$130 to the price of hay.”

Producers in dry areas may find it’s cheaper to move cattle to hay, rather than vice-versa, he said.

Competition for hay is also up because Eastern Canada and the eastern U.S. had a rainy spring, with 80 per cent of alfalfa lost due to winterkill in Ohio and on the eastern seaboard.

“They’re also facing a big shortage,” said Shaw. “The overseas market is demanding more and more hay.”

The overseas market typically buys higher quality, but that’s not a given this year.

“With the rains, there might be more low-end available, but some of the markets are buying more low-end, too,” said Shaw. “The demand worldwide for forages is increasing.”

Normally, this has a positive effect, prompting more producers to grow for the export market and since not all of their hay is export quality, putting more hay back into the local market.

“The overall picture is that it’s not just what is happening in Alberta. Worldwide markets affect what is happening,” said Shaw.

Parts of Saskatchewan are still very dry and producers there are seeking more hay.

But a rebound in cereal crops should be a positive.

“Some farmers take some of their barley, wheat or oats and put that into feed rather than grain... and that could alleviate the shortage”, said Shaw.

If you’re buying, make sure you’re spending money wisely, Nibourg said.

“Know what’s in your feed,” he said. “If you get good quality feed, you may get by with less. If you have poor quality feed, you may have to supplement.”

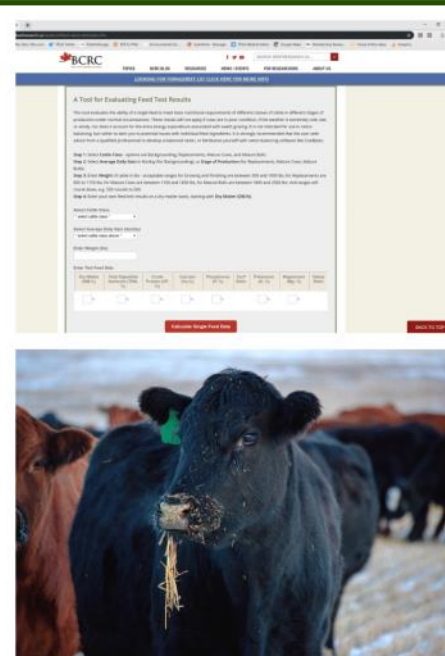
And don’t overbid, he said, noting that last year some cow-calf producers were paying up to 12 cents a pound for hay.

“The breakeven I worked through was eight cents. If you are paying more than eight cents a pound for your hay, you’re losing money,” he said.

This might ring even more true because cattle prices are coming down. There will be reduced calf prices in the fall, and culled cow prices are already down, he said.

Shaw recommends producers develop a strategic plan to look at different feeding options.

Author: Alexis Kienlen  
Original article found at <https://www.albertafarmexpress.ca/2019/07/29/rains-bring-some-relief-to-hay-markets-but-not-much/>



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# Call it 'a vegan sandwich': Beyond Meat a hot topic as beef producers converge on Cowtown

Meatless burgers seem to be all the craze as of late, but beef producers gathered in Calgary this week say they're not worried about consumers converting en masse to the vegan alternative.

The Beyond Meat burger, which is now available at A&W restaurants, Tim Hortons and grocery chains, is marketed as "the world's first plant-based burger that looks, cooks and satisfies like beef" without use of genetically modified organisms, soy or gluten.

Advertisements seen on television would have burger lovers believe the product's taste is indistinguishable from a classic beef patty.

But cattle farmer Kenny Hofer isn't buying it.

"I think it's misinformation," said Hofer, who hails from Granum, about 60 kilometres west of Lethbridge.

"It's something I would never eat. I mean, everybody has a right to eat whatever they want. If there's people that feel that they don't want to eat meat, they want to eat that, by all means, they can have that. I would not eat it because from what I've seen, I don't feel it's a healthy alternative.

"I don't think that it has the same benefits."

Ranchers from across the country were in Calgary from Tuesday to Thursday for the annual Canadian Beef Industry Conference, which features guest speakers, panel discussions and a trade show.

University of Alberta health law and policy professor Timothy Caulfield delivered a keynote presentation on Wednesday morning, highlighting how pop culture and media contribute to how "fear and the misrepresentation (and perception) of risk are having a huge impact on our decisions, particularly in the context of food."

Caulfield, who hosts and co-produces the Netflix documentary *A User's Guide to Cheating Death*, said these industries are "pushing fear."

"And, yes, it happens with food," Caulfield told hundreds in the crowd at BMO Centre.

"You guys know this from your lives and

your professions. You see headlines like this: 'This is how long you'll live if you stop eating meat.' These are playing on fear, this kind of negative headline."

The new Canada Food Guide, released in January, urged Canadians to adopt more plant-based sources of protein in their diets. But others have pointed out that the Beyond Meat burger and similar products are processed foods, which are linked to the development of disease in high quantities.

Camrose farmer Rodger Hovde questioned the health benefits of plant-based patties filled with additives and preservatives. But he said it's difficult to get that information to consumers.

"They want to follow movie stars and not science or relevant facts. That's just human nature these days," Hovde said.

"It's a tempting trap for us to be angry about it or emotional about it, but I think, by and large, people are conservative in their thinking. Maybe it's a fad, maybe it's a craze, maybe it's here to stay. Maybe it doesn't matter."

Whatever it is, George Hofer of Raymond, nearly 40 kilometres south of Lethbridge, doesn't think it will last.

"McDonald's tried something like that quite a few years ago and it didn't work and they had to drop it," he said, recalling the 2003 launch of the McVeggie burger in the U.S.

The fast-food giant ultimately took the item off the menu.

"So I don't know if it's going to have any effect. Vegans are going to buy it," Hofer said.

He said his only concern was with use of the word "meat" in the marketing of Beyond Meat's signature product.

"I think that's what beef producers are worried about it. They have the word 'meat' there," said Hofer.

"They should just have 'vegan sandwich.'"

*Author: Sammy Hudes. Original article found at <https://calgaryherald.com/business/local-business/call-it-a-vegan-sandwich-beyond-meat-a-hot-topic-as-beef-producers-converge-on-cowtown>*

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