



# Join the Excitement! AGM & Cocktail Cover Crops!

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FOR  
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PEACE  
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FORAGE

## You're Invited!

### Join Us for our Annual General Meeting!

By: Kaitlin McLachlan & Carly Shaw

Stop what you're doing and mark your calendar for the evening of February 26th for PCBFA's Annual General Meeting at the Dunvegan Motor Inn in Fairview! This year's AGM is sure to be a great one! We have the ranching soil health legend himself Neil Dennis coming to town as our guest speaker, our Research Coordinator Akim will be presenting some information and some results of one of our current research projects, and our Extension Coordinator Kaitlin will be announcing our next study tour destination! Would you like to become more involved with PCBFA? There will be opportunity to become a member of PCBFA's Board of Directors as we say goodbye to three of our wonderful directors, Peter Tindall, Randi Kuriga, and Gary These. And as always there will be a fabulous supper with lots of networking, and visiting with neighbours and fellow producers!



Neil with his wife Barbara. Photo via sunnybrae-acres.com

We are very excited to be welcoming Neil Dennis as our guest speaker for the evening! You may remember his talk "Grazing to healthier soils" from his keynote address at the Western Canadian Conference on Soil Health in Edmonton this past December. He will be joining us from his farm near Wawota in southeastern Saskatchewan, where he is a fourth generation farmer. After years of trying to manage his farm conventionally through drought conditions, Neil and his wife took a Holistic Management course and learned about how grazing management could increase the productivity of their soils. Soon, they were using high stock density grazing to build the health of their soils by increasing organic matter and putting nutrient back in the soils. Since then, Neil has gone from running 200 head on 1,700 acres to 800 and up to 1000 head on the same land. Neil is a firm believer in that whether we are cropping or grazing, we need to be using regenerative practices – healthy land produces healthy forages, which in turn produces healthy cattle.

During our business meeting, we will be holding elections to replace our three outgoing board members. Being a member of PCBFA's Board of Directors gives you an opportunity to be a part of the action here at PCBFA! Perks of the job include having first opportunity to host research projects, opportunities to represent PCBFA at provincial conferences, and help to determine the direction that PCBFA goes with our research and extension activities! You may be thinking that this will be a huge time commitment, but its not! We typically have evening meetings once every 2 months. So if you or someone you know is interested in becoming a director and would like more information, please feel free to give us a call and we can connect you with one of our board members!



Some of our board members enjoying the sun at our Board and Staff BBQ this past July

Registration will open up at 4:30 with coffee and a variety of door prize draws to enter in. Our business meeting will get going at 5:00, with supper to be served at 6pm. Following supper, presentations by our staff will lead into Neil Dennis' talk. The evening will be capped off with discussion amongst neighbours and friends.

**We hope to see you there!**

**To RSVP, please give Kaitlin a call at 780-835-6799**

# Cocktail Cover Crops -

Well don't you know about the word? Everybody knows that cocktail cover crops are the word! Forgive my attempt at humor with my poorly crafted "Surfin Bird" remix, but really, cocktail cover crops are the word! There are fewer things that we have gotten more questions on this past year than on cocktail cover crops.

What do you think of when you think cocktail? If you think of a mix of various liquids that make a delicious refreshment, you aren't too far off. Cocktail cover crops are a mixture of plant species that work together to meet the nutritional needs of cattle, with the added bonus of improving the health of the soil while it grows.

Cover cropping used to be a very common practice, then in the 1980's it fell by the way-side when low cost commercial fertilizers came on the scene. This practice was previously used to keep cover on the soil to keep it from eroding away in a fallow year. Now, with the ever increasing price of fertilizer, we find ourselves looking for alternatives once again.

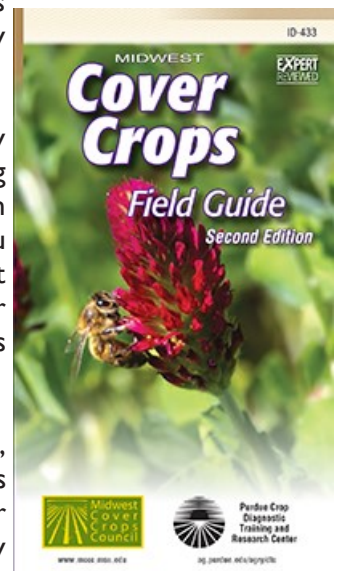


Hairy Vetch is a popular cocktail species for its soil health benefits. Photo via: natureandnurtureseeds.com

Cover crops are an excellent tool for improving soil productivity over the long term. But how? Cocktail cover crops allow producers to take full advantage of sunlight and water resources available. With a diversity of vegetation, cover crops are very efficient photosynthesizers, taking carbon out of the air and putting it into the soil. This relocation of atmospheric carbon to the soil feeds the beneficial microorganisms in the soil, who in turn improve soil quality by breaking down organic matter into nutrients usable by plants. The variety of plants in a cocktail also means a variety of roots that are interacting beneath the soil surface. Cover crops are great nutrient recyclers! By planting nitrogen fixing species, such as peas or vetches, nitrogen is made available for other species to utilize. The diversity of hair-like roots mixed with tap-roots, helps open up the soil and break through hard pans. By opening up pore spaces with plant roots, we are allowing for more water to be absorbed into the soil as opposed to running off the surface into the ditch. These pore spaces also allow for nutrients that are trapped deep in the soil to move up through the soil where it can be utilized by plants!

Cocktails are also seen as an opportunity for high quality feed here in the Peace Country. By planting a diversity of plants, not only are we reaping the benefits of root diversity improving soil nutrients, but the variety of vegetation means variety of plant nutrients that we can use for feed! This is the primary use of cover crops in this area at this time. Depending if you want to graze the crop, silage it, or even cut and bale it, there are a variety of mixtures that are available. We can select our mixtures for the nutrients that we would like back in our end product. Make sure there are high-energy plants in your mix such as barley, wheat, as well as high protein plants such as crimson clover.

Bagged, pre-mixed seed is available for purchase. Depending on the mix and the end use, these pre-mixed bags range from a couple species to a dozen species. Pre-mixed seed is available for purchase at Dynamic Seeds in Fairview, or you can order some in from other suppliers such as Union Forages. If you would like to try out a mix, but do not necessarily want to go buy an expensive mix, you can try mixing seed that you have available. PCBFA has some copies of Purdue University's "Cover Crops Field Guide" available in the office if you would like to come up with your own cocktail. This field guide identifies the soil health benefits, feed value, and seeding guidelines for several common cover crop species that can be found here in Canada and could be shipped into the Peace.



Purdue University's Cover Crops Field Guide available in PCBFA offices

Find us online!

[www.peacecountrybeef.ca](http://www.peacecountrybeef.ca)



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# Join the Excitement!

By: Kaitlin McLachlan

Advantages seen in a cocktail mixture include:

- Cocktails provide multiple benefits that a mono-crop cannot
- If one part of the stand does not perform, other parts may excel and compensate
- Greater plant diversity can increase soil biological diversity

Some difficulties with cocktail mixtures:

- Various seed sizes can prove difficult to seed all together, specialized equipment or two passes may be required.
- Seed can get quite pricy. Be sure to shop around when looking for seed, or replace with a similar species that will give you similar results.



Graeme Finn Grazing a cocktail. Photo via: southerncrosslivestock.ca

Thinking of trying a cocktail this year? Not sure where to start? We at PCBFA are very excited to be hosting a Cocktail Cover Crop Selection Workshop in Rycroft on February 23<sup>rd</sup> with Graeme Finn! Graeme, originally from Australia, currently resides in Crossfield, AB, and has many years of experience with cocktail mixtures. Graeme is a wealth of knowledge, and you name it, he has probably tried it! Not many tractors turn wheels at Graeme's operation, as he manages 2,800 acres and grazes year-round on cocktail and high legume mixtures. Graeme believes that a good producing pasture starts with the soil. Graeme is also a rep for Union Forages, a company that is specializing in annual forage varieties specifically for cocktail cover crops.

**If you are interested in joining us for our Cocktail Cover Crop Selection Workshop,  
Give Kaitlin a call at 780-835-6799**

**At the end of December, we said farewell to our  
Extension & ASB Program Coordinator, Stacy Pritchard.  
We wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors!**

**Kaitlin McLachlan has now taken on the role of Extension Coordinator.  
If you were previously working with Stacy, please direct any questions to Kaitlin.**

## We Are Hiring!

PCBFA is currently hiring for two positions:

**Agri-Environmental Program Coordinator:** Consists of assisting in producer projects and carrying out applied research and extension related to environmental stewardship, riparian area grazing and restoration, and nutrient management. Agriculture or related environmental science diploma or degree is required, and on-farm experience is an asset. Permanent Position.

**Summer Research Technician:** Consists of planning, setup and implementation of applied research projects and demonstrations, office help in extension articles and publications and events. Students obtaining an agriculture related science degree or masters preferred. Full time from May 1-August 31, 2016.

Deadline for applications is February 16th, 2016.

**For more information on these job postings please visit our website:  
[www.peacecountrybeef.ca](http://www.peacecountrybeef.ca)**

### Contact us for:

- Project Ideas  
- Feed Testing

- Growing Forward 2 Assistance  
- Ration Formulation Help

- Environmental Farm Plans  
- Past Project Information

# Upcoming Events!

**Thanks  
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## **Caring for your Green Zone**

*February 3, 2016*

*Upstairs in the Agriplex, High Prairie*

## **Tactical Farming Conference**

*February 10-11, 2016*

*Deerfoot Inn & Casino, Calgary*

## **Working Well Workshop**

*February 11, 2016*

*Upstairs in the Agriplex, High Prairie*

## **Cocktail Cover Crop Selection Workshop With Graeme Finn**

*February 23, 2016*

*Rycroft Ag Society Hall*

## **PCBFA Annual General Meeting**

*February 26, 2016*

*Dunvegan Motor Inn, Fairview*

## **Peace Country Classic**

*March 10-12, 2016*

*Evergreen Park, Grande Prairie*

## **Solar Workshop**

*March 10, 2016*

*Venue TBA, High Prairie*

## **Peace Country Beef School**

*March 15, 2016*

*Venue TBA, Grimshaw*

## **Succession Planning Workshop with Merle Good**

*March 30, 2016*

*Venue TBA, Debolt*

For more information, or to register for events please call  
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