

Forage Facts

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Managing & Assessing Perennial Pasture

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It's no secret that perennial pasture can be an excellent source of low-cost grazing and hay production. But sooner or later, there always seems to come a time when the pasture has either stopped producing, weeds or woody species have moved in, or all the tame legumes have died out. When this happens, it's time to rejuvenate a pasture. Changes to your plant stand should not be a surprise; plant communities in nature are always in a state of flux even when they reach a relatively stable climax community. However, if you aren't using a

management system that requires regular rejuvenation of your permanent pasture, it can become a costly, time consuming and frustrating endeavour.

So how do you keep your pasture in a productive state for longer periods? An easy answer for established pasture is fertility. But that doesn't always necessarily mean fertilizer. It may be more effective to use the site as a bale grazing or winter feeding site instead. Winter feeding can add organic matter and fertility, improving the soil's nutrient and water holding capacity. If the pasture is looking low on fertility, try and figure out where all the manure from the summer grazing is going. If cattle are hanging out in the bush, or in certain areas - it may be helpful to cross-fence the pasture.

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DID YOU KNOW?

We are continuing our relationship with the University of Alberta, by hosting a second Master's Student project at the Fairview Research Farm!

2021 PCBFA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
March 20th, at 3pm
Dunvegan Inn & Suites, Fairview

If you're looking at rejuvenating or establishing a new pasture stand, the first thing to consider for longevity is species selection. Of course, selecting tame or native plant species that are adapted to your ecological region, weather, and soil type will help improve establishment, longevity, and production. So just as you wouldn't plant Taber corn in Beaverlodge, you should be making sure that the perennial seed you source will be able to perform with the short growing season and grey soils of the Peace.

Research carried out by AAFC in Saskatchewan discovered that even under aggressive mob grazing (multiple times per year and aggressive utilization), Alfalfa will not decline any faster than under gentle or no utilization. Rather - it depends on the hardiness and frost tolerance of the variety planted; the more winter hardy varieties survive longer in the forage stand than those with less tolerance. (canadiancattlemen.ca/features/an-ecological-approach-to-forage-research/)

Another key consideration for pasture longevity is management. There's a long-standing rule of thumb about taking half and leaving half when grazing perennial and native pasture. Leaving enough plant matter behind is especially important towards the end of the growing season. For plants to over-winter, they need to have enough leaf, or as some experts call 'solar panels', left after graz-

ing to recover the carbohydrates and root matter necessary to start growing again in the spring. It's also key in dry, nutrient-poor areas where there may not be enough moisture or resources for the plants to replace their lost biomass. Wetter areas, especially wet areas with good nutrition, are much more forgiving regarding how much grass you can remove. (extension.oregonstate.edu/crop-production/pastures-forages/grazing-management-improved-pastures-1)

Time of grazing, soil health, fertility, and moisture also significantly affect how much plant matter you can reasonably graze. And taking half doesn't mean half the height, but half the mass, which means low growing bunch grasses like Fescue with more biomass close to the ground, can be grazed shorter than taller single stalk grasses like timothy. (onpasture.com/2017/07/10/grazing-height-determines-the-health-of-your-forages/)

Another concept of native range management that may be utilized to good effect in tame pasture is staggering grazing time to allow plants to set



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Perennial Pastures



seed. The goal for native pasture is to do this every 2-3 years. While some producers may go a step further and add legume seed to loose mineral or winter feed mature hay on tame pastures that need a boost, even a simple rotation change may be enough to improve your plant stand.

Making cows graze mature plants that have already set seed means the cattle can carry those seeds with them when they move - research has shown that plant material can take up to 3 days to travel through a cow's system, meaning they can distribute seeds from one pasture or paddock to another. This can be especially useful if you want to use forested pasture without clearing and re-seeding it. However, only hard-coated seeds such as legumes and some forbs are likely to survive a trip through the cow's system. Softer seeds, like most grasses, are more likely to be damaged in the rumen. However, letting the cows distribute the seeds is a significantly cheaper way of rejuvenating pasture than almost any other method. (beefresearch.ca/blog/let-cattle-do-the-seeding/)



Many of these ideas are common sense or may seem obvious to many producers. And sometimes encroachment of woody species or takeover of unproductive or otherwise harmful species may mandate a more intensive rejuvenation technique. But it never hurts to consider the least-cost and time heavy options when dealing with your perennial pasture. After all, it is supposed to be your low input feed source.



Congratulations to Chelsey, Thomas, Rosa & Heidi Hostettler on the early arrival of Hudson Lee Hostettler on January 31st.

He weighed in at 3lbs, 6oz

Hudson and Chelsey are healthy, and doing well



Upcoming Events

Event	Date & Time	Location
2021 Annual General Meeting	March 20th 3pm	Dunvegan Inn & Suites, Fairview
<p><i>AHS & Local Guidelines will be followed at in-person events.</i> <i>For More Information & to Register:</i> Visit peacecountrybeef.ca/upcoming-events or Call 780-523-4033</p>		

Peace Country Beef & Forage Association's 2021 Annual General Meeting has been Scheduled!

Date: Saturday, March 20th

Time: 3pm - 4:30pm

Location: Dunvegan Inn & Suites

Cost: Renewal of PCBFA Membership

Due to current public health measures, attendance will be restricted to one person per voting membership.

Pre-Registration is Required

This meeting will consist of the annual business meeting only – there will be no guest speakers, and no meal served.

The agenda and package for the meeting will be sent out by email ahead of time.

To register or renew your PCBFA Membership, please visit peacecountrybeef.ca/agm, or call Katie at 780-772-0277

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