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In This Issue

Sharing Cattle and Cropland1
Meet a Board Member - Grant Chittick3
Meet Our Summer Staff 4
Upcoming Events5
Eco-Buffer Planting Workshop6
2018 Small Plot Research Workshops
Riparian Grazing 8

Important Dates

May 24: **EFP Help Session** May 30: **Weevil Order Deadline** June 20: **EFP Help Sessions** June 1, 5, 12: **Pond Days**

SHARING CATTLE AND CROPLAND A WAY TO CAPTURE NUTRIENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

By Tara Mulhern Davidson Published: May 10, 2018 in Canadian Cattlemen

west-central FORAGE association

A few decades ago, the practice of growing both crops and cattle on the same farm was far more common than it is now. Today's notill, organic, and conventional crop producers, however, are paying close attention to soil health and crop inputs. The potential benefits of incorporating cattle back onto their farms are leading to some creative arrangements.

RECYCLING IDEAS AND NUTRIENTS

Cody Straza and his wife Allison Squires operate Upland Organics, a 2,000-acre organic crop farm near Wood Mountain, Sask. They grow several crops including cereals, oilseeds, and pulses, and use practices such as intercropping, cover crops (with 8-12 species), and green manure plow-downs. This year, they are about to adopt a practice that hasn't occurred on their farm in nearly a decade — cattle grazing.

May 2018

Straza says their focus has been on building nutrients and improving soil health but now it's time to get cattle out there to help. "You can build nitrogen with legumes but when the plants are laid on the surface you can lose those nutrients. When we process those nutrients through a cow, we are also kick-starting the biology of the soil on our farm," Straza explained.

This spring they will seed an annual cover crop and partner with a neighbour who will graze around 200 cow-calf pairs on their



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CONTACT

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



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SHARING CATTLE AND CROPLAND

........... field using high-intensity, lowfrequency management. Their collaborator will look after the fencing and water. "One of our main goals is to trample more than we eat. The livestock will eat the most palatable parts of the plants, and rest of the plant will become litter," Straza said, and explained their costs will be reduced because they won't burn diesel or run equipment to achieve the same outcome. Both Upland Organics and their neighbour have a back-up plan in case things don't go as expected. "There will probably be lots of mistakes the first year - we are all going to be learning a lot," said Straza, optimistically.

OPPORTUNITY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

"I don't know why more people don't do this," said Leanne Thompson, when asked about striking a deal with cropfarming neighbours for grazing. Thompson and her husband Ryan operate Living Sky Beef near Minton, Sask., where they run pairs, background, and feed cattle, on 7,000 acres of native and tame grass.

For the past seven years, the Thompsons have collaborated with adjacent landowners Derek Axten and his wife Tannis who were named Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers in 2017.

Axten says it makes sense to work together. "It's been a really good arrangement and flexibility has been the key," he said. The Axtens have made soil biology a focus on their 6,000-acre farm and are using composts and multi-species cover crops to improve nutrient cycling and increase organic matter. "There are guys that are doing this without bringing cows in but this helps to jump-start the system." Axten likes to leave about 50-60 per cent residue behind as a biological primer.

"We grow a lot of fall seeded cover crops. The Thompsons can use the grazing and they have enough numbers to make it easy to add cattle on the farm where we need," he explained.

Ironically, the families first met when the Axtens were exiting the cow business. They were looking to sell their native rangeland and the Thompsons were looking to buy. "(They) started stubble grazing on our farm a couple years in. We were used to it; that's what we always did. That's how it started," Axten recalled.

The Axtens installed proper perimeter fencing and the Thompsons are responsible for maintaining the infrastructure, temporary fencing, and moving animals. Access to stock water can be an issue, but the families have worked it out together. On some sites they developed new sources, on others they tied portable troughs into the Thompson's existing pipeline.

Both couples stress the importance of forthright communication. "I think we've

always had a really open dialogue about costs and pricing," said Axten.

Leanne Thompson echoed that sentiment. "Sometimes price discovery can be hard, but nothing is free so you have to put a price on grazing," she said.

"We also do a lot of horse trading," added Axten. "We've been using manure from their corrals for composting." They apply compost onto the soil surface, or into the soil in the form of compost tea.

For other cattle producers interested in developing similar partnerships, Thompson cautions that you need to be dedicated to the process and willing to prove it can work. "Once you get your foot in the door, you have to make sure it goes well. The first year or two are the litmus test."

The livestock and crop sectors will always face ongoing competitive issues, but the potential benefits that come from working together are becoming hard to ignore.

Both parties involved in these arrangements should clearly negotiate terms and identify potential problems and solutions before issues arise.

For producers willing to think outside the box, and their property lines, grazing cattle on cropland can be a win-win situation for everyone.

MEET OUR BOARD PRESIDENT - GRANT CHITTICK



Grant has a purebred registered cattle operation raising Red & Black Angus, Simmental and Hereford cattle. The Chittick family bull sale happens annually in March and their female sale in November.

Grant's grandfather started the operation, which got passed down to Gary (Grant's father), then Grant and his brother Randy. Grant's wife Tanya and children, Raymond, Crystal and Jessie, are active in helping with the success of the operation. As a family they are very pleased to have three generations farming and raising cattle together, and some of the fourth generation are showing great interest in being "future farmers" This makes Grant very happy and proud that they will carry on the "farming way".

The family's philosophy consists of having females that have been selected from cows with calving ease and are heavy milkers while still carrying neat and tidy udders. "As we all know farmers and ranchers sell their cattle by the pound so every pound counts" says Grant. They strive to select the sale bulls from up and coming females that have strong maternal traits that show they can produce. Grant believes these bulls will carry on the genetics to put more dollars in your pocket.

Grant is passionate about giving back to the community. He is the president of the Mayerthorpe Ag Society, a leader in the Mayerthorpe 4-H Club, director of the Conner Creek Community Pasture and on the Sports Ground Committee in Mayerthorpe. Grant sits as the current president of the WCFA Board of Directors as well.

MEET OUR SUMMER STAFF



GARYN TOPOLA – SUMMER FIELD TECHNICIAN I was born in Moose Jaw Saskatchewan and have been around farming my entire life. Growing up as a kid my grandparents owned a grain farm 90 miles southwest of Moose Jaw and during the summer I and my family would spend majority of our time out there. When I was 11 years old my family moved to Stony Plain for my dad's work. My grandparents continued to farm so we would make the 10 hour drive back home for every holiday in order to help out. I currently just finished my first year of post-secondary education at Olds College. I am working towards a diploma in Agriculture Management with a major in marketing. I have plans of completing the applied degree in Agribusiness Management at Olds College as well. Because of my background in grain I was expecting to continue my education within the grain sector and eventually my career, however after my first semester at Olds I discovered a passion and interest in the livestock industry but specifically in cattle. Because of this new found interest in my second semester I took up the livestock nutrition class and this furthered my passion for the livestock industry and the producers involved in it. After school I have aspirations of pursuing a career as a feed consultant and eventually purchasing land and starting my own cow/calf farm.



DYLAN FATH – SUMMER FIELD TECHNICIAN Dylan was born and raised in northern Alberta (Barrhead area and the Peace Country) and, most recently, lives in Edmonton. Dylan is undertaking a BSc Environmental and Conservation Sciences at the University of Alberta and will resume his second year of the program autumn 2018. Pursuit of a science degree and technical skills represents a career shift for Dylan into applied sciences from a prior business education and work as a policy analyst with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Within agriculture and environmental sciences, Dylan's interests are primarily in grassland management and wetland and riparian preservation and stewardship. Dylan is married to Breanna, a most wonderful and patient wife, with whom he has two wonderful kiddos: Eveleen and Matthias.



UPCOMING EVENTS

EFP HELP SESSIONS

9 M	ay 24 4pm-8pm
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- Lac Ste. Anne County Office
- June 20 10am-2pm
- Lac Ste. Anne County Office

*Note: pre-registration is required please contact Jessica at 780-72-4424 or conservationag@ westcentralforage.com **POND DAYS** June 1, 5, 12

- ANNUAL PLOT TOUR
- August 9 (Tent)

SHEEP AND GOAT SYMPOSIUM

O November (dates TBA)

WINTER TOUR

December 4 (Tent)

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GOT THISTLE? ORDER YOUR WEEVILS TODAY!

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For more information or to order please contact Jessica at 780.727.4424 or conservationag@westcentralforage.com

Note: there are a few trays of stem-gall flies remaining as well if you would like to get in on the 2018 order!

2018 SMALL PLOT RESEARCH TRIALS

Spring has finally arrived and that means WCFA is buzzing with activity getting ready to put in our small plot trials for the year. We have a number of different trials that will be going in over the next few weeks at both of our forage research sites.

WILDWOOD FORAGE RESEARCH SITE TRIALS

Perennial Forages

This is a continuation from the trial that began at the Wildwood site in 2016. This project is looking to identify perennial crop species/varieties that demonstrate superior establishment, hardiness, forage yield, and nutritional quality in different eco-regions of Alberta. Yield and nutritional quality were assessed in 2017, and will be again this year.

Hemp Variety Trial

Several varieties of Industrial Hemp will be assessed for height, growth and establishment at the site to provide producers with information on this emerging crop.

Cover Crops

Several varieties of cover crop and cover crop mixes will be tested to determine yield and nutritional quality, and assess any differences in varieties over two harvest dates.

Corn Variety Trial

Corn varieties will be evaluated for maturity, yield and nutritional quality at the site to provide regionally specific information for producers. **Regional Silage Variety Trial** Varieties of barley and oats commonly used for silage are included in the trial. The trial will also include winter and spring cereal mixes, as well as some alternative crops (ex. Millet, Sudangrass, etc.) The trial intends to determine yield and nutritional values of the various varieties to give regionally specific information for producers.

BRAZEAU COUNTY FORAGE RESEARCH SITE TRIALS

Hemp

Several varieties of Industrial Hemp will be assessed for height, growth and establishment at the site to provide producers with information on this emerging crop.

Cover Crops

Several varieties of cover crop and cover crop mixes will be tested to determine yield and nutritional quality, and assess any differences in varieties over two harvest dates.

We will be sure to keep you updated on the progress of these trials throughout the year, and will provide our final findings in a future newsletter. To view the findings from trials completed in previous years please visit our website: www. westcentralforage.com/projectsprograms/. For "behind the scenes" updates keep an eye on our social media pages as we'll be posting updates from the field there.



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> Jonathan & Stefan Bouw, Edie Creek Angus,Dugald, Manitoba.

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RIPARIAN GRAZING – STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

ADAPTED FROM RIPARIAN GRAZING FACTSHEET FROM COWS AND FISH (HTTP://COWSANDFISH.ORG/WHATSNEW/DOCUMENTS/RIPARIANGRAZINGFACTSHEET.PDF)



Riparian areas, those areas next to a stream, river, lake, wetland, or spring have soils and vegetation influenced by water. These moist soils and waterloving plant communities require some special consideration when grazing these areas. Healthy, functioning riparian areas help filter and trap runoff, recharge groundwater, reduce erosion, support biodiversity, and often produce abundant primary production, production that provides grazing opportunities. These grazing opportunities, can be maintained, as can riparian functions, with sound grazing management. The grazing strategies outlined below focus on relevance to riparian areas, but need to fit into the entire livestock grazing operation.

Like all grazing lands, grazing riparian areas involves 4 range management principles:

- Balance grazing use with available forage – stay within the carrying capacity and productivity of the site, while allowing plants to remain healthy and vigorous.
- 2. Provide effective rest rest during the growing season enables plants to re-grow roots and above ground leaves and shoots, following grazing.
- 3. Avoid use during vulnerable periods – vulnerable periods include when soils are saturated with moisture and most prone to compaction, as well as when trees and shrubs are most sought after, such as when grasses are dormant or no longer available.
- Provide even or planned distribution - livestock will tend to return to favourite areas, so using distribution

tools is key to spreading grazing impacts to where use is desired and to minimise impacts in sensitive areas.

Considerations for riparian grazing:

- Apply range management principles
- Modify your grazing strategies or practices to suit your situation
- Monitor the impact of grazing and adjust management as needed
- Riparian areas are particularly sensitive and important for many reasons, and thus may require more active, careful management than upland areas
- Not all riparian areas are suitable for grazing, due to their natural characteristics
- Riparian areas can be extremely productive, with

3-10 times as much forage produced compared to surrounding uplands

- Riparian forage productivity is highly variable, and this variability needs to be factored into grazing planning. Flood waters deposit and build deep rich soils, creating high productivity in the long-term, but sites may be covered with water or buried from new sediment deposits, resulting in no useable forage in some years.
- Riparian areas are diverse and thus no single grazing strategy or approach is suitable for all riparian areas.
- Consider using off-site watering systems wherever possible in riparian grazing situations, as this improves livestock distribution, increases livestock health and minimizes negative impacts to the waterbody, banks and shoreline.
- Highly disturbed areas are at risk of expansion of nonnative, disturbance-caused plants as well as more invasive plants (weeds), including when the disturbance is removed. Weed management may be necessary during recovery.

GRAZING STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

RIPARIAN PASTURE

Create a pasture entirely or mostly made up of the riparian area, rather than fencing based on quarter section or landownership lines, and factor this site into a rotational grazing system.

Benefits: allows grazing timing and intensity specifically suited to the riparian area. Riparian plant species are often different than surrounding upland areas, and thus, fencing 'like with like' allows targeted grazing timing to best suit each pasture. Riparian pastures can be used in complex landscapes, such as areas comprised of a mixture of topography and plant communities, such as open grassed pasture or meadows, forested areas, and a mixture of riparian plant communities.

Considerations or Limitations: Not well suited to very small riparian areas because pasture units may be too small to be practical. Additional fencing (temporary or permanent) is required to develop new pasture units. Creation of riparian pastures may result in adjacent upland pastures not having access to surface water, which needs to be addressed.

REST ROTATION

Using a rotational grazing system (2 or more pastures fenced separately), one pasture unit is rested and not grazed for one full grazing year, or more. The pasture unit that is rested is then grazed in the coming year(s), while another pasture unit is rested. Rest rotation may be used for one or a few years (such as to recover a pasture's health), or it may be a long-term strategy.

Benefits: Providing one or more years of rest is particularly beneficial to provide a



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significant boost to recovery of a very unhealthy or heavily impacted site, or to provide one or more years of rest to allow for seedling or sapling trees or shrubs to grow to a larger size which are more browsing resistant, speeding the regeneration of woody plants.

Considerations or Limitations:

Rest rotation requires having a large enough total area of pasture and low enough stocking rates that you can rest a specific area for the year. If all pasture units were used previously and are needed to meet existing stocking rates, rest rotation will require either adding new pasture or reducing stocking rates. New fencing or watering systems may be required if new pasture units are created, and that changes access to water.

DEFERRED ROTATION

Using a rotational grazing system (2 or more pastures fenced separately), one pasture unit is rested throughout the spring (and sometimes later), while other pastures are grazed. The pasture unit that is deferred in one year may be grazed in the coming year(s) earlier, while another pasture unit receives delayed use, if it is suited to early use (such as a tame pasture). Alternatively, you may always delay early season grazing in a riparian area to avoid wet conditions or minimise negative impacts on nesting waterfowl or song birds. Deferred rotation may be a strategy used for a few years (such as to recover a pasture's

health), or it may be a long-term strategy.

Benefits: Delaying spring use allows the soft, wet and compactable soils to dry out somewhat, reducing physical impacts and compaction issues that can occur. Delaying grazing in the spring is often also beneficial for waterfowl and songbirds, reducing the likelihood of physical damage or loss of cover (because of forage being eaten) to nests. Deferral dates can be predetermined (such as July 15, a common date for waterfowl nest protection) or variable, depending on the goal of deferral, such as varying based on the moisture conditions of the year.

Considerations or Limitations:

Deferral of a given pasture assumes you either continue winter or supplemental feeding longer or have other pastures to move cattle to instead of the deferred field. Not all pasture units may be suited to either being the deferred or nondeferred field equally well, due to logistics, location relative to wintering or calving sites, forage type, etc. If new fencing is required to create new pasture units, and that change results in some pastures being separated from former water sources, then alternate watering systems will be needed.

GRAZEABLE RIPARIAN CORRIDOR

A grazeable corridor is essentially a small (usually narrowly) fenced area adjacent to a waterbody. Sometimes it is an area that was fenced with the intent of fully excluding livestock, and then some grazing was determined as desirable or necessary. It is grazed, like a riparian pasture, when the area is best suited, such as when soils are not soft and compactable, or when the forage is most suited for use. It

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may be grazed each year, or only in some years.

Benefits: A grazeable corridor is a highly controlled area, usually with limited diversity of topography or plant communities, making it well suited to a defined timing and type of use. Because it is a relatively small area, moving livestock in or out can be quite easy and efficient.

Consideration or Limitations:

It is generally too small to be considered a regular pasture unit, and it may not be suited to grazing every year because of the limited forage available. It is particularly sensitive to overuse and physical impacts because of the small area and requires careful monitoring. It can be useful as a source of stockpiled forage in drought periods.

RIPARIAN EXCLUSION FENCING

Livestock exclusion can be done for all or part of a riparian area, usually to protect the riparian area and adjacent waterbody, allow healing or recovery, or sometimes to make management of livestock more practical. The site may be excluded from grazing permanently, or after many years of rest, become part of your grazed areas again.

Benefits: One of the main benefits to exclusion fencing is that riparian areas and waterbodies are protected from physical damage and unwanted nutrients or contaminants (eg. bacteria) from livestock manure. In addition, since many riparian areas have extensive trees and shrubs, exclusion can reduce damage to or loss of trees and shrubs from excessive rubbing, browsing or trampling of root zones, thus maintaining deep rooted species to protect banks and shores, as well as maintaining fish and wildlife habitat and shelter opportunities for livestock (if adjacent to another pasture). Exclusion fencing creates more control of livestock distribution which can be beneficial during grazing (in adjacent areas) as well as when gathering livestock.

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Consideration or Limitations:

If a waterbody that was a livestock water source is fenced off, then an alternate watering system must be used. Exclusion fencing adds additional costs in fencing and maintenance, as well as reduces access to forage and shelter resources for livestock. Weed management is still often required in an exclusion area, as it is in other pasture units. Generally, fencing as far back as possible, in straight lines, reduces fence maintenance and construction costs, including avoiding damage by flood waters and flood debris.

CONTINUOUS GRAZING

Continuous, season long-grazing is challenging for any pasture, particularly areas that include riparian areas, because livestock tend to re-graze favourite areas and spend a lot of time around water and shelter. Careful distribution and stocking rate planning is required to ensure that riparian areas are not overgrazed when included in a pasture that has continuous grazing.

When should you consider changing your riparian management?

Signs to watch for that you may need to consider adjusting your riparian grazing approach:

- unreliable or highly variable forage production
- change in plant species from water-loving to drier, upland species

- trees and shrubs are heavily browsed, flat-topped or mushroom shaped, all old or missing
- loss of wildlife and fish from the area
- extensive bare soil from livestock
- abundant undesirable or noxious weed invasion
- extensive bank and riparian damage and erosion from hoof action
- water quality or water quantity issues

Benefits of sound riparian pasture management include:

- increased animal performance and weight gain resulting from cleaner water
- better nutrient management (keep it on the land to enrich soils)
- increased forage production
- maintain or restore animal shelter
- drought and flood proofing
- better distribution and utilisation
- reduced bank erosion and loss of land

Your riparian grazing goals should aim to maintain or restore riparian functions to ensure long-term grazing opportunities. To understand the pieces of your riparian area better, you may wish to conduct a Riparian Health Assessment.