

Forage Facts



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DID YOU KNOW?

We have an Environmental Farm Plan Technician on staff to help you complete your EFP's

Methods to Make Early Spring Grazing Work

By Johanna Murray

2021 put a strain on our feed systems in all the wrong spots, with things being 'just wrong' for most producers in the Peace and widespread drought across Canada and the US making feed hard to come by.

With feed shortages across the west, the cows need to get out onto pasture as soon as possible this spring in many areas. So here are some tried and tested ways to manage things if you've got to get the cows out on pasture first thing this spring.

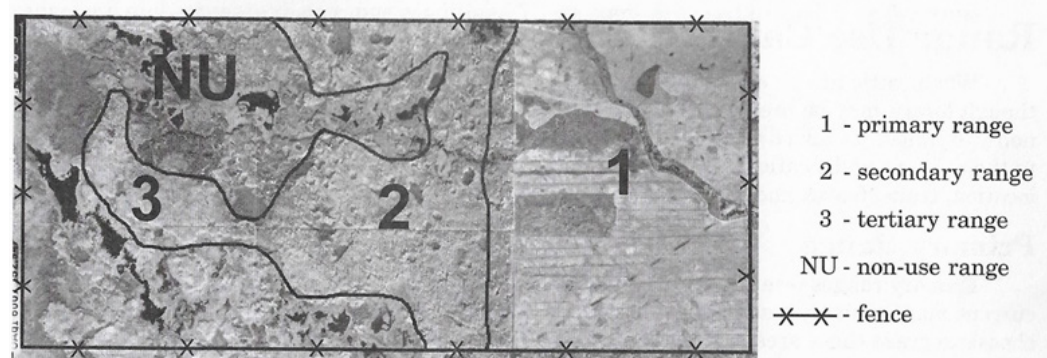
Option 1: Skim grazing. Moving your cows through the pasture system rapidly will reduce the number of new plants that they graze. If your cows only take the tips of the leaves or only one bite per plant, the plants will have more solar panel left to recover and

produce more forage. The amount of time a skim will take depends on how many cows you have and how big your pastures are. It might be a few hours, or it might be a few weeks. The downside of this technique is the management pressure of moving cattle more often especially if you have a lot of young calves to herd.

A rule of thumb for skim grazing is that pasture plants will start to re-grow about 5 days after being grazed. However, growing conditions have a significant impact, and well-timed rains and sun can help plants regrow much more quickly, while drought or late frosts can slow regrowth down. If your animal moves can be synced to regrowth (fast moves for fast growth and slower moves for slower growth) your pastures will likely recover more quickly. (<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/cattle-connection/2016-04-01-early-spring-grazing-sets-stage-entire-season>)

One issue with skim grazing is pasture size. It's difficult to get an even cut on a quarter section in a week or two with-

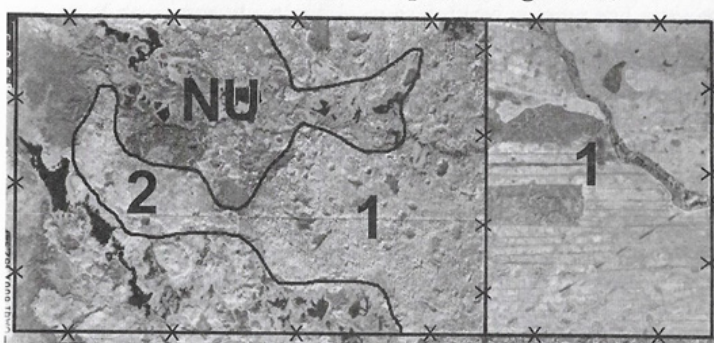
Figure 4.1 Range Use Categories (Ehlert and Lawrence, 1999)



out impossible numbers of animals. Not to mention that on that much pasture, the cattle will prioritize their favorite areas (primary ranges) and hammer them instead of taking a more even graze over the whole pasture (as in the image at the bottom of page 1).

One way to address this is to run a couple of hot wires to split your pasture into 2 or 3 slightly smaller pieces. It doesn't have to be fancy, and it certainly doesn't have to be tiny 20-acre paddocks. But forcing the animals to move instead of staying in their preferred area the whole time can improve recovery of the preferred pastures. Increase the amount of time the cattle can stay on one piece of land, and get them out into pasture that might not otherwise get used.

Figure 4.2 **Changing Range Use Categories By Adding a Cross Fence (Ehlert and Lawrence, 1999) (compare to Figure 4.1)**



- 1 - primary range
- 2 - secondary range
- 3 - tertiary range
- NU - non-use range

✕✕ - fence

While it is a little more management than sacrifice pasture and can be a bit of a roll of the dice in terms of success, a well-timed light graze early in the spring might even encourage more aggressive growth if the weather cooperates. And if the weather doesn't cooperate giving all your pastures a dash of fertilizer in the spring won't hurt. And by using a couple of hot wires to prioritize grazing, you might even buy some extra time to let your pastures grow.

Option 2: Sacrifice pastures. Taking the opposite ap-

proach to skim grazing by picking a pasture and holding your cattle there until your other fields are ready to graze is another option. Ideally this pasture would be one that is high and dry that won't get pugged out. But another consideration is carryover. Some higher levels of carryover can reduce the amount of supplementation your cattle might need. Pastures that were grazed more intensely last year might not have enough carryover to meet a cow's dry matter needs. Her protein and energy requirements will likely be fulfilled by the new grass, but if there isn't much carry over, you might need to supplement your cattle with some straw or other roughage.

It's also worth considering that you may not be able to graze this pasture again this season, depending on how the growing season goes. Generally, pastures should be allowed a minimum of two months or 60 days to recover but more time will likely be necessary depending on the weather conditions. (<https://www.manitobacooperator.ca/livestock/manage-early-spring-grazing-carefully-to-ensure-proper-nutrition/>)

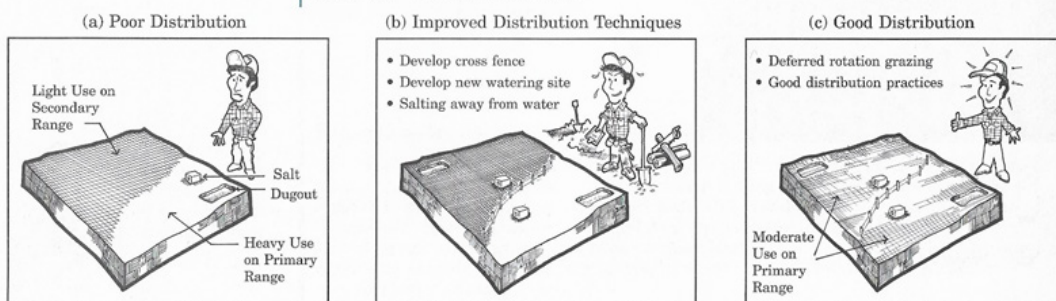
Other considerations;

Mineral: For either of these methods, it's important to keep an eye on your cattle for loss of condition, or conditions such as grass tetany (Magnesium deficiency). A good mineral mix is an effective way to ensure your animals stay healthy through the spring.

Late Summer Feed Shortages: It's also important to consider the later season. You know the saying, expect the best, prepare for the worst? It always pays off to consider what course to take if you run into a shortage of feed in mid to late summer. Whether it's caused by

drought or other challenges, now is the time to plan how to fill that shortfall. Will your bush pasture be recovered enough to serve as an emergency pasture? Do you have hay fields that can be grazed? Will you plant some annual forages to graze? Should you make

Figure 6.9 **Benefits of Fencing**



Assessing Your Bush Pasture



hay/baleage with some of the excess early pasture growth? Or will you destock your mother cows?

There is no single right answer for any type of pasture management, whether early spring grazing or later in the season. But having a plan can take some stress out of the decision later.

Assessing Bush Pasture

In 2021, we were reminded of the important role that bush pastures play in our grazing systems. Bush pasture can produce a great deal of high-quality forage, especially through the height of summer. Livestock prefer tame species to native plants because tame species were developed to cater to palatability, but bush pasture can be more drought-resistant than open pasture due to deep rooted perennials, and layers of protection between the soil, and direct sunlight.

High-quality bush pasture can be difficult to assess since the main sources of forage and forage quality are different in the trees. A healthy forest isn't going to be an impassible wall of fire hazard, but a bush pasture that consists mainly of grass and trees isn't healthy either.

As a rule, a healthy bush pasture should have four layers.

Layer 1: Trees Perhaps most obviously, a healthy bush pasture will have trees. More specifically, there will be trees of different heights. New trees coming up through the undergrowth are a good sign that the forest is regenerating on its own. The trees in your bush pasture can also give you a good idea of how much forage will be available to your livestock. If Jack pine or white & black spruce dominate, there will be less for-

age than in sites dominated by poplar or aspen.

Layer 2: Shrubs Willow, Rose, and snowberry can give shrubs a bad rep since they aren't often preferred in an open pasture situation. In forests though, shrubs (and forbs) supply most of the quality forage. Willow, Red Osier Dogwood, low bush cranberry and Saskatoon all make good forage and are preferred by cattle. When you're assessing your bush pasture, keep in mind that because shrubs only add growth each year, your livestock should only graze this year's growth. A sure sign your bush pasture is getting pushed too hard year over year is when your shrubs are shrinking or starting to develop odd shapes like flattening or mushrooming.

Layer 3: Forbs & Grass Despite our tame pasture training that tells us to prefer lots of grasses and forbs, having more of this layer than shrubs is usually a bad sign for how much forage you can get out of your bush. In addition, forbs and grasses are more shallowly rooted than shrubs or trees, so the impacts from overuse, drought, and compaction are likely to show up earlier than in the others. Changes in the population of this layer, such as a dramatic increase in agronomic grasses like brome, or more unpalatable forbs, might be an early warning sign that the pasture is being overused.

Layer 4: Litter, Lichen, Moss, and Mushrooms There isn't much forage to be obtained from this layer. But a healthy, springy layer of fallen leaves and mosses or lichens is key to the forest regenerating its own nutrients by breaking down dead fall and litter. Much like in a grass pasture, the layer of litter helps insulate the soil, reduce compaction, and prevent erosion. The biology of the soil is much slower in this system than, say in a high legume pasture, but if plant matter isn't



35
all layers present, light use



27
all layers present, moderate use



18
1 layer reduced or absent

breaking down, that's a sure sign of trouble. Much like the forbs and grasses, dramatic increases or decreases in this layer will indicate fluctuations in the system.

Final Assessment: Much like tame pasture assessment, there is no single indicator that will tell you what is happening in your bush pasture. Often, one layer will tell you that something's happening, and maybe even what that is, but whether the change is positive or negative is a question better answered by looking at the entire system rather than one part.



9

2 layers reduced or absent



0

3 layers reduced or absent

We are excited to welcome Chelsey Hostettler back from leave in a new role!

Hello again! I'm happy to say that after a year and a bit off I've rejoined the PCBFA team as Farm Projects Coordinator. With a busy family and farm life at home, I wanted to come back to help with the research team in a lesser capacity. I'm excited to work alongside the staff planning larger farm projects and coordinating the acres leased to us from the MD of Fairview into scalable farm trials. It's amazing to see how much can change in a year both at the Research Farm and on the home front. My three little ones are happy to run around the yard and farm and now that they have a toy gator maybe they will finally be able to pick some rocks! Ask me next winter to see how well that idea pans out...

I'm looking forward to seeing some fa-

miliar faces and I'm always interested in meeting new producers to see what everyone is doing on their farms!

Chelsey will be working primarily at our Fairview Research Farm.



Save the Date!

Upcoming Events

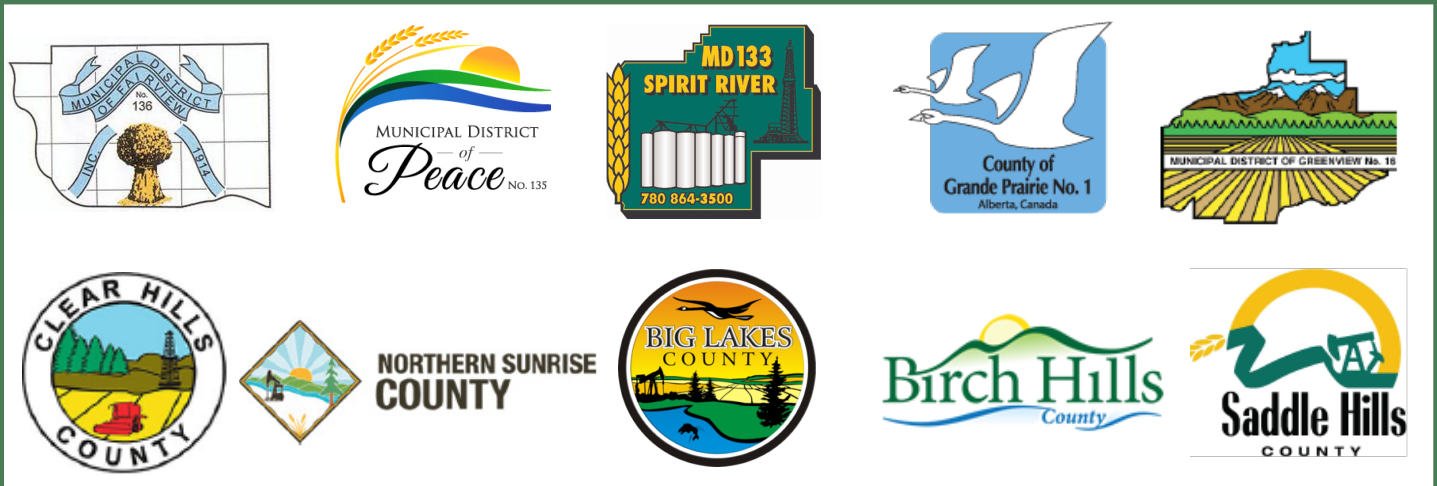


Event	Date	Location
DeBolt Perennial Plot Tour	Wednesday, June 15th	PCBFA's DeBolt Plot Site
Fairview Perennial Plot Walk	Thursday, June 16th	PCBFA's Fairview Research Farm
Stockmanship Clinic with Dylan Biggs	Thursday, June 23rd	Saddle Hills County
Stockmanship Clinic with Dylan Biggs	Friday, June 24th	Valleyview
Pasture Rejuvenation Field Day with Dr. Bart Larder	Tuesday, June 28th	Lyons Events Center, Teepee Creek

For More Information or to Register:

peacecountrybeef.ca | 780-523-4033 | info@pcbfa.ca

Thank You to Our Municipal Partners!



Submitted by Cleanfarms & Alberta Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group

Of all the agricultural plastics on prairie farms, baler twine is one of the easiest to overlook when it comes to a commitment to recycle.

Unlike grain bags, which when empty, are a massive amount of plastic laying in the field, baler twine accumulates in smaller bunches, seemingly innocuous, until they start to take over a corner of the barnyard or wrap around farm equipment axles. Some farmers relegate baler twine to the burn barrel, but that's one of the worst options for managing it because burning twine releases toxins into the air.

So, what can farmers do with used ag twine?

In Alberta, a pilot, 'Alberta Ag Plastic. Recycle it!', is underway to give farmers the option to take baler twine to one of dozens of collection centres throughout the province, giving that old twine a new life.



Farmers place used twine in ag collection bags to help keep it clean and make it easier to transport to collection sites. Source: Cleanfarms

Cleanfarms, which operates the pilot program on behalf of Alberta's Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group (APRG), sends the used baler twine to recycling facilities in Canada and the U.S. where it is turned into pellets to be used in the production of new materials. Twine is made of polypropylene, which is a plastic that can be easily remanufactured into new products such as car parts, dimensional lumber, flowerpots and composite decking. Down the road, as technology continues to evolve, twine may be remanufactured back into new baler twine, a process that fuels the emerging regenerative circular economy...and one that contributes to farmers' sustainability goals.

Waste analysis studies in the province estimate that Alberta farmers generate just over 14,000 tonnes of various types of ag plastic annually including pesticide and fertilizer containers, grain bags, plastic baler twine, bale wrap, silage bags and bunker covers. That includes about 2,200 tonnes on average of baler twine.

The pilot was introduced in 2019 for used grain bags and baler twine to test the collection, transportation and recycling of these ag plastics. The study also aims to determine if Alberta farmers will participate and take used twine to the collection centres.

Assar Grinde, a cow-calf producer in Ponoka County, says used twine can be collected for recycling with minimal additional effort.

"After a winter of collecting twine for recycling, I was surprised at how much clean twine I collected with no extra work," he says. "If the twine comes off the bales clean, it goes in the recycling bag, if it comes off dirty with frozen lumps, it goes in the garbage. I would say, don't worry about getting 100%, just collect what is easy and that will have a big impact."

It is expected that Alberta will follow other provinces and legislate a permanent recycling program for these materials. The approach, known as extended producer responsibility (EPR) involves legislation requiring the first sellers of the material to take responsibility to collect and recycle it after use – they

Ag Plastics to Recycle. Really!



develop, operate and fund the program. EPR has been in place for grain bag recycling in Saskatchewan for four years. Manitoba initiated an EPR approach for grain bags and baler twine last year. PEI has designated the ag materials for EPR and it is anticipated Quebec will pass EPR regulations on ag plastics soon.

How to Prepare Twine for Recycling

The pilot program enables twine recycling by offering large, free, twine collection bags. The next three steps are straightforward:

1. Shake – Remove as much debris, snow or ice as possible. Excessive organics and other materials (such as net wrap) mixed with the twine will cause it to be rejected or result in the material being sent to the landfill. Recycling processors wash and shred the plastic, so they need it as clean as possible.

2. Bag – Place loose twine in a clear collection bag. They are available at no cost to farmers and can be obtained from pilot collection sites and select County/MD offices. If using your own clear bag, poke holes in the bottom to drain moisture. With any bag, once full, secure it closed with twine or a zip tie.

3. Return – Please contact your local pilot collection site prior to dropping off material if unloading assistance is required and if you are unsure if you have prepared it properly.

About

Cleanfarms and the Alberta Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group (APRG) are publishing a series of information articles for Alberta farmers to develop a shared understanding of the importance of used agricultural plastics resource management.

A common theme throughout this monthly series is an exploration of how ag plastics, once used, can be recycled to reclaim the natural resources and the invested energy, returning them to the economy where they can be remanufactured into new products.

This practice is important to Alberta farmers because it contributes to agricultural sustainability

that begins and ends on the farm, providing stewardship for future generations, as well as environmental health. Future articles will feature discussions on change management such as first sellers and manufacturers taking responsibility for used materials (extended producer responsibility), and explore practical recycling, including opportunities and challenges, for products such as grain bags, silage and bale wrap and baler twine that have real-time applications for farmers.

Cleanfarms is operating a three-year pilot project for grain bag and baler twine recycling in Alberta. The project is led by the multi-stakeholder APRG. Funds were granted by the Government of Alberta and are being administered by Alberta Beef Producers.

An advertisement for Young Farmer financing. It features a photograph of a man and a woman in a field, smiling and talking. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image. At the top left of the image, it says 'DREAM. GROW. THRIVE.' The main text reads: 'You have a vision We can help you achieve it'. Below that, it says: 'If you're a farmer under 40, we have the financing and resources to help move your business forward.' At the bottom, it says: 'Learn more at fcc.ca/YoungFarmer'. The logo for the Young Farmer Centre (fcc) is in the bottom left corner of the advertisement.



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