

The Saskatchewan Hay and Pasture Report

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Editors' Note

As the 2009 growing season comes to a close, we are pleased to bring you the final edition of the Saskatchewan Forage Council's *Saskatchewan Hay and Pasture Report*. In this issue we provide a review of the forage year, both in Saskatchewan and surrounding areas. You will also find the final article in our three part series on grassland ecosystems, information on fall grazing options and the usual report on forage markets in Saskatchewan and surrounding areas. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all of those who contributed articles and information for the 2009 Saskatchewan Hay and Pasture Report – your offerings are appreciated! Read on for information about the current market situation in the Saskatchewan Forage Industry.

We welcome your feedback and encourage anyone interested in being placed on our email distribution list to contact the SFC at office@saskforage.ca. You may also want to visit our website www.saskforage.ca for regular news and information related to the forage industry.

Leanne Thompson
Saskatchewan Hay and Pasture Report Editor

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture Crop Report For week ending September 21, 2009 and week ending September 28, 2009

South Eastern Saskatchewan: *Week ending September 21*

Much of the week was dry, but most areas received rain on Sunday and/or Monday ranging from trace to 24 mm (CD 2A). Overall, the southeast region received an average of six mm. Reports on barley grades indicate that 40 per cent of the barley is malt, while 53 per cent is No. 1. Hay and pasture land topsoil moisture conditions are 63 per cent adequate, 34 per cent short and three per cent very short. Some wind damage was reported in a few RMs while RM 26 reported frost damage, however, most reports indicate a good harvesting week. Warm weather is still needed. Some reporters are indicating that with another week of dry weather, harvesting could be wrapping up.

Week ending September 28

It was windy and warm for the most part, with some scattered showers on the weekend. The Grenfell and Indian Head area recorded a low of -1.5°C . The limited precipitation recorded to date has resulted in a decrease in topsoil moisture conditions. Hay and pasture land topsoil moisture conditions are 57 per cent adequate, 40 per cent short and three per cent very short. Livestock water availability is reported as 96 per cent adequate and four per cent inadequate. Pasture conditions are generally in decent shape in the southeast. Reporters are indicating 42 per cent are in good condition, 40 per cent is fair condition, 16 per cent in poor condition and two per cent in very poor condition. There are areas in the region that are reporting as much as 50 per cent of the pastures are in poor condition. Most farmers will need another week to 10 days to finish up harvest. Farmers are also busy with fall weed control, baling straw and hauling bales.

South Western Saskatchewan:**Week ending September 21**

Much of the week was dry but most areas received rain on Saturday, Sunday and/or Monday ranging from trace to 20 mm (CD 3ASW). Overall, the southwest region received an average of four mm. Reports on barley grades indicate that 32 per cent of the barley is malt while 61 per cent is No. 1. Topsoil moisture conditions have declined from last week. Topsoil moisture conditions on hay and pasture land are rated as 37 per cent adequate, 32 per cent short and 30 per cent very short. Crop damage reports include grasshoppers, gophers, deer, drought and frost damage in limited areas. Some areas are reporting damage due to deer. A good week of harvesting will allow most farmers to wrap up their harvest



Photo Credit: Saskatchewan Forage Council

Week ending September 28

The region was generally warm, dry and windy for most of the week until Sunday and Monday when cool temperatures and scattered showers fell in some areas. Frost was also recorded in the region ranging from -1.6°C (Lisieux) to -7°C (Consul). The Gull Lake area reported winds of around 100 km/hr during Monday night (Sept. 28). Topsoil moisture conditions have declined from last week with hay and pasture land rated as 31 per cent adequate, 34 per cent short and 30 per cent very short. Livestock water availability has decreased somewhat from last month. Reporters are indicating that 76 per cent have adequate supply and 24 per cent have inadequate supply. Pasture conditions are reported as 14 per cent good, 37 per cent fair, 31 per cent poor and 18 per cent very poor. Good harvesting weather has resulted in many farmers completing their 2009 harvest. Others are indicating another clear and sunny week will get most of the crop in the bin. Farmers are also busy with fall weed control, baling straw, hauling bales and drying grain.

East Central Saskatchewan:**Week ending September 21**

Much of the week was dry, but most areas received rain on Sunday and/or Monday ranging from trace to 24 mm (RM 280). Overall, the east central region received an average of seven mm. Reports on barley grades indicate that 38 per cent of the barley is malting barley while 49 per cent is No. 1. Topsoil moisture conditions on hay and pasture land were similar to last week

and rated as three per cent surplus, 68 per cent adequate, 24 per cent short and six per cent very short. Crop damage was reported from wildlife, grasshoppers, and wind.

Week ending September 28

The weather was warm and dry for most of the week. It had cooled off and some scattered showers rolled through the region by the weekend. Temperatures dipped below zero on Sept. 28. Most areas received only trace amounts of rain.

Topsoil moisture conditions have declined somewhat from last week with hay and pasture land rated as 56 per cent adequate, 35 per cent short and nine per cent very short. Livestock water supplies remain fairly close to what they have been during the growing season. Reporters are indicating 94 per cent have adequate water supplies and six per cent have inadequate supplies. Pasture conditions have declined from last month. Reporters are placing 21 per cent in good condition, 55 per cent in fair condition, 17 per cent in poor condition and seven per cent in very poor condition. Harvesting is continuing at a good pace. Another two weeks should get the majority of the crop in the bin. Stubble fields are reported to have quite a bit of green growth. Straw is being baled up for use as feed.

West Central Saskatchewan:

Week ending September 21

Much of the week was dry but most areas received rain on Thursday and/or Sunday ranging from trace to 15 mm (RM 283). Overall, the west central region received an average of 5 mm. Reports on barley grades indicate that 52 per cent of the barley is malting barley while 45 per cent is No. 1. Topsoil moisture conditions have improved from that reported last week. Topsoil moisture conditions on hay and pasture land are rated as 56 per cent adequate, 33 per cent short and 11 per cent very short. Very little crop damage was reported in this area. The few producers who reported crop damage attributed it to wind (in three RMs), grasshoppers (RM 317), and wildlife (Sandhill cranes). Most reports indicate good harvesting weather - a hot week with a few showers and wind. However, there are some reports of immature spring wheat. Some producers are making good harvest progress, while others are just beginning to harvest. The hot weather is helping crops to mature.

Week ending September 28

There was warm and dry weather for most of the week allowing great progress in the field. The end of the week brought cooler temperatures and frost on Monday (Sept. 28) morning. A temperature of -3°C was recorded in the Biggar and Conquest area and -5°C in the Luseland area. Only trace amounts of rain fell for the most part, in the region. Topsoil moisture conditions have declined quite a bit from last week with hay and pasture land rated as 47 per cent adequate, 33 per cent short and 20 per cent very short. Livestock water availability is rated as 82 per cent adequate and 18 per cent inadequate. These ratings are similar to last month's ratings. Pasture conditions have declined since last month and are rated as one per cent excellent, 22 per cent good, 37 per cent fair, 29 per cent poor, and 11 per cent very poor. Harvesting is progressing well, but most are indicating there is still a fair bit left to do. Another 10 days to two weeks is needed. Some fields have fairly green areas, so farmers are swathing these areas or waiting for them to mature as they harvest the ripe portion of the crop. Farmers are also busy baling straw and hauling bales.

North Eastern Saskatchewan:

Week ending September 21

Much of the week was dry, but most areas received rain on Sunday ranging from trace to 23 mm (RM 370). Overall, the northeast region received an average of 10 mm. Reports on barley grade indicate that 25 per cent of the barley is malting barley, while 70 per cent is No. 1.

Topsoil moisture conditions on hay and pasture land are rated as 78 per cent adequate and 22 per cent short on hay and pasture land. Little crop damage was reported in the area (some from water fowl). Harvesting is progressing well, although some reports indicate that another two weeks of good weather will help matters. Nights are still reported as cool and the Sunday rain did not help in some areas.

Week ending September 28

The region was mostly sunny and warm until the end of the week. Topsoil moisture conditions are still looking decent for the region with hay and pasture land rated as 80 per cent adequate and 20 per cent short on hay and pasture land. Frost was reported in the region, but crop reporters indicated it did little damage. Livestock water supplies are looking good with 100 per cent having adequate supply. Pasture conditions are also looking alright with reporters indicating 38 per cent are in good condition, 44 per cent in fair condition and 18 per cent in poor condition. Excellent harvest progress has been made in the last seven days and harvest operations are being pushed forward. A good two weeks of nice weather is needed to get the 2009 crop in the bin.

North Western Saskatchewan:

Week ending September 21

Much of the week was dry, but most areas received rain on Thursday and/or Sunday ranging from trace to 31 mm (RM 464). Overall, the northwest region received an average of five mm. Reports on barley grades indicate that 34 per cent of the barley is malting barley, while 58 per cent is No. 1. Topsoil moisture conditions on hay and pasture land are rated as 47 per cent adequate, 42 per cent short and 11 per cent very short. Few crop damage reports were received. Those that were recorded were attributed to rain, water fowl, frost, wind and grasshoppers. Many reporters indicate that it was a slow week due to wet weather - showers and dew in the morning. However, some reported having good harvesting weather.

Week ending September 28

The majority of the week brought beautiful weather for harvest progress. Frost, ranging from -2°C to -4°C was recorded in some areas as well as scattered showers. Topsoil moisture conditions have remained similar to last week with hay and pasture land are as 38 per cent adequate, 46 per cent short and 16 per cent very short. Frost and wind contributed to the crop damage. Livestock water availability has remained in good supply during the course of the growing season. Crop reporters are indicating 92 per cent have adequate supply and eight per cent have inadequate supply. Pasture conditions have declined since last month and are reported as two per cent excellent, six per cent good, 40 per cent fair, 38 per cent poor and 14 per cent very poor. Poor pasture conditions are being reported in some areas from both Crop Districts. Most producers still need warm dry weather for the next couple of weeks in order to get the crop in the bin.

Saskatchewan Regional Forage Reports

South East Saskatchewan

Lorne Klein, PAg

Forage Development Specialist – Weyburn, SK

Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture

Growing conditions improved later in the season with excellent moisture through August. Pastures should be in excellent condition if the management was there to enable them. Unmanaged pastures will likely have little carryover. Hay yields in the area are generally below average. Very good second growth, but second growth is seldom as good as it appears once you start baling. For this reason supply is expected to be just adequate. Hay quality - the majority was baled with minimal rain on the windrow. Prices have been reported in the \$100/ton range, but it is unclear how many tons are actually selling. Asking prices are high. There are some fields of annual cereals cut for greenfeed in the area. Other forage - no shortage of straw, grain or pellets is expected, but the price of these commodities may be a limiting factor.

South Central Saskatchewan

Andre Bonneau, PAg

*Forage Management Specialist – Moose Jaw, SK
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

In the Moose Jaw region, spring was cool and dry. Forage and pasture in many areas didn't get going until mid to late June. Once rains came, forages recovered fairly quickly and young stands yielded very well but late. First cut didn't start until mid to late July in many areas. As such, the second cut would have been welcome but was too late. However, a second cut in this region is rare. Pastures held very well in most of the region and grass is still green in many areas. Hay yields are average to better than average in the Moose Jaw area and south of Old Wive's Lake and in the Big Beaver to Bengough areas, yields were somewhat lower than average. For the most part, hay came off dry and with little rain. Some may have been cut on the mature side to increase yield. Prices are reported in the \$70 to \$85/ton range in most areas. Some areas are under pressure from buyers in Montana/North Dakota. There have been rumors of sales in the \$90+/ton range but are not confirmed. Hay supplies appear to be adequate in most areas. The extreme south may be short due to hay moving into the States. Straw is generally short in region but more may be available this year.



Photo Credit: Leanne Thompson, SFC

South West Saskatchewan

Trevor Lennox, PAg

*Forage Development Specialist – Swift Current, SK
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

Growing conditions this summer were not favourable to forage crops. The cool spring really set the forage crop back, resulting in delayed maturity of many hay fields. Hay yields were below average for most of the south west region. Hay quality was good in that very little rain occurred during the haying season, however the stage of maturity was more advanced as producers delayed haying in an effort to capture more tonnage. Pastures fared somewhat better than hay crops as rains later in the season helped regrowth on areas that had been grazed earlier in the year. Overall, pastures were grazed heavier than what they would be in a normal year. Most pastures are going into winter with very low carry-over of litter. Prices are higher than average, however many producers are reluctant to pay the price of hay and will be selling some cows. Any hay that is advertised at a decent price is sold very quickly. It looks like more producers will be supplementing with grain this winter to help offset the lower amount of forage in the ration.

West Central Saskatchewan*Charlotte Ward, PAg**Forage Development Specialist – Outlook, SK**Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

Growing conditions in the west central region were hot and dry in mid-September, which caused a lot of pastures to brown off, likely resulting in a sharp decline in pasture quality. Hay yields in the area were about 50% of normal. In the Dinsmore/Elrose area, there has been a number of alfalfa hay fields showing patchiness and yields did not warrant cutting it this year (or only parts of the fields). Irrigated hay around Lake Deifenbaker has been able to take advantage of the warmer temperatures and many fields were still being irrigated in the past week, resulting in what will be a good 3rd cut. Most hay was put up in good quality and had minimal to no rain on it. Many producers held off on taking the first cut to maximize yield, which may have resulted in a slight decline in quality compared to other years, but since most hay had no rain on it, overall quality is still good. Most pastures are in fair condition. Cattle are running out of available pasture and some producers have started to supplement their cattle on pasture until they are done harvest and crop residue is available for grazing. Hay asking prices are in the 3 to 5 cents per lb range, but it is difficult to prove how much is actually moving at 5 cents per lb. Most producers will likely decrease their herd size or sell all of their calves shortly after weaning to match their herd size to their available feed. Good quality hay is in short supply in the area and very little hay appears to be moving in as the surrounding areas do not have an abundance of hay either. Many producers put up greenfeed if they had the opportunity, but even greenfeed yields are below normal (likely 70-80% of normal) in many areas. Many cattle will be fed straw and crop residues supplemented with grain this winter, especially since the price of barley has dropped. Other alternative feeds that producers are talking about include liquid protein supplements to be injected into straw bales or DDGS.

Central Saskatchewan*Dale Weisbrot, PAg**Forage Development Specialist – Watrous, SK**Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

The later spring allowed hay and pasture to benefit from the early July rains. Annual crops are very late so harvest has been delayed therefore residue and stubble grazing is also delayed. Hay yields in 2009 are near long-term average to slightly above average (the 14 year average for this region is about 1.27 tons per acre). Hay quality appears to be good for the region. Asking prices are approximately \$100 per ton. Due to the decent hay yields in the area, hay supplies are adequate to slight excess meaning that there may be some export from this area. Pasture conditions - the later season for harvest of annual crops has kept the grazing pressure on the pastures longer than a normal year – meaning the late summer and fall pastures will be 'harder hit' this year. Availability of other feed sources appear to be adequate.

East Central Saskatchewan*Todd Jorgenson, PAg**Forage Development Specialist – Yorkton, SK**Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

The east central region experienced difficult growing conditions like much of the province this year. As a result, hay yields were variable and were 50-60% below the long-term average of 1.5 tons/ac. Feed stocks are marginal with many producers planning to bale more straw than usual to make up for the shortage of hay. Livestock numbers in the region are down, so the

shortage of hay may be less of a problem. Depending on winter conditions combined with the price and availability of alternative feeds, the shortage of hay may not be a problem. Very little hay is moving in the area at this time, so price is difficult to determine, but asking prices are reported in the \$95/ton range.

North East Saskatchewan

Al Foster, PAg

*Forage Development Specialist – Tisdale, SK
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

The growing season in northeast Saskatchewan started out cool and dry with a few hard frosts setting back forage crops. Rains in mid June helped pasture production but first cut hay yields were below average for most of the region. Scattered showers through July and August resulted in some loss in forage quality but since the hay crop was behind normal development some producers cut 2-3 weeks later than normal and were able to work around many of the showers. Hay quality is quite variable across the region. Second cut alfalfa yields were good and many producers took off a second cut in good condition in September. Asking prices are estimated at about \$70.00 - \$80.00 per ton for average quality alfalfa hay. The hay supply in the northeast is adequate. Many producers anticipated low hay yields and seeded some greenfeed which yielded well. Straw supplies should also be adequate for the region.

North West Saskatchewan

Glenn Barclay, PAg

*Forage Development Specialist – North Battleford, SK
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

Hay yields in areas west of the Battlefords (south of the North Sask. river) seemed to be in the 70% of average range with newer fields being close to average (1.5 tons/ac). East and North of the river yields were a bit better -85% to close to average. Hay quality was generally pretty good as rains did not do too much damage. Pasture conditions at the beginning of September were going backwards now with some talk of pulling off herds. However, the days have been hot with no frost yet and scattered showers have produced some last minute growth. Hay producers seem to be holding out for 5 cents per lb baled for hay. In horse/acreage areas, this may be possible, however, cattle prices haven't risen so beef producers will likely not pay these prices, but will look at downsizing the herd first. Supply of hay in the area is short as there was no carryover from last year and yields were short this year. The NW isn't in desperate shape for hay just yet. If the winter starts out mild it will go a long way in being able to maintain the herd. Some producers are looking at yellowfeed and greenfeed on crops seeded late for that purpose. There seems to be more oats than normal out there (were seeded for cattle). Pea straw is being looked at to supplement feed supplies.

Saskatchewan 2009 Forage Crop in Review

*Michel Tremblay, Provincial Specialist, Forages
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

The Saskatchewan forage crop struggled in 2009. Most regions began the growing season late, with cool temperatures and varying intensities of frost slowing development. In some cases, frost damaged emerging growing points, leading to developmental delays and reduced yields.

Dry conditions beginning in fall of 2008 prevailed across much of the province in the spring of 2009, further compromising forage production potential.

Most growers chose to delay cutting to allow hay crops to accumulate more tonnage. Delayed development of the forage crop resulted in first cut harvest being delayed until mid July in most cases. Significant acreage of first cut hay was being cut into August. Due to the lack of heat and moisture, and the late harvest, second cut acreage potential was curtailed. In some cases, newer alfalfa fields that received some rainfall in late summer were cut the second time well into September.

Forage quality was impacted by the late cutting, and rain that occurred in some areas during harvest. Late cutting resulted in greater fibre content in hay. Variable weather conditions across regions resulted in forage quality ranging from fair to good.

Table 1. Summary of Saskatchewan hay crop, by region, 2009.

Region	Estimated yield (% of Average)	Long-term average yield for region ¹	Quality
Prince Albert	60-75%	1.4 ton/ac	Good
Tisdale	50 to 75%	1.5 ton/ac	Good
Watrous	80 % +	1.3 ton/ac	Medium
Yorkton	60-70%	1.5 ton/ac	Medium
Weyburn	100%	1.2 ton/ac	Good
Outlook	50%	1.3 ton/ac	Good
Kindersley	50%	1.0 ton/ac	Good
North Battleford	70%	1.4 ton/ac	Good
Swift Current	50-75%	1.2 ton/ac	Good
Moose Jaw	Below average	1.1 ton/ac	Fair to Good

Hay prices trended upward over the period, with good quality hay presently trading for \$80-110/ton. Tightening feed supplies in 2009 resulted in prices moving upward from approximately \$70/ton observed during midwinter of 2009.

Pasture conditions mirrored hay fields, with spring growth being slow, delaying cattle turn out by 2-3 weeks. Periodic rains in many regions in July and August allowed pasture conditions to improve somewhat.

The 2009 forage year was characterized by cold, dry conditions resulting in a delayed, below average crop. Tightening feed supplies following several years of generally good forage crops increased cost of forage to livestock growers.

Manitoba Forage Report 2009

*Glenn Friesen, Business Development Specialist – Forages
Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives*

Hay

This has been a challenging year from the start. Cool, wet condition plagued much of Manitoba, with the balance experiencing excessively dry conditions. The hay crop yields are generally

rated below average, an exception being the central region where they are average. Hay quality ranges from below average to above – depending on if the swath was rained on. In the eyes of a producer, they either harvested average amounts of poor quality hay, or very little amounts of good quality.

The dry conditions in the southwest have resulted in hay yields 30-75% of normal – with a concern of grasshopper populations in some areas in recent weeks. Hay yields in the northwest ranged from 30-50% of normal - due to dry conditions in the western portions and excess moisture in the eastern portions. Furthermore, overland flooding in the eastern portions has left bales standing in water and native hay stands inaccessible for this year's harvest. The hay yields in the Interlake region range from normal in the south, to 60-70% of normal in the northwest, and 40-60% in the northeast due to overland flooding and saturated soils. Some shortages in the Interlake may be mitigated by unpollinated alfalfa seed crops being harvested for hay. Eastern hay yields are below average due to intermittent rains and saturated soils; however, moist conditions are providing for reasonable regrowth and 3rd cut options on higher grounds. Recent warm temperatures have improved hay growth and field access - harvest volumes are expected to improve.

Green feed and silage yields are reported as average right from the northwest to the eastern regions. Additionally, cattle producers continue to bale straw to stretch feed supplies this winter.

Low to medium quality (cow) hay is selling between \$0.035 to \$0.06/lb, and high quality (dairy) hay is selling for \$0.06 - \$0.08/lb. Some higher priced hay is moving into the horse industry with lesser amounts is being bought by the sheep and goat industries.

Similar reports of reduce hay yields are being heard from AB and SK, where many producers are electing to down-sizing their herds.

Pastures

Pastures in the southwest are recovering after late season rains; however, moderate to high grasshopper populations (Melita to Russell) combined with poor responses to precipitation has resulted in some producers beginning to graze of 2nd and 3rd cuts of tame hay stands.

Pastures in the rest of the province are rated as average after the late season improvement in growing conditions. However, many producers across the province are still electing to graze hay stands or over mature native hay lands to avoid feeding.

Alberta Forage Report 2009

Grant Lastiwka – Forage, Grazing and Beef Specialist

Calvin Yoder – Forage Seed Specialist

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

Almost all of Alberta was similar in weather conditions and forage outcome. This poor weather condition and forage result thereafter is seldom seen on this scale. Many say this is a worse weather year than 2002. By mid-July moisture deficits were commonly reported across all of Alberta to be either a 1 in 25, or a 1 in 15 year occurrence. Pastures are going to need a favorable year next year to start their recovery.



Photo Credit: Leanne Thompson, SFC

Low soil moisture to start the year, a cold spring, and drought thereafter were common, with few exceptions across all of Alberta. Early August hailstorm damage occurred in a few areas with one southern Alberta storm being very large in impact. August rain was some of the first significant moisture several areas had seen. Grasshopper damage was variable but high in several northern and north central areas. High fertilizer prices also meant fertilizer use on forages was again less than normal so yields on all forage crops could be expected to be less. Currently, moisture across most of Alberta are generally $\frac{1}{2}$

of normal. Pastures are in fair to poor condition. Forage prices as greenfeed or hay, are 3-1/2 to 6 cents/pound for salvage crops and 5-8+ cents/pound for hay. Quality of hay is excellent. After forage sales in July and August of early hay or salvaged crops, sales have largely halted as would be buyers cannot afford the prices being asked by sellers. Price reductions appear to not be coming soon, but as a lot of straw is being baled and 10-20% of cowherds are commonly being sold, this should change. Cost of trucking and the financial losses in the beef industry over the last 7 years meant the purchase and transportation of forages as happened in 2002 will not be repeated.

In southern Alberta, irrigation timothy and alfalfa crops had lower first cut yields due to early season frosts. In spite of these frosts, moisture in the foothill areas south of Calgary was good so annual forage crops, perennial hay and pasture yields were good in these areas. One hailstorm in early August was so severe $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of grain and forage crops were unsalvageable. However, this event did add moisture and provided some salvaged grain crops for silage or greenfeed. Over most of this area (other than the foothills south of Calgary) the cool spring and later drought gave severe results. Hay yields are about $\frac{1}{2}$ of normal and pastures are in fair to poor condition. Many acres of hayland were pastured in June as regular pastures were growing poorly. Silage yields were also about $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ of normal.

In central Alberta the cool spring, drought and some hail storms meant significant salvage grain/oilseed crops, particularly canola. Hayfields were grazed in many areas. Those which were hayed would yield less than $\frac{1}{2}$ of normal. Forage yields of pasture were often $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of normal with much compensatory growth coming in late July and again in late August tied to moisture events. Moisture events in August were very sporadic with up to 6 inches of rain occurring on one weekend in a small area. Because of the dry fall last year and drought again this year pastures are generally in poor to fair condition.

Northern Alberta weather and forage yields are unfortunately very similar to the rest of Alberta. (Fort Vermilion area is an exception with very good weather and yields). Grasshopper damage though in the rest of the Peace was much higher in pockets and more general in some areas. Hay yields around Manning are average. Pastures are in fair to poor condition. In other parts of the Peace hay yields are $\frac{1}{2}$ or less than normal. Pastures in many of these other areas are poor due to drought and grasshopper damage.

Alfalfa seed yields of 30-40% of normal from the better alfalfa crops are just being harvested. One area had an August rainfall of 4 inches in one day so there are problems with second growth in seed fields. As harvesting alfalfa seed has just started, the later harvested seed yields will likely be poorer.

Forage Seed Conditions from the Peace River Region

Creeping red fescue

Creeping red fescue seed yields were below average. Seed yields were between 275-300 lbs/acre ranging from 150-600 lbs/acre. A few fields had yields as high as 600 lbs/acre, but they were few and far between. The lower yields were expected, but there were experienced growers who expected the crop to yield higher than what was harvested. Seed yields on second year stands were very poor. Low yields are attributed to very poor moisture conditions last fall combined with dry conditions throughout the spring and summer. Seed weights are reported as average to below average. Seed quality is generally good, although there were a few fields where quackgrass control was not as good as what is normally expected. Cool conditions in May, when farmers were spraying their fescue fields, may have contributed to this problem.

There were few new plantings of creeping red fescue this past spring, and any new stands that were seeded are quite patchy and poorly developed. Late seeding, dry conditions and in a number of cases, grasshopper damage, made establishment difficult. Acres of fescue are substantially lower than in the past few years and may remain this way for a number of years until growers see better competitive prices. There is a lack of interest in seeding creeping red fescue at this point in time, which is definitely a concern in the seed trade. It may be a good time to be seed some.

Timothy

Timothy seed fields looked quite good in May but lack of rain in early June resulted in severe drought damage and fields never recovered. Seed yields were very poor. Average yields were only 200 lbs/acre down from average yields of 300-350 lbs/acre. A good seed yield for timothy this year was 300 lbs/acre. a number of timothy seed fields ended up being harvested for hay, as hay prices have risen dramatically due to the dry conditions.

Bromegrasses

Smooth bromegrass seed yields are reported as being average to slightly below average ranging from 250-300 lb/acre range. Older stands did not yield well at all. There is a lot of smooth bromegrass seed in storage as both demand and price are low. Acres of meadow bromegrass were minimal and very few yields have been reported as of yet.

Legumes

At present there have been very few legume seed fields harvested. Acres of red and alsike clover are down substantially from previous years. Seed set on the clovers and alfalfa was quite good, although the crops are very short which may prove difficult to harvest. The case bearer moths in red clover seed fields were abundant but the damage does not appear to be as evident as in previous years. Most of the clovers have been dessicated and harvest should begin shortly.

Overall, the turf and forage seed yields in the Peace Region are relatively poor, due mainly to the dry conditions throughout most of the Peace. Creeping red fescue and timothy seed yields were most affected by the dry weather. Acres of all seed crops are down and there does not

appear to be much interest in new seedings at this time. Grass and legume seed acres will likely remain this way until prices and demand for seed begin to recover.

The Secret Life of Grassland Birds

*Peggy Strankman, Manager, Environment
Canadian Cattlemen's Association*

Sensible grassland birds have confirmed their reservations and headed south to Texas, Mexico and into Central and South America. The Burrowing owls are the first to leave.

Grassland birds are decreasing more than any other group of birds in Canada and all of North America. Even monitoring the population change is a challenge. Many of them live in sparsely populated areas so the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) does not cover these species well. However there is now a Grassland Bird Monitoring program underway that collects information in sparsely populated areas to supplement the BBS and helps to better understand habitat needs. Between the two surveys there is enough information to know that the population trends are downward for almost all of the species.



*Sprague's Pipit
Photo Credit: Stephen Davis, CWS*

Some of these grassland birds are pretty picky about where they hunt and nest. Others, like the Western Meadowlark, are labeled generalists. They will make the best of what they find. The male meadowlarks usually have two mates at the same time. The nest is a partially covered cup of dried grasses or bark, usually woven into surrounding vegetation on ground. They nest in open country but it can be native or planted pastures, agricultural fields, roadsides, and desert grassland. They are often seen on fences posts. Their familiar song and bright yellow breast with a black "V" makes them the most easily recognized grassland bird.

On the other hand the Sprague's Pipit is a very fussy little bird coloured like the grass it lives in. It is a threatened species and has been studied a fair amount in the last while. It's rarely found in cultivated lands and is uncommon in most areas where native grasses have been replaced with introduced forage. They have been documented nesting in non-native hayfields lacking in alfalfa at Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area in Saskatchewan, but not in most other hayfields in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Generally, they prefer native grasses of intermediate height (4 -12 in/10–30 cm) and density and few shrubs. These tend to be areas of light to moderate grazing. They like to nest in areas of relatively tall (10 in/27 cm), dense grasslands. There is often an overhanging roof of grass over the nest.

Biologists say that it's the structural (e.g. height and thickness of standing dead grass) differences between a planted pasture and a native pasture that matters to the birds, particularly in the configuration of standing dead grass and in the litter layer right at the ground. Dead native grasses droop to provide overhanging cover for nests while the wiry stems of crested wheatgrass stand upright. When you look at the ground of a planted pasture you will often see

The average grassland bird catches an estimated 74,000 grasshoppers over the summer. Every hopper they don't eat takes grass away from your cows.

bare ground. Not exactly the best place to put a nest unless you are a killdeer. When you look at the ground on your native pasture you better see lots of litter or get yourself some grazing advice. That lack of litter means poor future forage production, less water absorption and less grassland birds.

Interestingly, to a bird alfalfa equals shrub because the structure is similar. Clay-colored sparrows nest in alfalfa like they would a shrub. Sprague's Pipit and Baird's Sparrows avoid alfalfa like they would shrubs.

So it's different strokes for different folks as each bird species likes a slightly different amount of grazing and tolerates different plants. Chestnut-collared Longspurs sometimes find crested wheatgrass attractive but it's been found that their nesting success is reduced. Burrowing owls like to nest in areas of golf green-like native grasses but their hunting grounds are taller grasses and slough edges. Burrowing owls are, of course, the prairie panda bear. Everyone loves them. But their needs make them vulnerable. A road to them is an open area with highly visible insect and rodent food but unfortunately it is also an area where they have a good chance of getting smacked. Other birds avoid the area near road, or even trails, for a variety of reasons. So one way or another, roads, and sometimes trails are bad news for most birds. Their numbers increase out to about two kilometers from a road.



*Meadow Lark with grasshopper
Photo Credit: Edgar Jones*

There is much unknown about the migratory birds of the Canadian grasslands. But we do know that habitat loss is the major issue in their decline. In Canada about thirty per cent or 14 million hectares) of the northern plains native grassland remains. That's about 43 per cent in Alberta, 24 per cent in Saskatchewan and 21 per cent in Manitoba. There is less known about the effect of habitat loss in the birds' migration routes and wintering grounds.

Work is ongoing to develop strategies to address the population declines. Cattle producers will be part of that solution because without cattle little grassland can remain. Virtually all grassland birds need grazing to create the right kind of habitat conditions. Good grazing management puts dollars in your pocket and little brown grasshopper eating birds in your pastures.

Fall Grazing Options to Extend your Grazing Season

Condensed from "A Quick Guide to Extended Grazing", a publication from Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives and the Manitoba Forage Council

There are many options for extending your grazing season into fall and winter. These options can lower your winter feeding costs and have environmental benefits. Here are some that you may want to consider.

Stockpiled Perennial Forage

Perennial pasture that is grazed early in the season, and then saved for late-season or early spring grazing, is referred to as stockpiled forage. Depending on forage characteristics, it can be grazed as a standing crop, or swathed and grazed from the swath.

Grazing Tips

- Use stockpiled pastures in the fall until November for growing animals and until December or later for maintenance animals. Because forage quality is often low due to deterioration as it is weathered, dry pregnant cows or ewes are most often grazed because of their lower nutritional requirements.
- Use forages that grow late into the fall for maximum palatability and quality, selecting species that remain upright and shatter resistant. (Some legumes are subject to shattering leaf loss.)
- Grass/legume mixtures are more suited than pure grass or legume stands.
- Prior to frost, alfalfa can be grazed moderately (only the tops) and suffer less stress than when it is cut to the ground for hay.
- Use strip grazing and temporary electric fencing to increase feed use and reduce feed waste.

Annuals

Fall Grazing of Annual Crops

- Annual ryegrass, (ex. Italian ryegrasses), can be grazed late into the fall, long after other cool-season forages have become dormant and retains good energy levels.
- Dwarf corn hybrids specifically developed for grazing may also be used – although good productivity and stock strength is also possible with a number of regular hybrids. Those with good stock strength can be grazed in deep snow, and will also provide shelter to the animals.
- Strip grazing of corn is extremely important to minimize waste and prevent over-feeding.
- Brassicas such as turnips, rape, kale and swedes provide late fall grazing, and kale can be grazed under wet conditions. In the case of turnips both tops and tubers can be grazed.
- Because brassicas are high in protein and energy (TDN), and low in fibre, they are very similar to a concentrate. As a result, they must be strip grazed on a very controlled basis, and supplemented with high fiber roughage.

Swath Grazing of Annuals

- Annual crops can be swathed in the late summer or early fall (mid-September).
- Spring crops should be seeded mid to late June or early July, to ensure they reach the right stage by harvest.
- Most annuals should be cut at the early dough stage for highest quality. Oats: at or just before the milk stage and barley: at or just before the soft dough stage for maximum results.
- Crops should be cut prior to frost to prevent nitrate toxicity, but late enough so that temperatures are cool enough to prevent mould.
- Swaths should be as narrow and deep as possible to protect against weathering and wastage.



Photo Credit: Les and Linda Johnston, Nisku Farms

- Control access by strip grazing mature cereal crops because of the potential for grain overloading by the animals and reduce wastage.
- Estimate animal intake at four to five per cent of body weight to account for waste and cold weather.
- Feed testing is important to ensure proper nutrition and checking for nitrate levels.
- Caution: crops cut for swath grazing are prone to wildlife feeding damage, especially in areas adjacent to the Parkland boundaries and other forested lands where large ruminant wildlife are known to inhabit and as a result, this practice is not recommended where high populations of wildlife (e.g. deer and elk) are known to exist.

Crops to Choose for Swath Grazing

High-yielding, late-maturing varieties of oats and barley are the best mixtures. Adding fall rye (spring seeded) will increase nutrient value and the length of the grazing period. Peas, ryegrass, and millets can also be used. Sorghum-Sudangrass hybrids are also suitable, especially for dry areas and for coarse soils. However, if stressed due to frost, they are susceptible to high nitrate and prussic acid concentrations.

Crop Residues

Crop residues are another very useful feed for maintenance animals such as dry, pregnant cows and ewes. However, it is important to provide a balanced ration to meet nutritional requirements and monitor animal condition for any declines in body condition. Toxins are a concern with crops residues, and monitoring is necessary. Nitrates can sometimes be found in immature crops that have frozen. Prussic acid is a possibility in some fast-growing, warm-season crops. Ergot is possible in cereals – particularly rye. Also, endophytes (a type of fungus) are often found in residues from grass seed crops (fescues and ryegrasses), and can be toxic to beef cattle and pregnant mares.

Corn Stover

- Energy can be met for most maintenance animals with good quality stover (with leaves and grain), but you will need to balance rations, usually with additional protein supplements.
- The cob and stalk have the lowest feed value, the husk and leaves have moderate value, and the grain has the highest energy value. Ideally, forage stover should contain a high proportion of leaves and husks, as well as any grain left after harvest.
- If there are only stalks and cobs, animals will need supplemental energy to meet their requirements for maintenance and cold weather.
- Prevent animals from overeating any excess grain using strip grazing or by reducing the field size to limit selective grazing.

Cereal Straw and Crop Residue



Photo Credit: Mark Neuman

- Cereal straws are an excellent source of feed for dry, pregnant cows and ewes, however do not allow the animals to eat too much straw without a protein supplement to help digestion, or compaction will occur. Work with a nutritionist to balance the ration to meet animal needs.
- Grazing on harvested annual crop fields can provide excellent fall grazing. Animals will clean up the crop residue, as well as unharvested grain and any grass that grows in low spots or at the edge of the field.

- Equipment is available for most combines that will collect the chaff and place it on top of the straw swath for baling, or collected and pile this residue. Residue can then be grazed for winter feeding. Supplemental nutrients will likely be required to balance the ration.

Bale Grazing

Bale grazing involves harvesting forage as round bales and either moving them to winter feeding sites on pasture or utilizing bales where they are made on the hay field. Generally, you would select areas where the manure is most useful for crop fertilization.

Grazing Tips

- Use bales in a separate feeding area, or as part of a larger pasture that is being swath grazed. They can be used on their own, or as an alternate feed source to swaths or stockpiled pasture when snow is deep or during a snowstorm.
- Bales should be spaced a minimum of 20-25 feet apart to allow access by animals.
- High-tensile electric wire is essential to control feeding and minimize waste and should be used to separate out a three to four day feed supply.
- If sisal twine is used, leave the bales on their sides and let the twine rot. It does not have to be removed. However, if plastic twine is used, bales should be placed on their ends so that the twine can be removed prior to feeding.



Photo Credit: Lorne Klein, SMA

Special Considerations for Grazing in the Snow

- Cattle and sheep can easily graze stockpiled pastures covered in up to five inches of soft snow, although quite often snow depth can be more – especially for cattle.
- If animals know there is forage under the snow, they will root down to it. Don't be in too much of a hurry to provide supplemental feed after a heavy snow, or they will become lazy and stop grazing.
- Swaths can be grazed in up to two feet of snow.
- Snow must be soft. If it is icy or crusted over, animals will wear the skin off their noses and the hair off their lower legs.
- If swaths are ice covered, you can try and open them up by driving a tractor over the swath.
- Stockpiled forage or swaths in low-lying or other areas of the pasture that accumulate snow should be used early in the winter, before the snow builds up.
- Under certain conditions, snow can be used as a water source for livestock.

To read the complete version of this publication visit the Manitoba Agriculture website, or click on the following link:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/forages/pdf/bjb05s11.pdf>

Saskatchewan Hay Market Report*Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca/FeedForageListing**Baled Forage Prices (dollars per metric Ton) to October 1, 2009**

	Listings	Listings Priced	Tons Listed	Tons Priced	Lowest Price/Ton	Highest Price/Ton	Weighted Average Price/Ton
<i>Conventional</i>							
Alfalfa	16	13	2,295	1,995	\$77	\$140	\$100
Brome/ Alfalfa	27	23	5,670	5,572	\$67	\$129	\$97
Clover	2	2	130	130	\$67	\$75	\$74
Green Feed	15	14	2,695	2,695	\$51	\$167	\$87
Other	6	4	251	251	\$73	\$108	\$99
Slough Hay	1	1	31	31	\$60	\$60	\$60
Straw	10	9	1,498	1,498	\$29	\$62	\$43
Wild Hay	1	1	16	16	\$77	\$77	\$77

No organic listing were found at this date.

USDA Market News Service Hay Reports*USDA Market News Service**For week ending October 3, 2009***Wyoming, Western Nebraska, and Western South Dakota Weekly Hay Summary***Dennis Widga, Torrington, WY*www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/to_gr310.txt

Trade and movement very slow. Demand moderate. Supplies heavy in most areas. Second and third cutting nearing completion. Grasshoppers reported to be a problem in some areas and blister beetle found in central Wyoming.

Weekly Montana Hay Report*Justin Lumpkin, Billings, MT*www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/bl_gr310.txt

Hay prices steady compared to last week. Trade activity light to moderate and demand good for all classes.

Hay Quality Designations - Physical Descriptions:

Supreme: Very early maturity, pre bloom, soft fine stemmed, extra leafy - factors indicative of very high nutritive content. Hay is excellent colour and free of damage. Relative Feed Value (RFV): >185

Premium: Early maturity, i.e., pre-bloom in legumes and pre head in grass hays; extra leafy and fine stemmed - factors indicative of a high nutritive content. Hay is green and free of damage. RFV: 170-185

Good: Early to average maturity, i.e., early to mid-bloom in legumes and early head in grass hays; leafy, fine to medium stemmed, free of damage other than slight discoloration. RFV: 150-170

Fair: Late maturity, i.e., mid to late-bloom in legumes and headed in grass hays; moderate or below leaf content, and generally coarse stemmed. Hay may show light damage. RFV: 130-150

Utility: Hay in very late maturity, such as mature seed pods in legumes or mature head in grass hays, coarse stemmed. This category could include hay discounted due to excessive damage and heavy weed content or mould. RFV: <130

USDA Hay Prices – for week ending August 21, 2009

	Eastern Wyoming	Central & Western Wyoming	Western South Dakota	Montana
Alfalfa				
Premium -Supreme	\$119-137	\$107-143	\$119-131-	-
Good - Premium	\$83-114	\$95-107	\$83-101	\$101-131
Fair – Good	\$71-89	\$83-95	\$60-83	\$77-95
Utility	\$60	-	-	-
Grass	-	\$89	\$65	\$137-143*
Greenfeed	\$60	\$71-95	-	-
Alfalfa/Grass				
Premium	\$140-161*	-	-	\$101-131
Good	\$119*	\$95-107	\$83-101	\$-
Fair		-	\$60-83	\$77-95
Straw	\$60	-	-	\$54-60

All prices converted to CDN dollars per Metric Ton FOB stack in medium to large square bales and rounds unless other wise noted.

*small squares

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Leanne Thompson, MSc, PAg

Project Coordinator, Saskatchewan Forage Council
PO Box 263
Ceylon, SK S0C 0T0
Phone: 306.454.2777
E-mail: office@saskforage.ca

Janice Bruynooghe, MSc, PAg

Executive Director, Saskatchewan Forage Council
PO Box 1715
Outlook, SK S0L 2N0
Phone: 306.966.2148
E-mail: jbruynooghe@saskforage.ca

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