

## An update from the Saskatchewan Forage Network - 'the value in creating conversations'

*Entering the third and final year of the current funding cycle, the Saskatchewan Forage Network provides the following update on activities and accomplishments to date. In addition an emphasis is placed upon the future as the Network strives to maintain and expand these collaborative industry actions.*

Formally initiated in November 2012 through the efforts of a group of industry partners with establishment made possible through a project administered by the Saskatchewan Forage Council, the concept of the Saskatchewan Forage Network was many years in the making. Discussions and brainstorming sessions started long before day one to create a model for industry collaboration, cooperation and communication. And that is exactly what has been accomplished and where the Network is today!

With a vision to grow the forage and livestock industry's future for producer profitability a very active and engaged steering committee\* was established. A Coordinator was hired and the Network got to work sharing information, creating dialogue and 'getting things done'.

The Network model essentially corresponds to a virtual meeting space built upon regular and ongoing conversations amongst a far-reaching group of stakeholders. The Network is not the creation of a new organization or legal entity but rather a forum where those with an interest in forage can share their knowledge, expertise, and opinions to help find and create a path forward.

It is important to note that for the purpose of the Network's areas of focus, "forage" includes tame species, native rangelands, perennials and annuals – from forage seed production through to end-users in the livestock sectors, while sustaining important ecosystems and resources. It is this recognition of just how far-reaching and important the forage industry is that has brought the various sectors to the table. It is relatively unique to find a gathering of no fewer than nine industry organizations, from forage seed growers to various livestock producers, working collectively.

The Saskatchewan Forage Network was created 'to facilitate a collaborative approach to research, technology transfer and industry development for all forage and livestock industry stakeholders in Saskatchewan through efforts which complement and expand the current activities and resources at work within the province and across Canada'. In order to follow that roadmap the industry stakeholders have focused on areas of common interest recognizing that the benefits for one sector often resonate and impact the entire industry. Through the leadership of the Network Coordinator and participation of the organizations who have committed to this initiative a number of significant outcomes and successes have been accomplished:

- creation and delivery of the Saskatchewan Forage Network **Graduate Student Awards** providing industry financial support to post-secondary graduate students. To date awards totaling \$120,000 have been awarded for delivery of projects into 2016/17 (see Appendix A for a complete listing of projects) with students working on a range of topics from forage pea cultivars for greenfeed, improving grazing capacity with bloat free legumes, development of new sainfoin and crested wheatgrass lines, and barley silage for dairy cows. Most recently the Network has approved funding support for a project aimed at developing grassland songbird management targets for multi-species conservation on mixed grass prairie rangelands – a study bridging conversation and livestock production;
- development of an overarching research priority list allowing for direct feedback to forage-focused projects funded through numerous funding agencies across western Canada including government and industry. These efforts have included a renewed emphasis on the annual **SK Advisory Council on Forage Crops** meeting. The Network proposed a new direction and worked

in partnership with SK Agriculture to revamp and expand this meeting of stakeholders with a clear emphasis on identification of research needs. The results have been a very successful outcomes-based meeting with clearly defined action items, many of which are being accomplished through research projects as well as infrastructure and capacity developments;

- dedicated leadership and targeted emphasis on the need for increased **forage research capacity and infrastructure**. This involves, but is not limited to, providing direct input to the creation and development of the Livestock & Forage Centre of Excellence at the University of Saskatchewan and efforts to establish an endowed Forage Management and Utilization Research Chair; and
- the Network played a critical role in providing industry leadership resulting in the June 2013 announcement of the Saskatchewan Agriculture funded Strategic Research Program (SRP) Forage Breeding Chair at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Bill Biligetu was hired for the position in May 2014 and has taken on an impressive number of forage breeding projects in a short amount time. Dr. Biligetu has exhibited a keen interest and willingness to work directly with industry and has been very successful in developing a robust and industry-focused research program.

*Facilitating a  
collaborative approach  
for all forage and  
livestock  
stakeholders....*

Industry contributions to the Saskatchewan Forage Network include both cash, through the Graduate Student Awards, as well as significant in-kind support. Steering committee members provide valuable input, insight and expertise to this initiative. Through these representatives the industry organizations maintain oversight and direction in order to ensure that the vision, mission and objectives of the Saskatchewan Forage Network are efficiently and successfully accomplished.

A note of recognition for this collaborative venture is also extended to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture and the Canada-Saskatchewan Growing Forward 2 bi-lateral agreement for their funding contributions.

The focus of the Saskatchewan Forage Network is continuously being evaluated and expanded as deemed necessary by stakeholders. Input, participation and new contributors are encouraged. The steering committee also recognizes the need for a long-term approach which includes maintaining ongoing support for the Network's activities. Current funding commitments end March 31, 2017 therefore efforts are underway to ensure that this dynamic initiative is sustained well into the future.

Comments, questions and feedback are always welcome. Feel free to contact members of the steering committee or the SK Forage Network Coordinator:

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\*Network Steering Committee members include: Native Plant Society of SK (Chet Neufeld), SK Bison Association (Les Kroeger), SK Cattlemen's Association (Michael Spratt), SK Forage Council (Aaron Ivey – Committee Chair), SK Forage Seed Development Commission (David Maxwell/Ray McVicar), SK Leafcutters Association/SK Alfalfa Seed Producers Association (Andrew Lindsay-Hawkins), SK Prairie Conservation Action Plan (Orin Balas), SK Sheep Development Board (Arlette Seib), and SaskMilk (Jack Ford).

## **Appendix A: SK Forage Network Funding for Graduate Student Projects (to March 31, 2016)**

- Mr. Basim Refat is a PhD candidate working with graduate supervisor Dr. Peiqiang Yu in the Department of Animal & Poultry Science at the University of Saskatchewan doing research as part of ADF project 20140281 'Comparison of Barley Forage with Highest and Lowest Digestible Fibre (NDF) in High Production Dairy Cattle'. Total of \$30,000 over three years;
- Mr. Surendra Bhatara is an MSc candidate under the supervision of Dr. Bill Biligetu in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan. His project is focused on development of new sainfoin lines. Total of \$20,000 over two years;
- Mr. Samuel Tandoh, MSc candidate, is working under the supervision of Dr. Biligetu on a project exploring 'Development of crested wheatgrass lines with improved forage nutritive value' (ADF project 20140046). Total of \$20,000 over two years;
- Ms. Breeanna Kelln is working under the direction of Dr. Bart Lardner (Western Beef Development Centre) on a project titled 'Improving grazing capacity through introduction of bloat free legumes in existing pasture stands' (ADF project 21040193) as part of her PhD program. Total of \$20,000 over two years;
- a graduate student award totaling \$20,000 over two years has been awarded to Dr. Bill Biligetu to support an MSc student working on 'Evaluation of contrasting forage pea cultivars in mixtures with cereals for greenfeed production in Saskatchewan' (ADF project 20150040); and
- a MSc student will be hired by Dr. Michael Schellenberg (AAFC Swift Current) to work on a project titled 'Increasing forage production with perennial native legumes' (ADF project 20150177). Total award of \$10,000 over two years.