

forage VIEWS



May 2019



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Important Dates

June 1: Order deadline for Canada Thistle Stem-Gall Fly

June 13: VBP+ Workshop

REDUCING THE IMPACT OF GRAZING EARLY SPRING PASTURES

With the snow off of the pastures, some farmers, ranchers and acreage owners are turning out livestock 4 to 6 weeks earlier than what was traditionally done. Some of the turn outs are due to a lack of feed, and for others it is necessary to get the cows out of the corrals.

Under preferred conditions, pasture grasses should be allowed to develop to the 3 to 4 leaf stage before being grazed. Allowing the plants time to grow early in the spring, prior to grazing, helps the plants to replenish nutrients required by the root system to keep the plant healthy. Grazing too early draws down root reserves and slows regrowth, eventually killing the plant.

Pastures that were overgrazed last year will take 2 to 4 weeks longer to develop this spring because of stresses caused by grazing, dry conditions and in some areas high numbers of grasshoppers. Last years' stresses will reduce the number of tillers sprouting this spring and diminish plant vigor which together will decrease yield potential this year.

Putting animals onto pastures with minimal spring growth restricts the amount of forage an animal can consume. This can cause animals to lose body condition. A female animal that is losing body condition cannot produce as much milk as one that is in good



REDUCING THE IMPACT OF GRAZING EARLY SPRING PASTURES CONTINUED

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Rachael Nay

CONTACT

ph: 780-727-4447
5009 45 Ave
Entwistle AB
Box 360, Evansburg ABT0E 0T0



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condition. This reduces growth rates of the offspring. The impact to the breeding female is that it takes longer for the animal to cycle and first service conception rates are impaired. These animals cannot maintain a high level of reproductive efficiency. If possible, provide supplemental feeds such as hay, greenfeed, silage, grain, or commercial pellets to reduce the demands on the grass plants. This helps to meet nutritional requirements of the animals. Ensure that mineral and trace mineral supplementation programs are continued.

Calves that are more than 45 to 50 days of age can be fed a 16% protein creep ration. A "home grown" creep can be 1/3 oats, 1/3 barley and 1/3 peas (the peas can be screenings from local seed cleaning plants to reduce the cost). Protein is required by the young animals to maintain growth rates including the development of bone and muscle. If they are fed only an energy feed such as oats; the extra energy will create fat and the animals do not frame out properly. Calves under 700 pounds can be fed whole grains without a loss in efficiency. Depending on conditions, a creep feed could result in 75 to 150 pounds of additional gain compared to calves that are not given a creep feed.

If there is no choice but to turn animals out; use a sacrifice pasture to minimize the impact on total forage production in other

areas. For every day the cows are turned out early in the spring, it could reduce fall grazing by 3 days.

Rotational graze or strip-graze pastures to have short duration/ high intensity grazing events. If possible, provide a minimum rest period of 30 days to allow the plants to recover and produce re-growth. Soil test to determine fertility available to the forages. If growing conditions are favorable, applying fertilizer in the spring or early on in the growing season (when rains come).

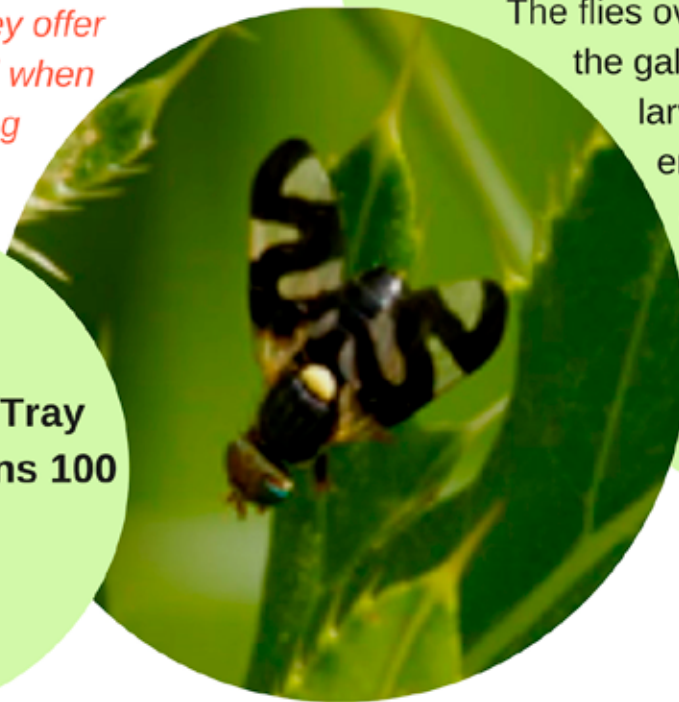
Plants that were over grazed and stressed going into last winter and continue to be stressed throughout this year are more likely to not survive the winter. If you treat your pastures and grasses well, with adequate rest and ample time to recharge root reserve, they will pay you back with higher cattle gains and increased pasture longevity and productivity. If you graze too early, or before there is sufficient regrowth, you get short term pasture and long term losses to your pocketbook.

CANADA THISTLE STEM- GALL FLY ORDERS NOW OPEN!

Have you considered biological control for your thistle patch? Have thistle in ecologically sensitive or hard to access areas?

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The flies overwinter in the gall as mature larvae and emerge as adults in the spring.

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For more info please visit

www.westcentralforage.com/saca/



MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

It has been a busy couple of months for West-Central Forage! In March, WCFA had our Annual General Meeting and welcomed two new members to our Board of Directors. This year we had one of our directors finish his time on the board. We extend our sincere gratitude and deepest thank you to Dale Engstrom for his contribution to the board and our organization over the last six years. You were an extremely dedicated board member and truly went above and beyond. We truly hope to see you back on the board soon! We also had Bruce Churchill step down from his director's role and we thank him for his contribution to the board and organization. We would like to introduce our two newly elected board members to you:



AREN SKOGSTAD

A fourth-generation farmer, Aren and his wife Kadi operate the family's farm, Skogstad Land & Cattle Company, located just north of Barrhead. The farm focuses primarily on cereal and oilseed production, while maintaining a small commercial cattle herd. Aren holds post secondary education in environmental sciences, working as an environmental specialist within the oil and gas sector, before coming on board as the Agricultural Services Manager for Lac Ste. Anne County in 2015. Aren has a passion for farming and everything ag, involving his two kids Luke and Sophie in the day to day of farm life whenever possible. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to sit as a board member for West Central Forage Association. The knowledge and experience the membership of this organization has to offer is second to none."

SAVE THE DATE - JUNE 13, 2019

VBP+
WORKSHOP

Join us on June 13th to learn about the Verified Beef Production Plus program and what it takes to enroll your operation!

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CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION
WWW.WESTCENTRALFORAGE.COM

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SAVE THE DATE

December 10, 11 & 12 2019
Edmonton, Alberta

www.ABSoilGrazing.com

MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS!



DUANE MOVALD

Born and raised in the Breton area, Duane has had a passion for agriculture since he was young. He co-operates the family farm established in 1952 along with his parents. Movald Ranches Ltd. is a mid sized farming operation that produces purebred and commercial Simmental cattle as well as cereal grains in rotation along with other crops to help benefit forage production. He holds a pesticide applicator certification and service registration, and services the local area to help landowners manage their weed issues. He is also active in his community and has served in various capacities sitting on municipal boards, breeder groups, 4-H groups, and societies. Some of his interests include cattle genetics, growing systems, ecological sustainability and networking with others. He also enjoys equine endeavours, snowmobiling, socializing, and anything outdoors. " I look forward to sharing my knowledge, sitting as a director, and learning and working with the good folks at West Central Forage."



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GRAZING PLAN-GET WHAT YOU PLAN FOR!

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." -Yogi Berra. While the plants lay in wait of warm weather and sunshine, now is the time to strategize a grazing plan for this coming growing season. Planning steps put you in the driver's seat!

In some parts of Alberta, producers have experienced two years of dry conditions and who knows what lies ahead for 2019. Planning allows the grazing manager to be pro-active in a situation as opposed to reactive, ensures all resources are optimized and helps to maintain control. Decisions are set to be made quickly and thoughtfully as "key trigger dates" arrive. Grazers in the drier areas know they are in the middle of the cumulative effects of the dry conditions.

They are in need of adjusting management to allow forages to build back productivity even if this year moisture is higher than the past couple of years. Returning subsoil moisture, plant's root systems, and plant vigor takes time.

The forage/cattle/ people plan itself can be as detailed as one wants to get and involve family for the teamwork needed ahead; and most importantly, it needs to be documented. As much as we think we will remember all the details of a plan, writing it down will ensure the writer and others understand where the plan is headed. It also helps encourage prompt timely actions for best outcomes. A number of plan templates are available that vary in detail. It is up to the individual

manager as to how technical she/he wants to get, and who they want to involve. Involving the family creates opportunities for creative ideas with team "buy in" using problem solving solutions. The important point is to ensure something gets documented so that if stresses happen, there is a fall back action and support to keep the arrow pointed at the goal.

A plan starts with setting the goals and objectives. Do you know the cost per acre for your grazing system? What is the net return? How many months of the year do you expect/need the cows to graze? Do the cows work for you or do you work for the cows? How important is your forage to your operation? These are but a few of the questions that should be considered when setting your

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goals and objectives.

Once the goals and objectives are determined, developing a resource inventory and evaluation of the pastures/feeding systems are the next steps. How many acres of all forages are there to work with? Could they be used differently? Are you looking to change your forage system – adding, deleting,...? Who can you talk with who is doing something you have thought of doing but not done yet? How did they make it work? Now may be the time to try. If you have not become a member of your local forage/research association, now is the time to join! The associations are a wealth of information with members/producers who have “been there, done that, got the T-shirt”.

How many cattle graze these acres? Knowing the forage requirements allows the question “do you have an adequate forage supply?” to be answered. At this point if the answer is no, you don’t have adequate forage supply, it is then time to revisit your goals and objectives or resource inventory and decide where you are going to find additional acres to increase forage supply. Are some acres not preferred by animals, not grazed well, but could be with a few changes?

Which brings us to the next planning step which considers the

cost-benefit and risk assessment of grazing. Although canola and some of the other cash crops may have a higher cost-benefit payout in the short-term, in the long-term the soil may be compromised by erosion or have other concerns which negate the short-term benefits. In almost all cases a few years of well managed grazing will improve the land for years to come. Legumes/grass forage stands have shown positive soil improvements with higher resulting grain crop production for 10 years after being taken out of forage.

Implementation of the grazing plan comes next, followed closely by monitoring; really, these two steps

happen simultaneously. Turning the cattle into the pasture in May, checking they have water and salt/mineral through the months and pulling them in August would not be considered monitoring the forages effectively. While mob grazing isn’t a system every producer wants to consider, closer monitoring, grouping herds, and moving of the cattle will begin to change the forage species present and has the potential to increase production over time.

The final element of a grazing plan is updating the plan. Continual change is important as the pasture conditions change. The plan update should happen every time it rains or doesn’t rain, or when

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actions are taken. Developing that plan today should use forage yields close to last year as a starting point. Be honest with yourself. Should you adjust it down if you feel you were not happy with results? If the area then gets adequate moisture through April to June and pasture growth is abundant with plants revigorated, then the updated plan in July could allow for additional animals. Even more profitable may be to graze longer so winter feeding is reduced. On the other hand, if the rains don't arrive by key dates written out in your plan, start culling steps to mitigate losses of grazing days. This backup plan with a culling procedure will be best in the long term and make the decision process easier when stresses are high.

Grazing management is more than noting the date the cattle were turned into the pasture and the date they left a month later. It's about observing your livestock, forages and other resources and making the best decisions for all involved. A vigorous healthy pasture will bounce back quickly with compensatory growth when rains come. An overgrazed pasture, at best will improve slowly in the following year and only then with conservative grazing management. Now is the time to start a plan for 2019. When we see the first flush of

green grass, we can get a bit too excited to be done with feeding which will negatively affect the forage production later in the growing season. Having a plan in place will ensure our excitement is curbed. Just as sure as dry conditions end with rain, there is opportunity in adversity.....what is yours?

Andrea Hanson – *Livestock Extension Specialist*
> 403.948.1528

Grant Lastiwka – *Forage Extension Specialist*
> 403.556.4248

Karin Lindquist – *Forage Beef Specialist*
> 403.742.7931



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