

The Saskatchewan Livestock & Forage Gazette

FALL 2010

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From the Editor...

This has been a great year for growing grass - I don't think anyone can remember a summer when it rained practically every day! For this reason, we have included an article on managing high moisture hay in this issue. Also included are a number of articles that deal with reducing your feed costs through improved grazing management, along with some very interesting information about how cattle can be trained to eat leafy spurge and other weeds. All of these approaches remind us that the conditions under which we operate are constantly changing and that it is so important to be able to think "outside the box". Have a great winter!

Best regards,
Chris Nykoluk
Livestock & Forage Gazette Editor



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Producer Profile: Glen and Dawn Ekert

Submitted by Stacey Gulka, PAg, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Weyburn, SK



Q: Can you describe a bit of your operation's history?

Our ranch was a grain and cattle operation when we purchased it in 1983. Grain farming wasn't a passion for us, but the biggest factor in converting the farm to perennial cover was the health of the land. Land cover is essential to preserving land, and with our land being so light, it's beneficial for it to be in perennial cover. The drought in the late 1980s was the final straw in our decision to convert, so we started to seed grass. The grain farm prior to converting was an organic one, but our concern about residue management led us to thinking more about perennial forage.

Q: You market organic beef, what is involved in raising organic beef?

Our steer calves are finished and sold as organic beef. There is a national standard for organic beef that is set out and regulated by the CFIA. In June 2011, that standard will begin to also be enforced by the CFIA. To raise organic beef, only vaccinations that stimulate the animals' own immune system can be used. If an animal needs to be treated for an illness, that animal is no longer eligible

for organic marketing. We find that the biggest factor in keeping the animals organic is to keep them in a stress free environment with a biodiverse selection of forage so they can acquire all the nutrients needed to stay healthy. When we kept our animals in the yard, vet bills were imminent. Now, as we keep our animals out on the land throughout the year, our vet bills are

near zero. As for marketing, we had someone purchasing our beef directly from the farm that was interested in getting our beef put into her local grocery store. She was able to talk to the grocery owner and get them to purchase our organic beef. From this, word of mouth got us another store that was interested in purchasing organic beef.

Q: How do your environmental goals meet your operation goals?

We are trying to encourage willow and tree growth back into some of our wetland areas. Willows are important for snow trapping and shelter for the cattle. The increased snow trap leads to increased moisture in the spring, and therefore a greater abundance of available forage. These areas had been farmed out for years, yet are still some of the most productive. With the regrowth of trees and willows, we are now seeing bird species that we haven't seen in the past. We attribute the movement of wildlife back to the ranch to a lack of chemicals, abundance of grass, and regrowth of trees. These are all attributes that are important in the production of organic beef as well.

We are also aware that the native plant portion of our ranch is a very important resource in terms of high quality forage. We want to keep our native grass in the valley healthy and productive for our cattle – this is good for the land as well.

Q: How do you manage your grass?

We have always wanted to extend our grazing season, so we were pushing our cattle to clean up the remaining forage in the fall. It wasn't good for our land or for our cattle, and we would end up feeding in the yard for four months. We decided to leave some forage behind for snow trap one year, and we let the cattle back out to clean up the old stuff in the spring. Our cow condition ended up better, and we had forage available first thing in the spring. We have implemented a rotational system that the cattle are run through on average, one and a half times a year. Our goal is to always have lots of cover left on the land throughout the winter. The snow is important for insulating the ground and protecting the soil microbes through winter. This leads to greater production in the following year.

All of our fencing is electric and our pastures are various sizes. The movement of the cattle depends on the topography, variety of forage, and time of year. We will move our fences according to forage and get our cattle to eat as such. The overall goal is to keep a high number of cattle on the smallest piece of land for the shortest grazing time possible, allowing for a very long forage recovery period. In the spring when the grass is growing fast, we move the cattle quickly. We slow the movement down in the summer as growth slows.

Q: You use sainfoin for a large portion of your grazing. Why?

Sainfoin is a non-bloating legume that we have had good results with. Our land is light, and sainfoin seemed to be more productive than alfalfa in the past. We mix it with meadow brome, smooth brome, and some timothy.

Some of our sainfoin stands are between ten and fifteen years old.

Q: What is your winter feeding regime?

Bale grazing occurs from December to April on our least productive ground that year. We have noted an amazing difference in residue and fertilization where the cattle have bale grazed. All of our cows, yearlings, and calves graze together until March, at which point the calves will be weaned. Bales are placed out in the field and we let cows into the whole area. We usually set out two weeks of feed at a time. We used to move the cattle around, letting them have two days at a time, but now we just let them in to the paddock and we don't see a lot of difference in leftover residue. Our hay is weighed, so that we can estimate how much feed each animal is getting. We prefer this method because there is no stress, the cattle aren't waiting to be moved, and they don't have to fight over feed. They maybe open up ten bales at once, finish them up and open a few more. They don't open up all the bales.

Q: How do you pick cattle to suit your operation?

We look for animals that are easy fleshing, good hair coat, moderate in size, and moderate milking. The calves are born in June and are left with their mothers to learn how to winter graze from their mom. We have to be careful to choose moderate milking cows for this type of system. High producing cows will milk a calf all winter and their condition decreases greatly. She won't be in calf the following year because of this decrease in condition. Basically, we need a hardy self-sufficient animal, since they need to do well on grass and hay, they don't get any grain.

Author's Note: Glen and Dawn Ekert were the 2010 recipients of the Saskatchewan Environmental Stewardship Award, an award that is given by the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association & Partners each year.

Base Map Complements Grazing Management Systems

Article written by Tracy Harrison for Ducks Unlimited Canada



For producers who are trying to make the most of their range and forage resources, a base map provided by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is proving to be a valuable tool.

Just ask Daryk Simonson of Dinsmore, Saskatchewan.

“I would have paid for that,” said Daryk, who manages a land base of 45 quarters along with his wife Bonnie, their three children – and his parents, Elmer and Faye.

While Daryk, as the fourth generation on the land, already knows every rock, hill and slough in the area – he also knows the value of using external resources. The Simonsons, who were the recipients of The Environmental Stewardship Award (TESA) for Saskatchewan in 2009, have already worked with various organizations from the agriculture and conservation communities.

And a base map, available to producers in

DUC’s target delivery areas, is a tool they’ve been happy to access.

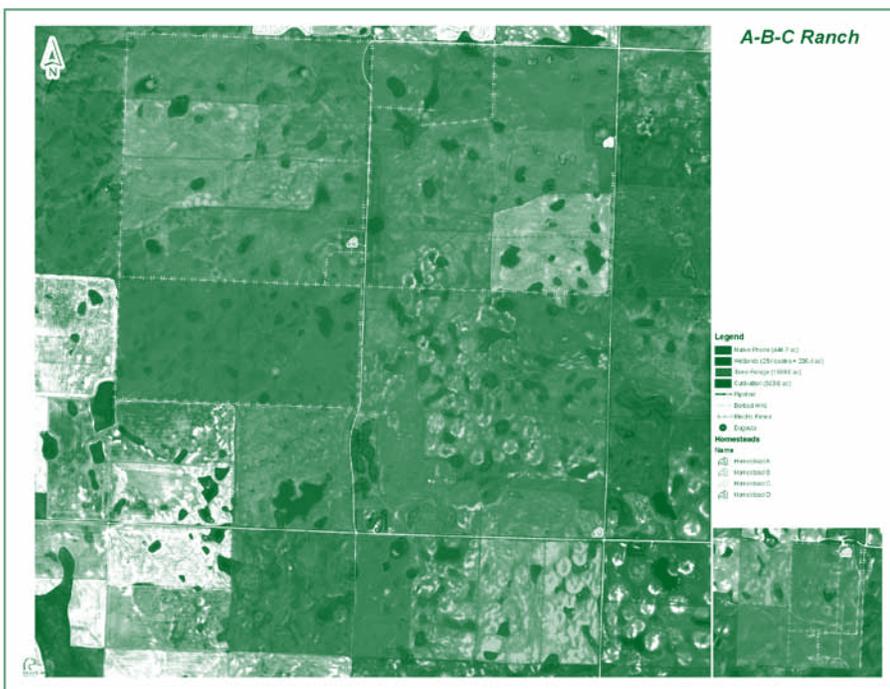
So what is a “base map”?

Essentially, a base map is a large laminated map – approximately two feet by three feet – or even as large four feet by six feet – that gives producers an aerial view of their land base in great detail. Along with being color coded, the map comes with a legend that indicates the acreage of native prairie, tame forage, cropland and wetlands. Features such as fence types, gates, yard sites, wells, pipelines and watering sites are also included.

The base map complements the Simonsons’ operation as they monitor changes and tweak management practices. Over the years, they’ve seeded grass, added fences and watering systems, implemented the practice of rotational grazing and expanded their herd to 500 cows and 200 yearlings.

“I use the map in conjunction with my journal where I write down which days the cattle are in which paddocks,” said Bonnie, adding she especially likes smaller versions of the map. “Those are nice because you can take them out to the pasture with you and draw on them while you’re sitting out there in the truck. If we’ve got somebody new with us moving cattle or something, we can also show them where we’re going to go.”

Mark Hoimyr, a producer from Gladmar, Saskatchewan also agrees. Like the Simonsons, he’s used his base map on countless occasions.



Mark said, “The smaller copies have been just about as handy as the big one for doodling on. We’ve also made copies and given them to people like custom bale haulers who need directions. Being able to explain to someone where a gate is, or what field you want them to go to, just makes things so much easier.”

For Mark, the larger map has also helped with changes being made to the operation he runs with his wife Laura and their two children, as well as his parents, Lyle and Judy. Since they started using it in 2008, the Hoimyrs have implemented a new grazing rotation and are adding a pipeline system – and more fences to accommodate their herd of 200 cows and 200 grassers.

Mark said, “It’s a family farm and it’s a mixed farm – but we’re moving towards having it entirely grass. And when it comes to doing a grazing rotation, it’s so much easier to figure it out when it’s on a big laminated poster on the wall. You can draw on it with dry erase markers and kind of readjust things.”

A base map also makes it easier to develop management plans that incorporate the unique features of the landscape.

The Hoimyrs have approximately 24 quarters in a region characterized by rolling hills, “tons of wetlands” and alkali lakes that split their pastures. Their land base, which is all in a reasonably tight block, includes over 2,900

acres of native prairie. While their cropland is now down to about 400 acres – the remainder of their operation consists of tame pasture and hayland.

“We use a lot of temporary fencing – a lot of poly wire and step-in posts,” said Mark. To improve the condition of their native prairie the Hoimyrs are using a cell grazing system to maximize the production of their tame forages which are utilized first. Some of these paddocks range in size from 10 to 30 acres.

“Depending on the time of year, in some cases we move the cattle daily. It just kind of depends on the amount of grass and how mature it is and everything. The map helps us visualize where they’re going to be in a week or two weeks, when the tame grass rotation is going to be finished - and when they could be moving to the native grass,” said Mark.

In conclusion, Mark noted that not only did the map come at the right time – but it was easy to acquire through a voluntary “handshake” agreement.

“The agreement is pretty simple. It’s just no draining and no breaking up prairie for 10 years – which is something that we weren’t really considering doing anyway,” he said.

So if Mark had to part with his map would he miss it?

“Oh, absolutely,” he said.

Dear readers.....

Please ensure that we have your complete and correct mailing address! We still are getting a fair amount of returned mail and many of them are to General Delivery addresses. Some of them are getting through but we need people to contact us and give us a PO Box number. Also please let us know if you have moved. Otherwise we may have no choice but to remove you from our mailing list.

Trivia Question

Which Saskatchewan Rural Municipality has had the greatest rainfall to date (as of October 15th, 2010)?

Turn to page 7 to find out.

Cattle Eat More Leafy Spurge

Submitted by Ron Moss, Tech Transfer Coordinator, AAFC Dauphin District



Kathy Voth, Utah State University, has made important progress in training cattle to eat leafy spurge and other problematic weeds. AAFC Community Pasture Program staff became aware of this research and became interested in exploring this concept further. In summer 2007, Lester Pryce, AAFC Land Manager, used Voth's training protocols to conduct a mini grazing training trial at Elbow Community Pasture with some of his own cattle. His results were promising.

Shortly thereafter, AAFC involved the University of Saskatchewan, and a cattle behaviour training research project was conducted in 2008 and 2009 at Elbow Community Pasture. The project was designed and carried out by Kimberley Will, then a Masters student at the University of Saskatchewan, under the supervision of project advisor Dr. Ken Walburger.

Kim's project involved 42 adult cows. Twenty-one of the cows were trained in the corral to eat spurge while the other 21 cows were used as untrained "control" animals. The 21 training animals were introduced to leafy spurge with treats in tubs. Later, out in the field the cattle were placed in 3 trained groups and 3 untrained groups, each with their own paddocks. Each group grazed in up to three 40-acre paddocks during the course of the season. The large paddock size ensured that any consumption of leafy spurge would be completely voluntary, since the cattle would have a wide choice of forages.

Although cattle grazing behavior was directly observed by Kimberley and clippings were also taken, the main analysis of actual cattle diet composition was from fecal samples that she collected as part of her study.

Kimberly's project showed the following results.

- Trained cattle eat more leafy spurge than do untrained cattle.
- The leafy spurge made up 12.9 % of the canopy of the moderately grazed areas. Under moderate stocking rate (ie. 4 acres/AUM), the trained cattle consumed 2.7 % of their diet as spurge in late June to early July; intake was reduced to 1.2-1.3 % in late July-August. Even with the training, the cattle did not develop a high preference for leafy spurge - but they still consumed it!
- When high intensity grazing was implemented after the initial training, the trained cattle consumed alot more spurge than they did under moderate grazing treatments. The cattle first selected the more palatable grasses, then leafy spurge, and then lastly, the less palatable grasses.
- Although calves were not trained to eat leafy spurge, calves from trained mothers ate significantly more leafy spurge than did calves from untrained mothers (2.5 % versus 1.48%). This may mean that retention of heifers from "leafy spurge eating cows" may have the potential to increase consumption of spurge over time.

In 2010 the remainder of the research project cows were trained using the protocol undertaken in 2009. This year neither the cattle trained in June 2010 or the group trained in 2009 would consume leafy spurge during the test period in late June! Was there something different in the palatability of the leafy spurge this year even though it was in the same general area of sites used in prior years? Did it have something to do with the

wet spring?

The author talked to Kathy Voth about this year's poor results and Kathy offered the following comments:

1. The social order of cattle can sometimes change preferences. These two groups of animals were normally together but they had been separated for a couple of weeks.
2. The variety of foods available. Cattle seem to be receptive to eating the weed you want them to when there are more foods on offer – even when greater forage diversity means weeds!
3. Time of year or stage of plant growth. Livestock often find plants more palatable during certain times of the grazing season. Kathy stated that in one of her training sessions she failed to get cattle to consume leafy spurge in the test area; they then released the cattle into the whole field. A month later Kathy observed that all of the target plants had been browsed throughout the field!

In September when the author was spraying spots of leafy spurge in the AAFC Portage Community Pasture, it was observed that leafy spurge had been browsed by untrained cattle. Does the leafy spurge become more palatable once it matures?

A number of other weeds - such as toad flax and Canada thistle - are more readily consumed by cattle than is leafy spurge. Kathy Voth found that knapweed was most favored by cattle. Nonetheless, leafy spurge is the problem weed at Elbow Pasture - answers to the above questions will help in answering these key questions.

Even though the success of this project may appear somewhat limited, it is still worthwhile pursuing training cattle to control spurge on sites that are heavily infested. More information on what dictates leafy spurge palatability, identifying when consumption

might be maximized, and the potential use of supplements to increase spurge consumption should be explored further.

There is no doubt that sheep and goats can both be easily trained to develop a preference for leafy spurge in all stages of spurge growth. However, finding significant numbers of sheep and goats is still not possible or feasible for many livestock operations.

We have certainly debunked the myth that cattle are harmed by eating spurge. Intensive grazing (ie. management intensive grazing) shows more promise for higher consumption of leafy spurge than does moderate grazing. Cows are readily available as weed control tools and so solving some of these issues still holds a lot of promise for the livestock industry!



Cattle have been successfully trained to eat leafy spurge at AAFC Elbow Community Pasture. Photo credit: Ron Moss, AAFC

Trivia Answer

**RM 305 of Invermay
had the greatest annual
rainfall to date at
856 mm.**

Source: Environment Canada

Take Care When Feeding Moldy Hay

Submitted by Michel Tremblay, PAg,
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture



After a short period of dry soil conditions in spring, the summer of 2010 was cool and rainy. Although this resulted in excellent forage yields in all areas of the province, it also created major challenges to making hay without rain damage. High humidity and regular and significant rainfall events occurred throughout the growing season, making the harvest of good quality hay challenging. In the struggle to field dry and bale hay between the rains, some hay was baled above moisture levels safe for storage. The result is hay that becomes moldy.

Wet weather conspires to reduce quality in a number of ways. Most of the first cut was harvested significantly later than normal, with some fields staying standing into September. As forage matures, protein levels drop and fibre content increases. When foliage dries, cellular respiration ceases. Wet weather following cutting increases the duration that plant tissues respire. Respiration uses up energy present in the forage, so extended periods of respiration results in increased dry matter losses. Rain leaches soluble components from the hay. Sun bleaching is increased as hay lies in swath for extended periods, degrading pigments and vitamins. When hay lies wet, fungal organisms grow on the hay, further degrading the palatability and feed value of the feed.

Hay can safely be baled at 15% moisture in small square bales, 17% in hard core round bales, and 19% in soft core round bales. Exceeding these levels can result in spoilage in stored hay. Considering the volumes of hay baled tough this season, many growers

will likely be faced with moldy feed when the feeding season begins. There is a wide array of hay quality in 2010, so feed testing is of particular importance this year. Feed testing is required to determine the feed value of hay, and facilitate a balanced feeding program to provide for the nutritional needs of the class of livestock being fed. If the hay has heated (has experienced elevated temperatures due to microbial degradation), the acid detergent insoluble nitrogen (ADIN) test is required for detection of heat damage. The ADIN test is not typically part of a general feed analysis, and must be requested in addition to a standard feed test.



*A significant portion of the 2010 hay crop will have some level of mold.
Photo credit: SMA file photo.*

All feeds have molds or fungus present on them. Normally the level of mold on feed is quite low. Mold formation increases when relatively high humidity is combined with heat. Heating occurs in hay that has been baled at elevated moisture levels. Molds can cause health problems in livestock. Certain types of molds, when exposed to cool moist conditions produce mycotoxins. Ingested mycotoxins, if passed on to the fetus, may cause abortions (aspergillosis). If not aborted, calves may have compromised immune systems, resulting in slow growth or health problems. Respiratory irritation and pneumonia may result from the inhalation of spores and dust created by molds. Molds result in feed quality deterioration and reduced palatability. Low palatability reduces forage intake and therefore nutrient intake, reducing animal performance.

Several strategies can be used when feeding moldy forages to minimize potential problems.

Limit feeding of moldy hay to backgrounders/finisher calves, and bulls. Avoid feeding moldy hay to pregnant cows due to risks associated with mycotoxins. Spread moldy forages on the ground or run bales through a processor to blow off some of the mold spores, and allow livestock to be more selective of which feed they consume. Limit moldy hay to 40-60% of the ration by mixing moldy hay with good quality forage. Supplement Vitamin A to avoid

deficiencies associated with feeding moldy hay for long periods.

A significant portion of the 2010 hay crop will have some level of mold on it. Although feeding moldy hay is certainly not a desirable situation, feed testing, combined with some feeding techniques will minimize the potentially negative health and nutrition impacts of moldy, low quality hay.

Stockpiling Perennial Forages

Submitted by Janice Bruynooghe, PAg, Saskatchewan Forage Council



With feed costs, mainly conserved feeds such as hay and silage, accounting for approximately 65% of the maintenance cost of a beef animal, any opportunity to reduce costs is a benefit to livestock producers.

The Saskatchewan Forage Council and its partners, including the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture and the Western Beef Development Centre, recently completed an ADOPT (Agricultural Demonstration of Practices and Technologies) project to demonstrate different methods of stockpiling and utilizing perennial forages. This project provided producers with a practical look at potential low-cost options as demonstrated by local beef operations for wintering beef cattle.

The Western Beef Development Centre near Lanigan, SK and two producer co-operators (located near Biggar, SK and Ituna, SK) provided the three sites included in this project. Treatments at each site included:



Cows graze stockpiled forage at WBDC site

swathed stockpiled forage and standing stockpiled forage, with each treatment grazed during the traditional winter feeding period. The co-operators swathed forage late in the summer and fall season (2009) and grazed the treatments later into the fall and into the winter months (2009/2010). Co-

operators recorded grazing periods and grazing animal days for each treatment. Utilization on each of the stockpiled standing and stockpiled swathed grazing treatments was assessed by the number of animal grazing days available at each site and treatment. Feed samples were collected and analyzed to quantify any differences in quality between the two grazed treatments at each site.

In all of the treatments in all locations, there appeared to be no correlation between swathing and forage quality. In some cases, forage quality was slightly less in swathed versus standing forage. This may be attributed to leaf-loss during handling. It

continued on next page



Aaron Ivey (centre) discusses stockpiled forage options with fellow producers – Ituna, SK, February 18, 2010

increased forage quality or utilization. The added costs of swathing forage as compared to grazing standing forage may not be justified, however this management decision will need to be determined by each individual producer at his specific location and within the parameters that he is managing.

is also important to note that forage species composition may have had an effect on forage quality loss during swathing.

Actual forage utilization by grazing animals is understandably correlated with each site location and grazing management. At the Ituna site, the co-operator noted no difference in utilization between swathed versus stockpiled forage. However, at the Lanigan site it was noted that utilization was greater on the swathed treatment as compared to the standing forage. With any winter grazing option, it is important to note that forage utilization will vary depending on environmental conditions, livestock behaviour, forage type, quality and grazing management decisions.

There was no clear indication at these three sites that swathing forage provided additional grazing capacity, either through

This project very clearly demonstrated at all three sites that stockpiled grazed forages can reduce wintering costs for beef cows. All three co-operators noted the reduced management/labour required to graze either swathed or standing stockpiled forage as compared to traditional winter feeding systems.

The results of this project do illustrate that stockpiling perennial forages is a viable option to consider for wintering beef animals. Producers need to consider forage type, local environmental conditions, fencing and water supply, as well as animal management expertise, before implementing a winter grazing option. These demonstration sites provided extremely valuable and practical information as well as a first-hand look at opportunities that should be explored.

To download the complete final report, including data results, visit www.saskforage.ca.

Current Feeder Price Levels – ‘Is It Enough?’

Submitted by Sandy Russell, MSc, PAg, Spring Creek Land & Cattle Consulting



As we enter the 2010 fall marketing season with stronger feeder cattle price levels, producers are asking: ‘Is it enough?’ As a market analyst this is a question I have not been asked in a few years. Intuitively,

everyone has been fully aware that price levels have not been ‘high enough’ but as markets have strengthened the question has begun to surface again.

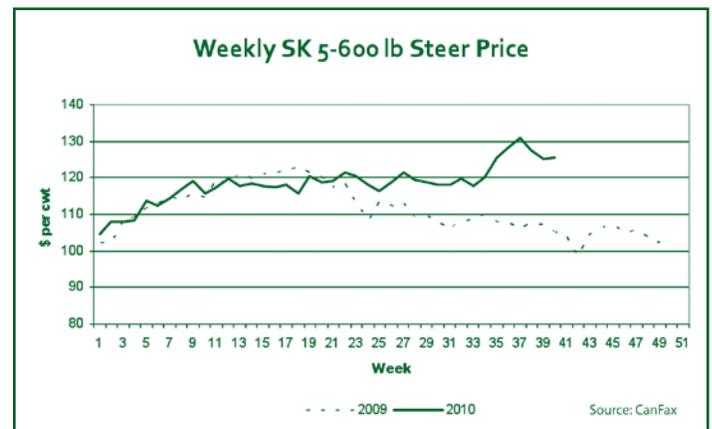
Initially, I ask my inquirers, define 'enough'. Everyone's interpretation of 'enough' will ultimately be very unique. After the numerous years of challenges and depressed feeder prices, is a breakeven price enough? Is a 5 per cent margin enough? Is a 10 per cent margin enough? Ultimately, we all want to realize the highest value for our product to secure a profit, but is our management ensuring we are positioning our businesses to actually achieve a profit?

Having worked on numerous 'cost of production' projects and been involved in market analysis for many years, I have recognized that often times we work on one or another variable in the profit equation but seldom do we put the entire equation together to fully determine profit or the lack thereof. Profit is determined by the cost to produce the product subtracted from the value of the product. The only way to fully determine if there is profit and the amount achieved is to determine those two components of the profit equation.

Successful grass managers talk about finding the balance between forage production and animal requirements so as to obtain optimum utilization. Without understanding what resources you have and the requirements of your particular animals you will not be able to achieve that optimum balance. Financial analysis is no different. Without understanding the inputs to produce the final product and the current value of your product you will not be able to obtain your target profit level.

There is no doubt the feeder market is higher than it has been in recent years, with 5-600 lb steers reaching \$130 per cwt in mid-September. During the first week of October, this same weight class of steers averaged \$125 per cwt in Saskatchewan, just over \$20 per cwt higher than 2009. That is certainly a much better price level than we have seen in recent years but is this enough? Although I am well aware we all want price levels to move higher, everyone's response will be different to

the question. And so it should be - everyone's profit equation is different. I often hear and strongly agree that each cattle operation is so unique. So too is each operation's profit equation.



For those of you who have strived to become better forage managers, it has taken a different perspective and some additional time and energy but the investment has likely provided a significant return in forage production and utilization to your business. Becoming better financial managers also involves looking at the operation from a different perspective and will require some extra time and energy but the return on your investment will be well worth it.

'Is it enough?' is and will always be a key question for all cattle businesses - whether in times of high prices or low prices. As you sort through the overload of market analyses and commentaries that will flood your mailboxes in the coming weeks, ultimately the only place you can find the answer to this question is through judicious scrutiny of the valuable information that is already sitting behind your own office door!

Sandy Russell is a partner in Spring Creek Land & Cattle Consulting Inc. and provides independent insight into the beef market complex through her weekly commentary 'The Bottom Line'. Sandy can be reached at 306.867.8396 or srussell@springcreekconsulting.ca.

Upcoming Events

Manitoba Grazing School **December 7 & 8, 2010**

Brandon, MB

Contact: MAFRI at
204-522-3256

Foraging Into the Future VI **December 8 & 9, 2010**

Swift Current, SK

Contact: Trevor Lennox at
306-778-8294

Saskatchewan Beef Industry Conference

January 19-22, 2011

Saskatoon, SK

Western Canadian Holistic Management Conference

February 15 & 16, 2011

Lloydminster, AB

Contact: Chinook Applied
Research Association at
403-664-3777

Native Prairie Restoration/ Reclamation Workshop

February 16 & 17, 2011

Regina, SK

Contact: Michelle Clark at
306-352-0472

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