GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

Photo Credit—Dylan Biggs

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

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May 2018

Manager's Note

Greetings FFGA Members,

After a wonderful year on maternity leave with my two little girls, I am excited to be back at FFGA! I started back three days a week on April 23rd, and I look forward to catching up with all of you over the next few months! I've been getting back into the swing of things and am busy catching up on what I missed over the past year, and no surprise it was a lot – FFGA has not disappointed with the many informative and exciting workshops, conferences, tours, demonstrations and projects we've delivered.

As we gear up for our summer field days, tours and events please join me in welcoming our new Environmental & Communications Coordinator, Sonja Bloom, to the team. Sonja is in the process of getting up to speed on the newsletter, website, social media and training to become FFGA's Environmental Farm Plan technician. She hails from Edson originally, where she quickly developed a strong passion for environmental responsibility. She studied Land and Water Resources, Land Reclamation at Olds College; graduating in 2009. Sonja's first position after college was with Yellowhead County as an Assistant Agricultural Fieldman. She spent almost 5 years administering various county programs like Weed Inspections, Pest Inspections, Extension & Education Events and working with various stakeholder groups. After dreaming of living in Southern AB, she took an opportunity with Cargill and moved to Calgary in 2013 with her husband. During her time with Cargill, Sonja held various sales and administrative roles and developed a strong understanding of the "business side" of the Agricultural Industry. We look forward to her enthusiasm and experience in both public and private agriculture as she forges strong, cooperative and respectful relationships with the FFGA members.

Sonja Bloom

While you folks are busy calving, branding and seeding we are planning field days, tours, and workshops for the coming months. Please stay tuned to our monthly newsletter and social media for details. We look forward to seeing you at some events this summer!

May the rains be timely, the sun warm, the forages thick and the soil healthy,

Laura Gibney
FFGA Manager

Laura and Family

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FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

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SAVE THE DATES

Forage to Beef Demonstration Days

July 10th, 2018 - Forage to Beef at the Waldron Ranch Grazing Co-op

Host: Mike Roberts, Ranch Manager
Featuring:

- Continuous grazing vs. intermittent grazing vs. never grazed pasture management
- Economic advantage of vigour in the cow herd
- Drone application in ranch management

July 11th, 2018 - Forage to Beef at Difficulty Ranch & Whiskey Ridge Cattle Co.

Hosts:
Sean & Holly LaBrie | Morrie & Debbie Goetjen
Featuring:

- Cell, bale, and swath grazing
- Economic advantage of vigour in the cow herd
- Drone application in ranch management

For more information, contact Sonja at FFGA:
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Producers Should Have Backup Plan to Ensure Quality Water Year Round


File Photo

STANDARD, Alta.— Water supply and distribution are important parts of a farm so producers must be ready for the next drought or flood.

"Most producers really are just set up for here and now, today. The average years are pretty good but really you need to be thinking about the next drought," said Joe Harrington, water specialist with Alberta Agriculture.

Advance plans are needed for dry periods. If cattle have to be moved to stubble when the forage runs out, water must be available, he said at a water management workshop sponsored by the Foothills Forage Association in Standard, Alta.

Many people do not know how much water their wells produce and they do not test the quality.

"If the water quality is not suitable, then it is not much good to you," he said.

Water should be tested periodically and records kept to keep track of changes. If the water quality changes that is a sign that the well is starting to fail.

"So many people have never tested their well, especially in pasture wells. You may find the water is not that great and you may be hurting some of your production," he said.

Wellheads should also be regularly inspected and protected with a vermin proof cap to keep out insects and mice.

When calculating quantity, consider how much water is needed for household use as well as what is required in pastures, feeding and wintering sites.

Every producer should be able to identify current and potential water supplies including wells, dugouts, springs, sloughs and creeks. The reliability of supply, quality and legal access should also be noted.

Wells are the most common source of farm water. Groundwater is often considered superior to surface supplies due to consistency of quantity and quality.

Wells don't usually dry up, but old structures can quit functioning because the rock formation is closing in on the casings.

Consider taking a course on water wells to learn proper design and construction with a licensed well driller, Harrington advised.

Hire well drillers with experience and local knowledge of the geology, as well as the location and depth of potential water sources.

Dugouts are not a reliable source during dry weather because water evaporates and leaves behind salts that could harm livestock.

"We see a lot of high sulfates in dugouts," he said.

Dugouts need to be deep and should have one side with a slope so animals can get in for a drink if necessary.

The dugout should be able to hold a three-year supply that includes accounting for use and evaporation losses. Dugouts accept runoff but included in that is silt, minerals from the soil and nutrients.

If they are not treated or aerated, toxic blue algae, which is actually a bacteria, could appear.

Windmills and solar systems can be used to aerate and pump out the water from the dugout to troughs.

Aeration mixes oxygen into the water and a system should be added the day the dugout was built rather than trying to improve it 20 years later, said Marvin Jackson of Sundog Solar who owns the solar and wind pump manufacturing company based at Sundre, Alta.

Jackson said he would prefer to aerate at night but it is easier to do during the day. However stirring up a pond in the heat of the day warms up the water and that could increase algae. When the aerator is installed the water should be treated at the same time to prevent algae development.

Water consumption requirements depend on:

- size and kind of animal
- rate and composition of gain
- pregnancy
- lactation
- type of diet
- level of dry matter intake
- level of activity
- quality of water
- temperature of water
- surrounding air temperature

Barbara Duckworth

https://www.producer.com/2017/10/producers-should-have-backup-plan-to-ensure-quality-water-year-round/

Good Grazing Means Managing For What You Want

For many, rangeland represents a tough, unresponsive "thing" that resists use and abuse with unlimited regeneration potential. Good cattlemen know that the actual restoration potential of rangeland and pasture is limited. Preservation and rejuvenation of rangeland must be carefully managed. Soil and grass health is an earmark for the cattle industry and a vital signal for its sustainability. The old idiom that we must manage for what's wanted, not for what isn't wanted, rings true. To leave land in better condition than what we inherited is a call that cannot be ignored. Grass made the industry and the industry will crash in its absence.

In spite of much research and knowledge about good grazing practices, Burke Teichert, an author and blogger with Beef Magazine, says we're still losing topsoil at an alarming rate. How do we stem the loss? Teichert's management priorities include:

- Reduce overheads — until it hurts. On most ranches, nothing changes profitability faster.
- Calve at the right time of year — never in winter. In most situations, calve in sync with nature, meaning that you arrange calving and rebreeding to fit the time of year when quantity and quality of grazable forage is at its best.
- Adjust cow size and milk production and let nature and the bulls select cows that fit the environment — highly fertile, trouble free and low maintenance.
- Begin the process of planning and developing grazing management practices that will greatly improve soil health and pasture productivity — leading to improvements in stocking rate.


File Photo

Adapting grazing plans on an individual ranch requires consideration of typical climatic conditions and the yearly variances that occur. Condition of the land and the plants on it need to be assessed. A professional range scientist is often needed to do this properly. The health and condition of the cow herd becomes an important consideration, as do the seasons in relationship to calving, breeding and weaning. Short- and long-term ranch objectives are factored in.

"Adaptive" implies that grazing is always planned and time-controlled. The timing of use for each paddock, length of the graze period, and, more importantly, the length of the recovery period all become components of the plan. Good grazing may be high density and almost always low frequency — "high density" meaning a high number of livestock on a small piece of land. This usually comes along later as grazing infrastructure and skills are developed. "Low frequency" means not returning to the same place very often. This relates to recovery time, which is tied to the expected growth rates of the grazed plants.

Grazing terminology and chatter are not uniform. Watching across the fence, attending ranch tours or pasture walks where good grazing is practiced are invaluable. Seeing is believing.

Most farmers and ranchers would not intentionally harm their land. Almost all producers profess an intent to leave the land better than they found it, yet many

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Why Your Cows Need Those Expensive Vitamins

Green, growing forages are high in vitamin A. However, until forages are available for grazing, supplemental vitamins remain vital during late gestation and early lactation. (Ohio State University)

Anybody who's strolled through the feed store or co-op lately to price mineral-vitamin mixes knows that vitamins have shot up in price. A logical question then, is this: Are vitamins necessary or just an expensive luxury that the cows can get by without?

Bottom line is yes. Vitamins, especially A and E, are important around calving.

Vitamin A is vital in cow rations in the last trimester through the first couple of months of lactation. It has been found to help manage calf scours, as colostrum is high in vitamin A, and help cows to "clean" and reduce the risk of retained placenta. To minimize calf scours, intake needs to be 30,000 to 45,000 IU per day. The actual requirement of vitamin A for pregnant cows is 1,269 IU/lb. of dry feed intake and for lactating cows 1,769 IU/lb.

Many green forages such as alfalfa are high in vitamin A, so the amount to supplement may be fairly low if feeding this forage or grazing lush, green forages. However, vitamin A can degrade in harvested forages, especially in hays that are more than a year old.

Dormant warm-season grasses are low in vitamin A, which becomes an issue for spring-calving cows, as this forage does not meet cow requirements. One good thing in regard to vitamin A is that cows can store it in the liver for up to four months, which can provide a slight cushion during vitamin A-deficient diets.

Vitamin E is important to help with selenium and vitamin A absorption, aids in immune function, and is an antioxidant important in cellular metabolism. Calves born to cows that are vitamin E-deficient can be born with white muscle disease, also a symptom of low selenium. Vitamin E requirements vary widely depending on diets, with higher vitamin E required if the diet is high in sulfur-containing amino acids, selenium, or includes oil from corn, linseed, or soybeans.

Once again, alfalfa is a good source of vitamin E for cattle, especially in the form of alfalfa meal, as well as other green, leafy forages. Whole grains also have vitamin E, particularly from the oil. There are some issues with vitamin E supply, primarily that heat and long storage length can reduce potency.

Vitamins A, D, E, and K are fat-soluble, thus can be stored in the animal if fed in excess of requirements. Rumen bacteria make vitamin K in quantities sufficient to meet ruminant animal requirements, except if feeding moldy sweet clover hay or silage or any moldy legume.

Vitamin D is synthesized by sunlight in both the ruminant animal and in the forages. Cattle that have direct sunlight exposure or are fed at least 3 to 4 pounds of sun-cured hay per day do not require supplementary vitamin D. Many times, vitamins A, D, and E are sold in one "vitamin pack." However, vitamin D is not necessarily needed unless the cattle are in a completely confined, covered facility.

Vitamin B is a water-soluble vitamin that is synthesized by rumen microbes to meet the animal's requirements and, therefore, does not need to be added to feed for mature animals. Baby calves do not have a functioning rumen with microbes and do not synthesize vitamin B or K.

All the vitamins mentioned above are in the colostrum of cows that have adequate vitamin levels. Subsequently, the young calf receives the vitamins from its mother. If the dam is deficient, injectable vitamins can be given to the calves. These injections are required in a series and need to be administered until the calf has a functioning rumen.

Vitamins are high in green, leafy forages. Therefore, most forages during the growing season could meet cow requirements for vitamins, so offering a low level of vitamins A and E at this time provides an economical "buffer" for vitamin intake.

In the past it has been recommended to feed around 100% to 150% of vitamin A, D, and E requirements in free-choice minerals year-round, thereby ignoring the amount being supplied from forages or feeds. However, to reduce costs, cows could be provided 100% of their vitamin requirement a minimum of 45 days before calving through the first couple of months of lactation to mitigate low levels in harvested, stored forages or dormant native range, without negatively impeding performance.

If no vitamins are included

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in the diet, there is a risk of deficiencies in the cowherd, which could be presented as:

More calf scours, which is the number one cause of death in young calves

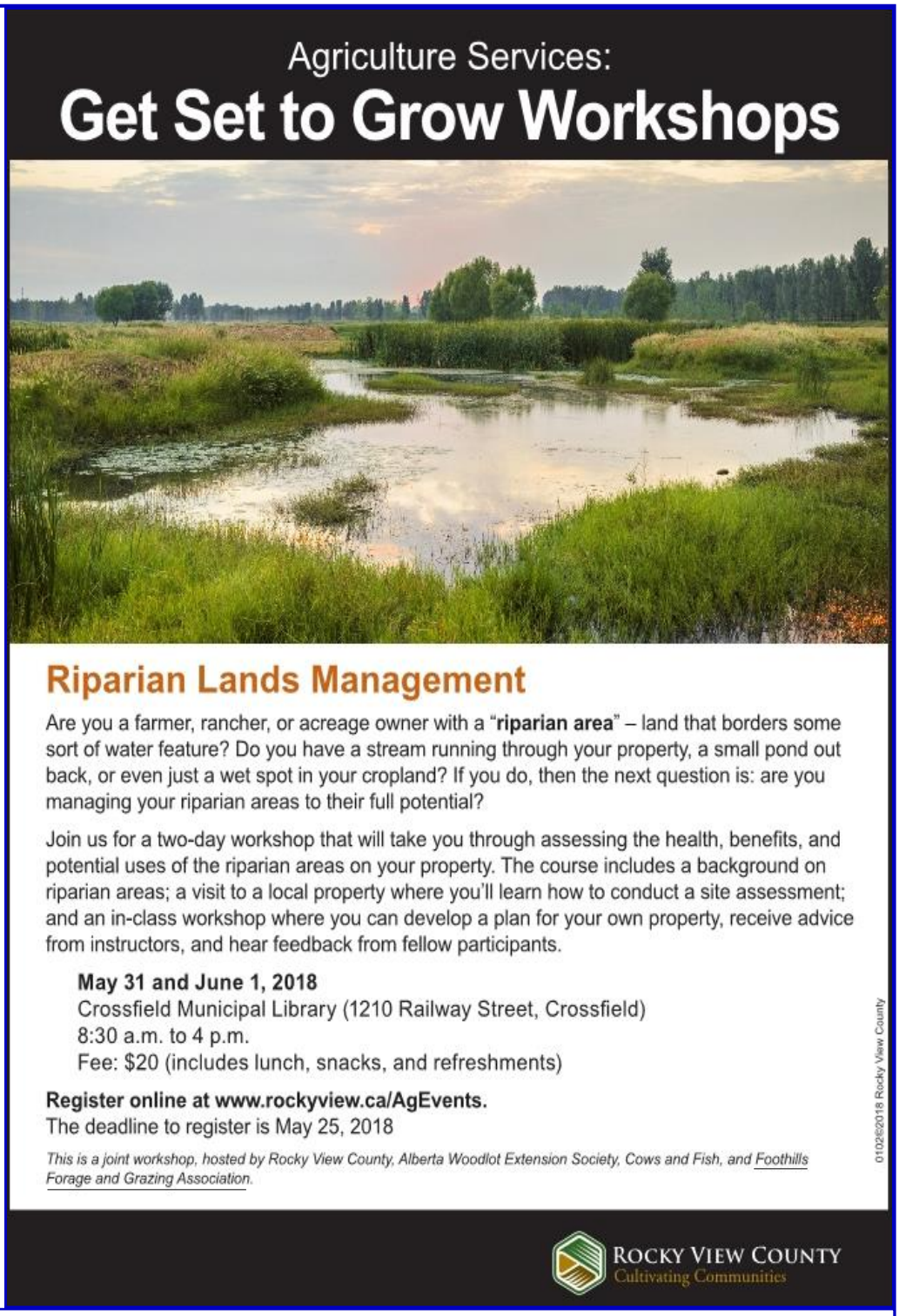
A greater number of cows not fully expelling the placenta, which results in an increased post-partum interval so more cows breed later in the season

A greater number of calves being treated for illness beyond scours

Increased occurrence of white muscle disease in newborn calves in extreme conditions.

It is important to remember that nutrition is balancing nutrients. If cow requirements for protein and energy are not met, the best quality vitamin and mineral program will not offset issues with deficiencies in energy or protein supply.

Jaymelynn Farney—Beef Specialist, Kansas State University
https://www.drovers.com/contributor/jaymelynn-farney-beef-systems-specialist-kansas-state-university



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ranches continue to lose soil at a rapid rate. Tons of soil enters rivers and creeks. There are still dirt banks created by wind reminiscent of Dust Bowl days. With few exceptions, cattle producers are not considered good stewards. Many stand ineffective while resources beneath their feet continue to degrade.

Teichert quotes Gabe Brown, one of the pioneers of the current soil health movement associated with regenerating soil and plant resources. "When people talk of sustainability, why do we want to sustain a degraded resource?" He strongly encourages the cattle industry to engage in "regenerative" agriculture.

Good management practices, simple by definition, are often squandered. Things like:

- Delaying spring grazing until plants are ready.
- Setting stocking rates to the average level of forage expected, with adjustment for the present year.
- Providing plant rest periods and grazing forage at appropriate stages.
- Managing pasture fertility.
- Using annuals and winter annuals.
- Selecting forage species adapted to geographic location.
- Carefully managing grazing of riparian areas.
- Distributing livestock evenly.
- Ensuring all these practices work together by developing and using a grazing plan.

Only a few of many North American ranchers use some form of rotational grazing in place of season-long continuous grazing. And some who do, rotate from low country to high country and back in the same pattern, every year. Others rotate from the calving pasture to the breeding pasture to the preconditioning pasture to the weaning pasture to the early winter pasture to the feeding pasture. They follow the same rotation on the same schedule every year. In the view of many range scientists, these practices do not constitute good grazing. In spite of the small number of producers practicing good grazing methods, the actual number of good graziers is growing rapidly.

Grazing cattle is an integral part of the grassland ecosystem and play an important role in nutrient recycling. Pasture represents an important store of carbon and provides habitat to many species at risk. Pastures preserve wetlands that otherwise may be subject to cultivation. As with any food production system, there is an environmental footprint associated with beef production and that story needs to be told in a straightforward and responsible fashion.

It is never too late to learn. Broad understanding of ecosystem processes is a common deficit. The science behind water cycles, mineral cycles, sunlight energy flow and their application can be learned. Familiarity with the impact of the time and timing of grazing events and impact of stocking density on the land has to be understood. There are a growing number of livestock producers who have doubled carrying capacity and stocking rates using improved grazing practices. They learned from each other and are striving to continually improve the soil, plant community and the livestock.

Good graziers have learned that everything they, their machines, their chemicals, animals, and fire do on the soil surface has a positive or negative effect on the soil, the plants, the insects, the birds, the small and large animals, and even themselves. You can't affect one without affecting them all.

Written by Dr. Ron Clarke who is a consulting veterinarian living in Alberta

https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/2018/05/02/good-grazing-means-manage-for-what-you-want/?module=related&pgtype=article&i=

LIVESTOCK
OFF-SITE WATERING SYSTEM & FENCING DEMONSTRATION

Photo Credit:: Cows and Fish

June 28th - Wheatland County
12:00 - 3:30 (lunch will be provided)
$15

Electric Fencing Demonstration
Norm Ward, Range Ward

Offsite Watering System Demonstration & Troubleshooting
Marvin Jackson, Sundog Solar

Caring For The Green Zone: Riparian Area Management
Kelsey Spicer-Rawe, Cows and Fish

Register at
riparain.eventbrite.com

For more information contact Sonja Bloom at
Ph: 403.995.9466 or enviro@foothillsforage.com

WHEATLAND COUNTY
Where There's Room to Grow

FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION

June 15 - 16, 2018
Beaupre Community Hall

RANGE & PASTURE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Topics Covered Include:
- Grazing Strategies & Range Health
- Stewardship Programs
- Watering Systems
- Plant Identification

Tentative Schedule:
Friday 5pm - 8:45pm
Saturday 9am - 4pm
Everyone Welcome

Most of Saturday will be spent in the field identifying common rangeland plant species. Dress appropriately for the weather, bring water and snacks.

Call or email Andrew Richmond to Register *Limited Space
403-673-3611 ext. 241
andrew.richmond@mdbighorn.ca
Registration Deadline: June 8th

Workshop Cost: $20 per person
Includes Saturday Afternoon BBQ
FREE Camping Available on Site (no water, power)

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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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