

# The Saskatchewan Livestock & Forage Gazette

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## From the Editor...

You may notice that the Livestock & Forage Gazette has a “new look” – thank you to Tara Davidson, AESB-AAFC Rangeland Specialist in Swift Current for creating it for us! As I now take on the role of newsletter editor I would like to thank Janice Bruynooghe, Saskatchewan Forage Council, for her past contributions as newsletter editor! The Livestock & Forage Gazette Committee’s goal is to provide you with timely and useful information to consider in your own livestock operation. One of the articles that I found particularly interesting this time around was the Producer Profile article on Steve and Kathy Grant’s winter feeding approach. While touring their ranch this summer we learned that they have been involved in chaff pile grazing for almost 30 years! What seems new is actually an old idea..... be sure to look for our next issue next spring.

Best regards,

**Chris Nykoluk**

*Livestock & Forage Gazette Editor*



Turn to page 11 to read more about what these two young producers were doing.  
Photo credit: Leanne Thompson

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# *Adding species to an existing forage stand*

Submitted by Richard McBride, PAg, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Saskatoon, SK



One frequent question that forage specialists get asked is “I have a stand of \_\_\_\_\_ and I want to add \_\_\_\_\_ to it. Can that be done successfully?” As with most questions, the answer is “It depends”. The rule of thumb that I like to use is that you can add legumes to some grass stands but you can’t add grass to a legume stand - but there are always exceptional circumstances!

The main issue when determining the potential success of adding a species to a stand is the competitiveness of the existing stand and the vigor of the seedling being added. A common example is smooth brome. Smooth brome will typically crowd out most other plant species by sending out aggressive roots and using up all the available soil nitrogen. Producers often refer to this as a “sod-bound” stand of grass. This soil environment makes it very difficult for other plants, regardless of their competitiveness, to establish (including weeds). Studies have been done which spray out strips of the brome and then additional species have been added using various techniques. These techniques may work with some initial success, but over time the brome will again crowd out the introduced species. Spiking, knifing and discing produce essentially the same result: a new species may establish poorly, produce little biomass, and then eventually be squeezed out of the stand.

On the other end of the spectrum are native plantings. Ducks Unlimited Canada has seeded many fields to native grasses. Early plantings used seed that, despite being native to Saskatchewan, may have originated from locations too far away to be competitive locally. In many cases, these stands were not providing the quality of nesting habitat desired, so we attempted to incorporate

additional species into these stands.

Successful enhancement of these stands has been accomplished using alfalfa. The alfalfa



*Alfalfa can be successfully established into some existing grass stands.*

has been drilled in, broadcasted and broadcasted/grazed. In all cases, alfalfa establishment has been successful. Slightly more competitive stands (dominated by meadow brome, intermediate wheatgrass and other bunch grasses) have also had successful alfalfa introduction by broadcasting the alfalfa. One specific example which failed to establish was the addition of broadcasted sainfoin into a thin native planting.

Along with smooth brome, Russian wild rye and some legumes (including alfalfa), are particularly difficult to add new species into. These plants produce toxins that prevent other species from germinating and growing near them. If a stand dominated by one of these species requires rejuvenation, you will likely need to establish a totally new forage stand. Reseeding preparation options might include spraying, fallowing, or cropping, or breaking, fallowing and cropping. Soil conditions will be a large factor in making this decision.

If you would like to add a legume to a thin grass stand, keep in mind the relative seedling vigor of commonly used legumes - from most vigorous to least vigorous: alfalfa, sweet clover, bird’s foot trefoil, red and white clover, sainfoin and then lastly, cicer milkvetch. Therefore, alfalfa or sweet clover would be the easiest legume to incorporate into an existing forage stand. These two species would also yield the highest chance of success.

Once alfalfa has been established in a grass stand, the alfalfa will last as long as conditions are suitable. In the thin native seeded stands where establishment has occurred (I wrote

about these earlier in this article), the alfalfa has remained productive for over 10 years, primarily due to lack of competition from the associated grasses. We have used seeding rates of 0.25 lbs/ac to 2.00 lbs/ac. If you assume 25% of the seed will establish you might expect to have a plant population of 1 - 2 plants per square foot at 0.25 lbs/ac, and possibly up to 4 plants per square foot using a seeding rate of 2.0 lbs/ac.

One application of this approach that is particularly useful is when a mix of grasses and legumes are planted. In some

cases, broadleaf weeds become a problem - particularly Canada thistle. If the thistle is sprayed out, only the grass is left. Once the concern of herbicide residue has passed, alfalfa seed can be then added using any one of the previously mentioned techniques. This is an economical way to return the land to a grass/alfalfa mix. Once again, keep in mind that nothing will stay in a mix with smooth brome!

*For more information please contact Richard McBride, Ducks Unlimited Canada at (306) 665-7356.*

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## *An old idea is new again?*

Producer Profile – Steve & Kathy Grant, Val Marie, SK

Submitted by Krista Connick, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Swift Current, SK

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### **1. Steve, please describe your operation. What are some of your greatest opportunities and greatest challenges?**

We own a mixed cattle and grain farm. Within this operation we manage a 200 head commercial crossbred beef cattle herd. We seed 1,200-1,300 acres of cereal grains every year, using a 50/50 summer fallow/crop rotation.

Irrigation and backflood hay fields help supply winter feed. Three established wells supply year round water as well as pasture pipeline opportunities. Our grain operation supplies fall grazing and winter feed (chaff and green feed).

Some of the challenges we face include drought, distance to markets, and also, to our farm input suppliers.



*Kathy and Steve Grant have been feeding chaff piles since 1980.*

*continued on next page*

## 2. How long have you been grazing chaff piles and where did you get the idea?

We started collecting and grazing chaff in 1980. This idea originated from observing another producer in the Val Marie area successfully collecting chaff - we recognized that it would be a way to extend our fall grazing. We then pursued the information that was published in agricultural magazines on chaff collection and feeding methods.

## 3. What type of equipment do you use?

We collect the chaff by using a Redekop “chaff saver” and “chaff wagon” mounted on a 9500 John Deere combine. To pick the piles we use a push-off stacker mounted on a front-end loader. The trailer we use to haul the chaff is a 40’ chip trailer which was formerly used to haul wood chips at a lumber mill. For unloading the chaff the chip trailer has a chain conveyor on the floor which is run by a hydraulic motor. We can haul approximately 12 full size piles per load with this chip trailer.

## 4. What works really well and what is a challenge when feeding chaff piles?

Feeding chaff piles directly in the field usually extends our fall grazing into the first week of December. Then the piles that have been hauled to a central location are used for winter feed. We leave the more palatable chaff (eg. barley & oats) for field grazing and pick most of the wheat chaff for winter feed. One thing that we like is that this process cleans up weed seeds and volunteer grains. It also keeps build-up of manure out of the yard.

The biggest challenge we have is having to spread any piles that haven’t been cleaned up by the cattle so that this residue doesn’t hamper future seeding operations. The other challenge is that wind can sometime wreak havoc with the piles before they can be grazed or picked.



*Steve talks about his chip trailer and his chaff feeding program.*

## 5. How do you control rations? Do you supplement? What do you use for water?

The chaff that gets hauled for winter feed purposes is fed and controlled by electric wire. We supplement with alfalfa hay and either pellets or ground barley. If we use ground barley we add loose mineral - otherwise we use mineral tubs.

We use dugouts for early fall chaff grazing and then when the cattle consume the picked piles we switch to well water with Thermosink (eg. non-electric) water bowls, and lastly, electric water bowls.

### *Trivia Question*

**How many cow hides does it  
take to upholster an  
Acura sedan?**

Turn to page 6 to find out.

**6. What are the economic aspects of using chaff piles as a source of feed? For example, do you know what your daily feeding costs per head are?**

Being in a semi-arid climate, availability of winter feed is usually a challenge. Because of our minimal investment in equipment, chaff is relatively cheap to collect and it has no economic value to the land. However, it is an excellent alternative feed source. It is hard to determine a value for chaff, however, with hay at 6 to 7 cents/lb. and barley or pellets at 7 cents/lb., using chaff saves us about 50 to 60 cents /head/day. Our winter feed supply of picked chaff piles usually lasts from early December through to early February. Our ration for that period

would be 8 lb./head/day of hay, 6 lb./head/day of range pellets, along with free choice of chaff and mineral.

**7. Anything else that you would like to add?**

One thing to keep in mind is that hauling chaff long distances for a winter feed supply can become costly. The chaff is light – and this increases the freight cost. The main reason chaff works so well on our farm is that our crop land is in close proximity for both fall grazing and winter feeding. Another attractive feature of chaff is that it is collected during the heat of the day. In fact, hot, dry weather creates no challenge in the feed collecting process.

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## *Feed testing this year's hay*

Submitted by Murray Feist, M.Sc., PAg and Al Foster, M.Sc., PAg,  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture



The summer of 2009 was challenging for hay producers. Scattered rains, a long cool spring, and dry periods throughout the growing and haying season resulted in some pretty variable

hay quality. Even some of the crops that were put up in good condition would have lost value in terms of protein and energy because of the delay in cutting. If you haven't already had your feed tested, it is still a good time to do so. Feed testing is the only way to know the true nutritional value of this year's hay supply.

Variability of hay quality can be high at the best of times. Soil moisture and soil nitrogen levels affect the protein content, especially in grasses. Plant maturity is the main factor affecting digestibility. The later cut the hay is, the lower its digestibility will be. Weathering, leaf retention, and forage species are some of the other factors that affect quality.

The importance of feed testing increases when feed grain and hay prices are high.



*Feed testing almost always reduces your feeding costs.*

*continued on next page*

Knowing the nutritional value of the feeds being fed allows you to supplement precisely to the level required, and it may even allow you to stretch your feed supplies and/or avoid overfeeding or underfeeding grain in the ration.

Consider the following situation: a wintering cow in mid-gestation is fed grass hay with grain to supplement energy needs. Assuming the hay is of average quality, most often we would see grain incorporated into the ration anywhere from two to eight pounds per head per day. Should grain be valued at \$0.06 to \$0.08 per pound, it will cost that ration in the range of \$0.12 to \$0.64 per head per day!

Stretching feed supplies or evaluating your cow's needs based on average values can be costly. Once the hay is feed tested and an energy value is derived, the ration can be balanced for the level of grain supplementation required. Over-supplementing grain can be costly to the pocket book while under-supplementing grain can be costly to cow performance. The value in feed testing is that it eliminates the guess work and can reduce your direct and indirect associated costs.

When testing forage it is important that the samples being analyzed are from a good cross section of your feed. Each type of feed should be analyzed separately. Forage samples should be taken from a number of bales because the more variable each type of hay is, the more samples that should be taken. Samples from each forage type can then be mixed together (approximately a two litre sub-sample), placed in a plastic bag, and tightly sealed for shipping.

A feed probe works best for collecting samples. You will need to complete an information form to send with your sample as to the type of sample, type of livestock being fed and the type of analysis desired.

Finally, no feed test is complete unless it is put to use. A balanced ration eliminates guesswork and avoids unnecessary costs – especially during challenging times!

*For more information, please contact the Agriculture knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 or your Regional Forage specialist.*

## *Competitive analysis of Saskatchewan's cattle industry – 2009 Report*

The development of a long-term livestock strategy for Saskatchewan's livestock sector was in response to several years of economic challenges faced by producers. As background for this strategy, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture contracted the services of Informa Economics Inc. to complete an analysis of the competitiveness of the cattle and hog sectors.

*For more information please see the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture website at [www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca](http://www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca) or contact the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Branch at (306) 787-4678.*

*Trivia Answer*  
**4 cow hides**

# Research Roundup: Supplementing beef cows grazing barley straw-chaff with dried distillers' grains with solubles (DDGS)

Submitted by Amanda Van De Kerckhove, Dept. of Animal & Poultry Science, University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. H.A. (Bart) Lardner, Western Beef Development Centre



The relative abundance of cereal crop residue in Western Canada dictates its potential use in beef cow feeding programs. Crop residue plays an important role in reducing winter feeding costs (McCartney et al. 2006). The characteristic high fibre, low protein content of crop residue requires supplementation to meet the nutritional requirements of the cow and to prevent impaction (Mathis et al. 1999). As the ethanol industry continues to increase production, wheat-based distillers' co-products, such as dried distillers' grains with solubles (DDGS), are becoming readily available in Western Canada. DDGS has potential as both a protein and energy supplement due to its high nutrient density.



*Crop residues and other supplemental feeds can play an important role in reducing winter feeding costs*

A two year study was conducted at Termuende Research Ranch to determine the effects of supplementation on beef cow performance and further evaluate the production costs for cows supplemented with either DDGS, barley grain, or a blend (50:50) of DDGS and barley, while grazing barley crop residue.

Forty-eight pregnant, multiparous Black Angus cows (BW = 1390 ± 25 lbs; BCS 2.7 ± 0.15) were extensively managed on barley straw-chaff piles (44.1% TDN; 8.4% CP;

77.5% NDF) during the winter periods of 2007 and 2008. Access to barley straw-chaff piles was controlled using electric fence and feed was allocated on a 3-day basis. Cows were stratified by body weight and pregnancy status and then randomly assigned to 1 of 3 supplement strategies which included (i) 100% DDGS, (ii) a blend (50% DDGS:50% barley grain; or (iii) 100% barley grain (Control). Supplements were fed to meet energy requirements at 0.6% BW under winter conditions and fed daily to minimize digestive upsets. Additionally, medium quality hay (48.7% TDN; 7.4% CP; 67.3% NDF)

was supplied when environmental conditions became extremely severe. Cows were weighed, body condition scored, and ultrasonically measured for rib and rump fat depth at the beginning and end of the trial to evaluate changes in animal performance.

Results indicated that cows supplemented with either 100% DDGS or a 50:50 blend of DDGS and barley gained 25 or 15 pounds, respectively. In contrast, cows supplemented with 100% barley grain lost 14 pounds over the duration of the trial. Cow condition was not different between supplement treatment groups. However, moderate improvement in body condition and fat was observed for the DDGS or 50:50 blend supplemented cows.

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There was no observed difference in condition for the barley supplemented (control) cows.

DDGS and barley grain were priced at \$157 and \$215 per tonne, respectively (averaged 2007 and 2008 prices). Total production costs for cows supplemented with either DDGS, 50:50 blend of DDGS and barley, and barley were \$0.70, \$0.80, and \$0.81 per head per day, respectively.

Based on these results, supplement choice will be dictated by current market value of supplements relative to each other. Cow body weight gain was greater when DDGS was substituted for rolled barley grain on a one-for-one unit basis. This is likely due to the greater nutrient (energy and protein) density of the DDGS. These results suggest DDGS can be used effectively as a supplement in extensive wintering systems to meet nutrient

requirements. It has no negative effects on cow performance.

### References

**Mathis, C. P., Cochran, R. C., Stokka, G. L., Heldt, J. S., Woods, B. C. and Olson, K. C. 1999.** Impacts of increasing amounts of supplemental soybean meal on intake and digestion by beef steers and performance by beef cows consuming low-quality tallgrass-prairie forage. *J. Anim. Sci.* 77: 3156-3162.

**McCartney, D. H., Block, H. C., Dubesjk, P. L. and Ohama, A. J. 2006.** The composition and availability of straw and chaff from small grain cereals for beef cattle in western Canada. *Can. J. Anim. Sci.* 86: 443-455.

*For more information please contact Dr. Bart Lardner, Western Beef Development Centre at (306) 682-3139.*

## *Sainfoin and cicer milk-vetch for pastures*

Submitted by Lorne Klein, PAg, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture



In 2005 the Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program for Canadian Agriculture provided funding for a demonstration project to establish and graze pastures that included sainfoin and cicer milk-vetch. Sainfoin and cicer milk-vetch reduce rumen methane emissions from grazing beef cattle. Added benefits of these legumes include reducing the risk of bloat when they are included in pasture mixes containing alfalfa, and reducing the need for commercial nitrogen fertilizer on grass pastures.

Ten producer co-operator sites were established around the province. Generally, each producer seeded a 40 acre paddock of each of the following two seed mixes:

### **Mix One**

Sainfoin: 10 lbs/acre  
AC Grazeland Alfalfa (bloat reduced):  
1 lbs/acre  
Meadow Bromegrass: 5 lbs/acre

### **Mix Two**

Cicer Milk-Vetch: 3 lbs/acre  
AC Grazeland Alfalfa: 1 lbs/acre  
Meadow Bromegrass: 5 lbs/acre



*Successful cicer milk-vetch/ meadow bromegrass forage seeding.  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture file photo.*

Sainfoin is relatively easy to establish and it grows early in spring so is well suited for early season grazing. However, its longevity in pasture stands has not been consistent. Therefore, alfalfa was included in the mixture to help ensure a long term legume component. Generally, the sainfoin established quickly at all locations and it produced 25-40% of the total forage volume.

Cicer milk-vetch is relatively slow to establish and spring growth is later than either alfalfa or sainfoin. Cicer milk-vetch holds its color and leaves into late fall, making it excellent for late season grazing. Because cicer milk-vetch is relatively slow to establish in a mixed stand, alfalfa was included in the mixes for higher forage production in the early years. Generally, the cicer milk-vetch is producing 5-20% of the total forage volume across the sites.

On many of the sites, the alfalfa germinated and established very well, producing high volume and percentage of alfalfa in the stands. These sites were hayed during the first two years to avoid the risk of bloat associated with grazing alfalfa. As the forage stands became older, they were grazed. There have been no cases of bloat on any of the grazed demonstrations.

This project demonstrated that both sainfoin and cicer milk-vetch are viable perennial forage options to include in pasture mixes. Producers can include them in specific paddocks for a targeted season of grazing.

*For more information please contact Lorne Klein, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture at (306) 848-2382.*

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## *Preventing wildlife damage on stored feed*

Submitted by Andre Bonneau, B.Sc., PAg and Al Foster, B.Sc., PAg,  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture



### **Deer and Elk Damage**

In 2008, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation received 205 wildlife damage claims on stacked forage. Most of the claims came from the northwest region of the province but damage to stacked forage in the rest of the province was also significant.

Much of the stored feed damage from wildlife occurs when they trample, urinate and defecate on the feed. Wildlife can actually ruin up to four times more feed than they consume! Once hay or greenfeed is urinated or defecated on, livestock avoid it.

Wildlife are attracted to the easiest source of feed available. Often, the easiest source is feed stacked in the yard. If feed is scarce in the

wild and your stacks become part of a feeding pattern, wildlife damage can become severe.

Fences and barriers are the most reliable methods for controlling wildlife access to stored feed. A fenced feed yard should be located near the farmyard within site of the home or working area. Monitoring the feed yard is important to ensure that if wildlife finds a way into the yard, you can deal with it.

Temporary barriers can be used to surround a hay stack and limit access and deter wildlife. If built properly, a mesh fence (similar to snow fence) will protect the stack. At times, panels set leaning away from the stack will create enough of a barrier to discourage wildlife from jumping over the panels and into the stack.

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Permanent fencing that is 2.5 m (8 ft) high is the most effective way to protect feed yards. Contact your local Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment office, your local Crop Insurance Office, or the Agriculture Knowledge Centre for permanent fencing construction plans.

### **Stack Management**

Avoid stacking hay in locations where wildlife can jump onto the stack. Stacking hay in the “mushroom style” (eg. with the bottom bales on end and the top bales on their side) makes a stack high enough so that deer will avoid jumping onto the stack.

Pushing snow away from stacks can help to keep wildlife off the hay. Another option is to bury the hay bales with snow. Once the snow hardens the deer will have difficulty accessing the hay.

### **Look for Assistance**

If wildlife are causing a problem, or the problem seems to occur year after year, contact your local Saskatchewan Environment office. This organization has a great deal of experience with managing wildlife behaviour and protecting stored feed.

Additional reading: “Dealing with Deer and Elk Damage” – available from Saskatchewan Environment.

*For more information, contact the Ministry of Environment at 1-800-567-4224 or the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.*



*Wildlife damage to stacked feed can become considerable.  
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture file photo.*

# Learning new tricks and sharing ideas

Submitted by Chris Nykoluk, AESB Range Management Specialist, Regina



On June 17-18, 2009 fifty producers from all over Saskatchewan met in Saskatoon to participate in the annual Saskatchewan Pasture School.

Of particular interest to producers was the amount of “hands on” experience they gained at the pasture school, plus the amount of time they had to exchange information with other fellow producers. Producers also had ample time to visit with the many sponsors who participated in the School.

One of the benefits of having producers attend from all around the province is the amount

of unique information they can share with each other – many times a producer from one part of the province has already dealt with a perplexing problem that a producer from another part of the province is now dealing with!

One gratifying part of the School was seeing the number of younger producers that attended. There is definitely still interest in the future of Saskatchewan’s beef industry!

Next year’s Pasture School will be held about the same time next June, stayed tuned to

the Saskatchewan Forage Council website in the coming months for more details.



Photo courtesy Leanne Thompson.

## Sponsors who participated in the school



M & D Cattle Enterprises Ltd.



98 Ranch



## Upcoming Events

### *2009 Manitoba Grazing School*

**December 1-2, 2009**

**Victoria Inn, Brandon, MB**

Contact: [www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca](http://www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca) or call (204) 726-9393.

### *Saskatchewan Beef Industry Conference*

**January 20 – 23, 2010**

**Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon, SK**

Contact: Adele Buettner at 306-249-3512

### *Western Canada Holistic Management Conference*

**February 8-10, 2010**

**Russell Inn, Russell, MB**

Online registration will be available after December 1, 2009 on the Manitoba Forage Council's website at [www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca](http://www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca)

### *9th Prairie Conservation & Endangered Species Conference*

**February 25-27, 2010**

**Winnipeg, MB**

For more information contact Shannon at (204) 253-8673, [Shannon@plannersplus.ca](mailto:Shannon@plannersplus.ca) or visit [www.pcesc.ca](http://www.pcesc.ca)

photo by: Tara Mulhern Davidson

## *The Livestock & Forage Gazette Committee*

Newsletter Editor: **Chris Nykoluk**, AESB-AAFC (306)780-5066

Committee Coordinator: **Al Foster**, PAg, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture (306)878-8890

**Janice Bruynooghe**, PAg, Saskatchewan Forage Council (306)966-2148

**Stacey Gulka**, AAg, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority (306)848-2354

**Bart Lardner**, PAg, Western Beef Development Centre (306)682-3139

**Richard McBride**, PAg, Ducks Unlimited Canada (306)665-7356 Ext #112

**Reg Schellenberg**, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (306)859-4905

**Michel Tremblay**, PAg, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture (306)787-7712



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Return address – Saskatchewan Forage Council  
PO Box 1715 Outlook, SK S0L 2N0  
[jbruynooghe@saskforage.ca](mailto:jbruynooghe@saskforage.ca)  
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