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# Canadian **Cattlemen**

THE BEEF MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2017 \$3.00  
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## **WILL MORE DATA MEAN MORE CASH?**



**Greg Thompson**  
Moose Jaw, Sask.

Publications Mail Agreement Number 40069240

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**SAT., JAN. 27, 2018**

Important information on Page 2-3  
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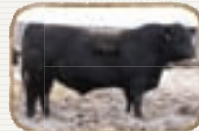
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Call me anytime to get started.

**1-800-561-2855 Thanks Mac**

**YOU PAY FOR THEM ONLY WHEN  
YOU ARE SATISFIED ON DELIVERY**

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Greg Thompson

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Cover photo: Debbie Fruber

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# LOOKING AHEAD TO 2018

**I** was trying to think of a word to sum up 2017, and the best I could come up with was volatile.

We came into 2017 bloodied by a fall slump in prices but seem to be going out on a rising tide. Fat cattle and calf prices have been on the rise since September, and better prices brought a flush of calves to the market well into November. With Alberta calves fetching a premium over the U.S. we also had a few thousand U.S. calves get into the mix this fall. The futures also look promising despite the higher number of placements in the U.S.

What this all portends for 2018 is still to be written, but it seems safe to say the markets will remain volatile for some time to come.

One thing that did not show up in the numbers this fall was a sign of the optimism Canadian producers will need to start rebuilding their herds. As of early November the heifer kill was running 10 per cent ahead of last year, and the latest cattle-on-feed data says placements of heifers under 700 lbs. increased 56 per cent in Alberta and Saskatchewan feedlots in the previous two months.

It appears we are still not ready to climb out from under the shadow of BSE that has hung over this industry since 2003.

Part of that uncertainty lies in the trade front where negotiations over the reboot of the North American Free Trade Agreement appear to be stalled on the bumper of the auto industry. All three sides remained dug in over this central issue at the fifth set of meetings in Mexico City and while the negotiators are set to go at it again next month in Montreal, the signs are not hopeful.

The prospects look slightly brighter for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, formerly the TPP11. All 11 countries have agreed on the core concepts and were ready to sign the agreement last month in Vietnam until Prime Minister Trudeau stepped out of the room. He wants to keep negotiating for environmental and labour rights covered by dispute settlement mechanisms.

In an earlier statement the Canadian Cattlemen's Association spelled out the costs to the beef industry if Canada should choose to opt out of the TPP.

With an agreement Canadian beef would immediately be subject to the same preferential tariff as Australian beef and our exports to Japan could double or nearly triple to about \$300 million. Without it, the CCA estimates, we will likely lose around 80 per cent of the value of our beef exports to Japan.

Japan's tariff rate on Australian beef has been reduced four times to 29.9 per cent on chilled beef and 27.2 per cent on frozen beef since the two countries signed a free trade agreement in 2015. Meanwhile the tariff on Canadian beef remains at 38.5 per cent.

As of July 1, beef imports to Japan went high enough

to trigger a safeguard that put the most favoured nation tariff on frozen beef at 50 per cent. Australian beef is exempt because of its FTA with Japan.

If Canada signs the TPP the volumes required to trigger a safeguard tariff on Canadian beef would be much higher, and the regular tariff for Canada would decline in step with Australian beef until it reaches nine per cent.

That's just beef. Other agriculture sectors could suffer even greater damage if Canada walks away from this agreement.

One other thing western producers can expect in 2018 is a larger check-off. Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) has approved a regulatory amendment that will introduce a \$2.50/head mandatory national check-off on April 1, 2018, and the Canadian Beef Cattle Check-off Agency expects the other three western provinces to begin collecting the increased levy around the same time.

That might not be the only source of new money for the Alberta industry. Negotiations between the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association and ABP have come up with a plan to turn the \$2 refundable portion of the Alberta check-off into a mandatory levy later this year or early next if they can agree on the final terms.

## Alberta expects to introduce a \$2.50/hd mandatory national check-off on April 1, 2018

About \$2.5 million of the \$10.3 million the ABP collected last fiscal year was refunded to producers. The idea is to direct a significant portion of those refunds either to the cattle feeders or a Beef Industry Development Fund that would be controlled by representatives of the ABP, the cattle feeders and the Western Stock Growers' Association. Some of the money would be used to fund the operations of these other groups, and the rest would be used to advance the industry. This fund may well end up playing a role similar to the now defunct Alberta Meat and Livestock Agency.

If the producers can agree on the details the next step would be to approach provincial minister of agriculture Oneil Carlier to conduct a producer plebiscite to approve the plan.

With the potential for new trade agreements, new revenue sharing agreements and volatile markets, there will be plenty to watch out for in 2018. Meanwhile all of us at *Canadian Cattlemen* want to wish you and yours a peaceful and enjoyable holiday season before you head into this exciting new year. 🍷





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*Ken & Linda Storch, Ab.*





# NewsMakers



Bill Thomas

**Bill Thomas**, the recently retired director of the field services at Perennia Food and Agriculture Inc. in Nova Scotia, is the 2017 recipient of the Canadian Forage and Grassland Association Leadership Award.

During his 30 years of extension service he implemented educational forage production programs at the former Nova Scotia Agricultural College, now part of Dalhousie University, and his work as a lecturer at Dalhousie continues in the forage and soil management and livestock production courses. At the same time, he developed policies on nutrient management, beef development and agricultural awareness. He is a member of the Nova Scotia Institute of Agrology, Agrology Institute of Canada and the Canadian Society of Agronomy, and has served on several forage and crop and research committees. In 2011, he was named a Fellow of the Canadian Society of Agronomy, the society's most distinguished award. The CFGA award is sponsored by New Holland Canada.



Dr. Betty Althouse

Saskatchewan Premier **Brad Wall** presented the province's chief veterinary officer **Dr. Betty Althouse** with the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Public Service in a ceremony last month. **Althouse** was

named chief veterinary officer and manager of the provincial animal health unit in 2012 following a 12-year career with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Other civil servants nominate the recipients for this award, but an independent committee makes the final selections.

**James Laws** has been appointed to the board of directors of Farm Credit Canada for a three-year term. He served as the executive director of the Canadian Meat Council from 2004 to 2016 and was the executive director of the Canadian Farm Business Management Council prior to that. After leaving the meat council he worked as a volunteer advisor for Winrock International

in Senegal, West Africa, and the Canadian Executive Services Organization in Tanzania, East Africa.



Annemarie Pedersen

**Annemarie Pedersen** is the new executive director of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC). **Pedersen** has worked in agricultural communications for over a decade, and has been running her own communications consulting business for the past three years. Before that she was the industry relations director with Canada Beef.

Four students were awarded the prestigious Bill Kehler Memorial Scholarships in the dirt at the 44th Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton on November 11. The \$2,500 scholarships are awarded to students pursuing an education in broadcasting or agriculture. The winners are:

- **Kashley Seitz** of High River, Alta., studying animal sciences technology at the faculty of agricultural sciences, South Plains College, Texas.
- **Kelsey Jetter** of Etzikom, Alta., studying plant and soil services at the faculty of agricultural sciences, Lethbridge College.
- **Makenna Moore** of Foothills, Alta., studying public relations at the faculty of communications studies, Mount Royal University.
- **Patten Frankhanel** of New Norway, Alta., studying animal sciences technology at the faculty of agricultural sciences, Lakeland College.

The scholarship was established in 2003 by the Edmonton Rodeo Cowboy's Benevolent Foundation and Northlands to honour the memory of **Bill Kehler** who was known as the voice of Canadian Finals Rodeo.

4-H Canada and CN have announced the 2017 4-H Canada Leadership Awards of Distinction (L.E.A.D.) recipients. The four winners demonstrate the personal development, community impact and leadership embodied in 4-H Canada's four leadership development pillars. The recipients are: **Sara Kate Smith** (B.C.) L.E.A.D. recipient for the com-

munity engagement and communications pillar, **Evan Krebs** (Ont.) L.E.A.D. recipient for the science and technology pillar, **Sadie-Jane Hickson** (Ont.) L.E.A.D. recipient for the environment and healthy living pillar, and **Thian Carmen** (N.S.) for the sustainable agriculture and food security pillar.

B.C. producers have until February 15, 2018 to get rebates of up to \$3,500 on the purchase and installation of livestock tag readers. The federal/provincial program covers 70 per cent of the cost of hand-held or panel readers, the installation of related software and training up the maximum. Applications are available online at [www2.gov.bc.ca](http://www2.gov.bc.ca). Search for the Livestock Tag Reader Rebate Program.

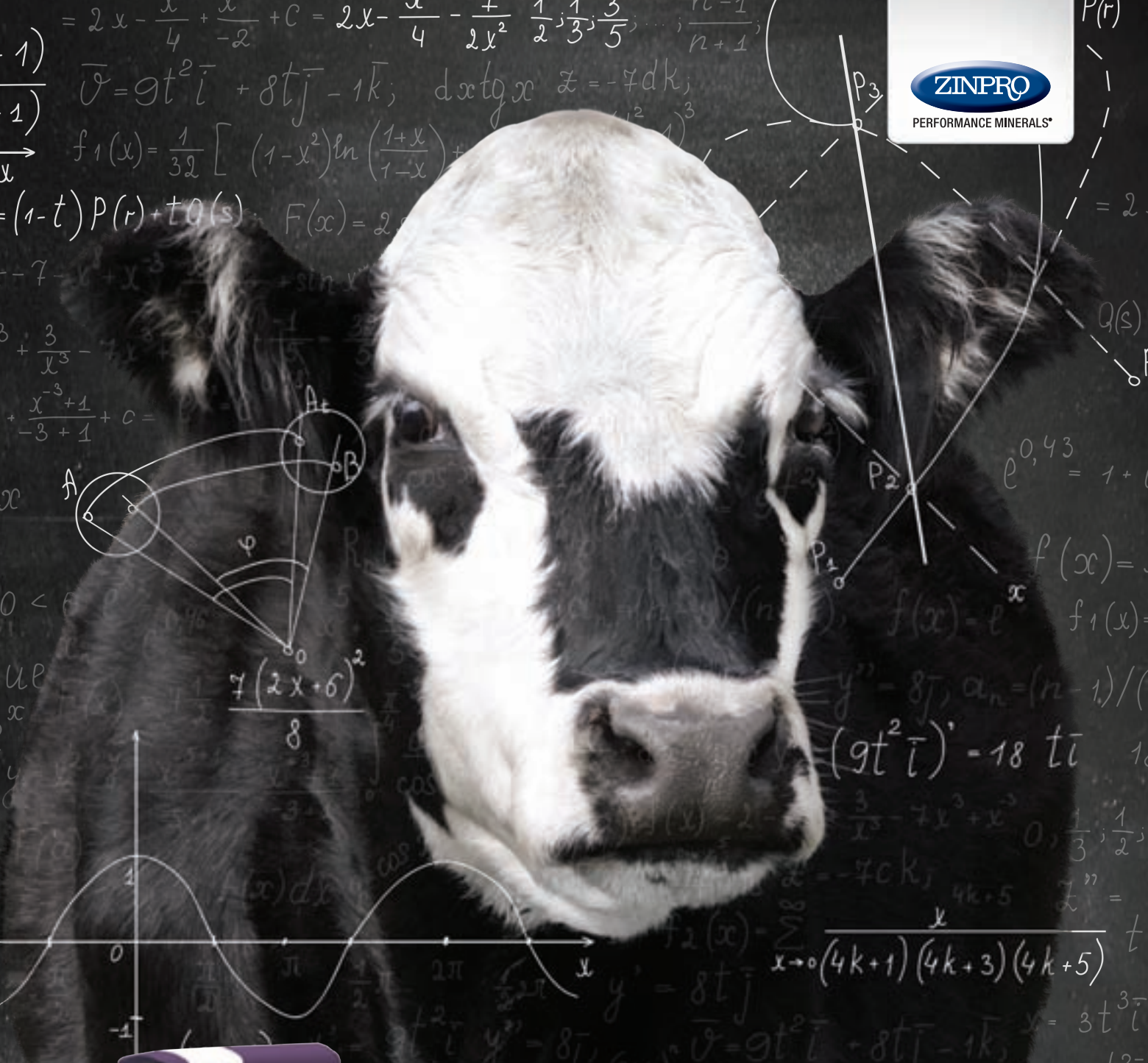


Lyle Stewart

Saskatchewan agriculture minister **Lyle Stewart** kicked off Canadian Western Agribition last month by announcing the renewal of the show's provincial grant of \$50,000 per year for the next four years. The money supports the work done by the CWA in promoting Saskatchewan's agriculture industry.

Alberta Beef Producers had 25 new or renewed delegates at their annual meeting in Calgary earlier this month following elections during 25 meetings in nine zones across the province that wrapped up last month. The 25 who were elected, acclaimed or appointed are: **Brad Osadczuk**, Jenner; **Kevin Stopanski**, Jenner; **Kody Traxel**, Seven Persons; **Sheila Hillmer**, Del Bonita; **Tyler Sawley**, Nanton; **Kayla Weston**, Fort MacLeod; **Tim Smith**, Coronation; **Nicole Viste**, Hanna; **Jesse Williams**, Hanna; **Charlie Christie**, Trochu; **Cathy Sharp**, Lacombe; **Stuart Somerville**, Endiang; **Cam McLerie**, Red Deer; **Ralph Buhler**, Armena; **Kolton Kasur**, Bashaw; **Tim Sekura**, Rocky Rapids; **Colin Campbell**, Bon Accord; **Ken Stanley**, Westlock; **Blair Anderson**, Minburn; **Gordon Graves**, Iron River; **Melanie Wowk**, Beauvallon; **Lorrie Beck**, Teepee Creek; **Linda Messner**, Berwyn; **Mike Nadeau**, Beaverlodge and **John MacArthur**, Fairview. 🇨🇦





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# ALBERTA'S 1950 MASTER FARM FAMILIES NAMED

By Lorne Stout, Calgary, Alta.

Reprinted from *Canadian Cattlemen*, November 1950



**T**hree prominent cattlemen were among five Alberta Master Farm Family winners for 1950. And the honours were even between the major beef breeds. Emil Cammaert of Rockyford, winner from southern Alberta, is a Short-horn breeder; Roy Ballhorn, who took the Central Alberta award, is one of Canada's most prominent Aberdeen-Angus men; and for Eastern Alberta, Master Farmer Charles J. Kallal is widely known for his Herefords.

For the second time, the Southern Alberta winner is a comparatively youthful farmer and stockman, for the initial award was won last year by L. Jensen of Magrath. Emil Cammaert, 48, came to Alberta from Belgium and the winning of the Master Farm Family competition is a highlight of 30 years of farming for Emil, his wife and their two children, 22-year-old son John, and daughter, Margaret, 17.

Unquestionably, the Cammaert farm at Rockyford is a showpiece of agriculture in Southern Alberta. The home was built in 1938 and the most recent addition to the extensive buildings is a fully modern 94'x34' barn, with concrete floor and foundation, air conditioned with water heated for the stock, electric food cookers and other conveniences, including space for 100 tons of hay.

The Cammaerts farm 1,170 acres and can irrigate more than a thousand acres with recently acquired sprinkler equipment. An eight-year crop rotation plan is followed and this year's crop was 18,000 bushels of wheat, 4,000 bushels of oats, 2,000 bushels of barley, 145 tons of hay and 40 tons of straw. One field of wheat averaged 62 bushels to the acre.

Little need be said about the Cammaert Shorthorns to stockmen for a vigorous program of improvement has gained for his herd an enviable reputation. Twice Reserve Grand Champion at Calgary, the herd sire is Rockyford Control. As the Master Farm Family awards were being announced Mr. and Mrs. Cammaert were in Scotland, where Emil bought 10 Shorthorns to

improve still further his Rockyford herd, and before returning to Alberta they plan to visit their native land, Belgium.

Addition of the Master Farm Family title to the name of Roy Ballhorn of Wetaskiwin is another achievement to the reputation which already covers all of Canada and many of the States, as a breeder of fine Aberdeen-Angus cattle. Their farm at Wetaskiwin, where they have lived for the past 32 years, is also widely known. They came to Alberta from Iowa, and have one daughter, Roma.

Woodlawn Farms, as they call their home ten miles southeast of Wetaskiwin has frequently been visited and this summer was host to a party of 200 from the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. Its 800 acres is well covered with shelter belts of trees, but visitors head for the barns and corrals for they want to see the fine black cattle that have won ribbons and championships at shows and sales over all of the West, Eastern Canada and the States. Roy is proud of the fact that his Aberdeen-Angus have gone to all of the Provinces and half of the 48 States as breeding stock. His Angus are noted for their fine heads.

The Ballhorns don't think they will ever retire — they don't think life in town can compete with the farm.

Charles J. Kallal, who farms and ranches in the Beaverhill Lake district 5-1/2 miles southeast of Tofield, and his wife are both natives of Illinois. They were married at Edmonton in 1915 and have lived on their present land for the past 23 years. They have nine children and son Joe, 33, one of the three still at home is a livestock expert. The others still working on the home place are Kenneth, 29, and Lawrence, 17, both competent stockmen. They raise a lot of grain but like their fine Herefords. Mr. Kallal says, "Alberta is a great cattle country, and we like our district. Our animals are bigger boned and have a more rugged constitution than those raised in the South." But he did have an envious tone when he conceded the Chinooks were a help, for at Tofield the cattle have to be fed in winter.

The Kallal Hereford herd includes more than a hundred registered animals, and usually 40 commercial cattle.

The Kallals know their Herefords, for in addition to being consistent winners of the Championship ribbons at Edmonton and other stock shows, Joe has several times acted as judge at cattle shows. He is also interested in Palomino horses, and plans an exhibit at the Royal Winter Fair.

Up in the Peace River, the Master Farm Family is Fred LaBrecque of Spirit River and here, too, grain is giving way to livestock. Born in Quebec at Lambton, Fred farms 1,500 acres. Eldest of their nine children is Romeo, 18, who is going to be the livestock man. The farm is still, however, mainly a grain proposition specializing in Thatcher wheat and Lorain-Victory oats. The cattle are grade Shorthorns.

Winners for the Athabasca section is the E.S. Parsons family of Boyle. They came from Sweden, and found a boom town in Athabasca when they arrived in 1913, shortly after their marriage. They were only 21 and 20, and they stayed in town only overnight before starting out on foot for their new land, 30 miles away. Neither spoke a word of English, and their raw quarter was virgin timber. A plot had been cleared for the first shack and when it was completed they found it had been built on the wrong quarter. Undiscouraged, though possibly down-cast, it was torn down, board by board and plank by plank; a new location cleared on their own land, and their first home rebuilt.

With that kind of perseverance, it is not surprising that in 37 years, the original quarter has grown to 640 acres under cultivation, called Esplund Farm, and the family has grown to eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. They have all grown up active in farm young organizations, calf clubs and the like. The Parsons also raise Shorthorns that are prizewinners. ★

*For more of the past from pages of our magazine see the History Section at [www.canadiancattlemen.ca](http://www.canadiancattlemen.ca).*





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Black Beefmaker (SimmAngus)



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85	AAA	95	AAA	105	AAA	115	AAA
86	AAA	96	AAA	106	AAA	116	AAA
87	AAA	97	AAA	107	AAA	117	AAA
88	AAA	98	PRIME	108	AAA	118	AAA
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# THE BUSINESS OF BEEF: AVOIDING THE BOGS AND QUICKSAND

**B**usiness planning, economic analysis and marketing strategies — these are all things that can cause most ranchers' eyes to quickly glaze over when mentioned. Not many, if any, ranchers get into the cattle business to sit behind a computer and create long-term business plans, marketing strategies or crunch numbers to compile an economic analysis, so it really shouldn't be a surprise that when it comes to the business side of cattle that there is a lot of room for improvement in many operations. However, planning, analysis and strategies are often the things that can have a considerable impact on improving the business's bottom line and long-term viability.

As ranchers know all too well, beef production is a complex and diverse business that has many unforeseen challenges. The demands of the day-to-day operation combined with the vast financial management requirements of the business can be overwhelming and often neglected.

It is easy to get bogged down in the daily demands of ranch operations and the all-encompassing facets of financial and organizational management of beef production, especially when the entire operation and management of the business from production to marketing is often done by one or two people. Financing requirements, cash flow, cost analysis, tax implications, market volatility and risk management are all extremely time-consuming and require significant management consideration. The demands of these aspects of management on top of the day-to-day operations of the business often means some elements of management are neglected, and without careful consideration and management, financial and organizational issues can gradually build up over time and erode the business's viability.

It is also critical for any business to have solid financial management to sustain and overcome the possible disasters and inevitable challenges that can strike without warning. If a business is not on stable financial footing when disasters strike the crisis can pull a business down very rapidly like quicksand. Drought, market disruption, an animal health crisis, just to name a few, are some of the quicksand issues that can very quickly threaten a ranch's viability. Even



JEANNETTE GREAVES

when financially sound, these situations can have severe consequences for the business; however, if strong financial management and monitoring is in place the operation is more likely to sustain such circumstances and more quickly recover.

The most common question from ranchers regarding improving overall financial management of the operation is: "Where do we begin?" There is no doubt that the complexity and diversity of beef production makes financial assessment and management more challenging than in some businesses; however, that makes it that much more essential to success. Ultimately, the first place to begin is with a current assessment of the financial and production situation, and this begins by determining the overall profitability of the operation.

In recent decades, considerable focus has been placed on the importance of determining cost of production and maintaining a low cost of production in ranching. While this is a fundamental metric for financial assessment the ultimate measure of success is profitability. Profit factors in both the cost of production and the value of production and are an essential measure of a business's long-term viability and unless put in the context of overall profitability, trying to minimize cost or maximum value can be futile.

Once an assessment of the business is

completed, ongoing monitoring or benchmarking of the key business performance metrics, both year-over-year within the operation and with industry best practices for similar operations, is crucial for ongoing success and continuous improvement. Benchmarking also allows businesses to persistently strive to improve in areas that are critical to the success of the operation. Undertaking this type of financial assessment and ongoing monitoring also ensures the business is quantifying and monitoring key production variables that are paramount to overall success and often clearly identifies areas for improvement.

The immediate followup to the first question of "Where do we begin?" is "How do I improve the bottom line?" Although ranches are extremely complex and diverse, there are definitely a few key areas to focus on to improve the overall profitability of an operation. The main areas of focus fall into three key areas: production optimization, information utilization and innovation adoption.

Production optimization is essentially self-explanatory and refers to those key production variables that we all know are essential to successful operations. This includes increasing conception rates, decreasing calf death loss, improving weight gain and optimizing feed utilization. As with all decisions within the business, these must be put in a financial



context. Focusing on one or any combination of these key production measures in the context of overall profitability will ultimately improve the overall success of the business.

Beef production generates an immense amount of data and as an operation begins to focus more on the financial and organizational components of the business, even more data is captured and available to management. Data is only as valuable as the analysis for which it is used and so collecting data in and of itself does not derive value. It is crucial that the information be shared and utilized if the full value is to be captured. It is for this reason that benchmarking, or internal and external comparison, is so important for the business.

The final common trait of a successful business is innovation adoption. Successful businesses persistently strive for improvement through ongoing education and early adoption of innovations that may benefit the business. Whether this is through genetic improvement, feed efficiency or marketing strategies, successful businesses exploit innovations and are continuously seeking out novel ways to remain competitive and profitable.

It is unquestionable that an increased focus on business planning, economic monitoring and marketing strategies improves the overall sustainability of a beef operation, nevertheless this is a daunting and overwhelming undertaking for ranch-

ers. All decisions, whether production, marketing or financial are easier when supported with information. As the business of beef becomes more and more competitive, ultimate success must concentrate on intensified management of all facets of the business, especially the financial and risk management aspects. Long-term viability of ranching operations has and will continue to hinge on the optimal utilization of resources to maximize production while minimizing costs and securing profitability. Only through enhanced management can you find that balance. 🍁

*Sandy Russell is a partner in Spring Creek Consulting, Outlook, Sask.*

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# WILL MORE DATA REALLY MEAN MORE CASH?

**T**echnology has advanced so quickly during the past decade that even young feedlot operators can reminisce about times when a long day's work at the family feedyard involved boxes of index cards, drawers of file folders and buckets full of chop.

The question of the day for a panel of three producers at the 2017 Western Canadian Feedlot Management School was

whether having all of this technology to collect more data really means more cash.

Greg Thompson manages M&T Feedlot, a 3,500-head custom finishing lot and the only one of three remaining in close proximity to the former beef packing plant in the industrial area on the western outskirts of Moose Jaw, Sask. His grandfather was one of a group of farmers who set up the feedlot in 1969 as a

way to market grain during this period of slow grain movement, and he and a partner went on to purchase it outright three years later. Today, M&T shares feeding, animal health and invoicing data in real time across the miles via ITS Global's online feedlot management programs with his dad's feedlot, G. Thompson Livestock, at Iron Springs, Alta.

Bottom line: "More data to me means more knowledge to make better business decisions."

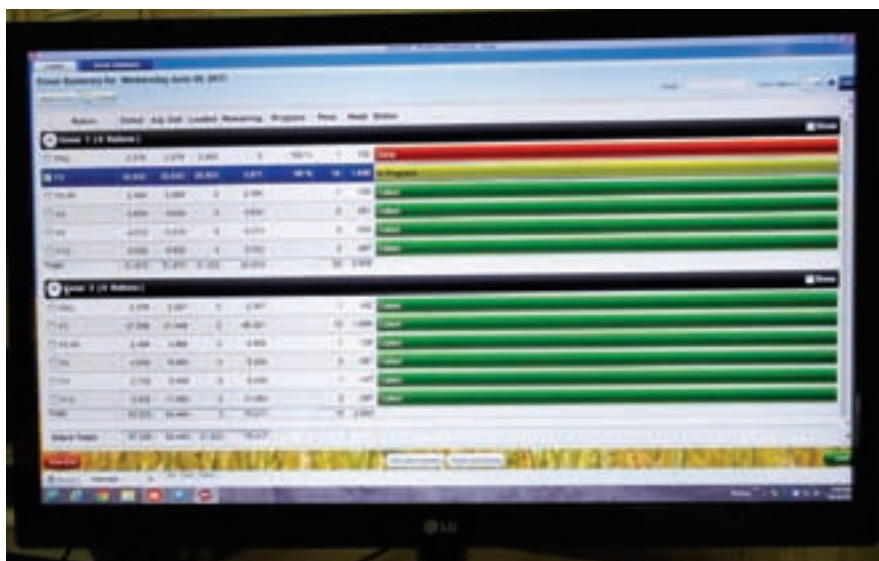
Pat Kunz of Kunz Farms near Beiseker, Alta., is the second generation to farm in Canada with roots going back four more generations in Switzerland where they had a dairy. He, his brother and dad crop 2,000 acres with another 400 acres in hay and pasture, run a 100-head cow herd and a feedlot that has evolved from a backgrounding operation when they started out in 1994 to custom finishing around 1,500 head each winter since 2006. Herdtrax, an online cattle record management program, keeps individual animal information in its place and in perspective, while GrowSafe Beef, a feedlot pen monitoring system keeps real-time track of gains and is proving to have merit for early disease detection.

Bottom line: "Raw data in itself is not very useful at all. It requires context in order to add substance. You have to be able to compare and control how you make use of all data. When you look at it this way, more data definitely does not mean more cash, but better data does."

Ryan Kasko's interest in cattle feeding dates back to his youth when his dad, a cattle buyer at heart, started feeding a few cattle. Today, he manages Kasko Cattle, with four family feedlots and cropping operations in the Coaldale-Taber area of southern Alberta. Last fall, he and four shareholders purchased the former Border Line Feeders near Ceylon, Sask., now operating as Ceylon Gap Feeders. Kasko relies on ITS Global's programs, Linus 7 risk-management tools, his own Athena database for carcass-adjusted performance benchmarking and, this year for the first time, tested a drone for the official audit of silage and cattle inventories.



Greg Thompson





Bottom line: “In the big picture, data is power. You just have to figure out how to turn it into money.”

### ITS GLOBAL

ITS Global’s web-based feedIT feedlot management program builds on the company’s experience with traceability solutions and the former ComputerAid Professional Services’ trusted Daily Gains Pro software first introduced 25 years ago.

Thompson, who uses the core feedIT program and the two optional modules, deliverIT with feedCALL, and animalMANAGEMENT for individual animal data, says the programs are a breeze to learn. ITS people working from the company’s headquarters at Okotoks, Alta., take care of the setup, provide 24/7 support and can remotely take care of any glitches that pop up with minimal disruption to the work in progress.

The feedIT program allows for real-time data collection on daily feeding and animal care activities, automatically allocates costs to the client’s account for efficient invoicing and tracks purchases, cattle arrivals and sales with automatic reporting to the national traceability database. It maintains running cattle, feed and drug inventories and historical data for benchmarking and decision-making.

The deliverIT program with feedCALL can be used from the office and/or feed truck to adjust feed calls and monitor ration mixing and delivery to pens whether it’s one truck at a single feedlot or multiple trucks at multiple locations. The information can be imported into feedIT to analyze intakes on a pen basis and compare ration calls to amounts actually fed out each day.

That’s one of the features Thompson likes best. Before, most drivers never recorded if they went over on ration ingredients when filling the truck. Now, if too much of an ingredient goes into the truck, the program recalculates the ration and shows top-ups for the other ingredients to maintain the balance. Not only does this improve the consistency of the rations, but the monitoring and inventory functions hold feed-truck drivers accountable for what goes into the truck and to the pens, he explains.

From the financial perspective, the cost of overages on feed ingredients can never be recouped when clients pay based on feed-call rations rather than what’s actually fed. A calculator on the ITS website

works through scenarios to bring home the message on potential commodity savings when rations are loaded correctly.

M&T’s nutritionist develops the six balanced step-up rations to include wheat and/or barley grain, supplement, hay, wet distillers grains and barley silage. Those are entered ahead of time in the feed schedule and a message on the deliverIT screen alerts the person scoring the bunks and making the feed calls to a ration change scheduled for that day so that pens don’t get left behind, Thompson adds.

Likewise, M&T’s veterinarian lays out the health protocols for induction and treatments of common conditions. Those are entered into the advanced animalMANAGEMENT module and show up on the chute-side computer. Reader bars on the headgate scan the animal’s electronic identification (EID) number to immediately call up the animal’s complete history so that treatments given can be tied to its permanent record. The treatment expenses are automatically charged to the client’s account and the treated animal is automatically flagged in the withdrawal summary reports for each pen.

The reporting function is another highlight of the program because it makes planning so much easier, he says. In a matter of seconds, he can pull up summaries on withdrawal status, commodity use, pricing and reconciliation, feed invoicing, lot closeouts, or daily feed and health activity reports.

An overarching advantage has been on the labour side.

“These programs have saved me trying to find people with agricultural knowledge. That was tough because guys who grew up on farms have their own farms now or have moved on because of competition for labour from other industries here. This puts my knowledge, my vet’s knowledge and my nutritionist’s knowledge all in one place for everyone to learn from,” Thompson sums up.

### HERDTRAX

The Kunz family takes in calves at weaning each October and looks after selling them as they finish out from spring through early summer. All are lower-risk calves because they arrive directly from ranches and the ranchers retain some ownership, making it in their own best interests to have good herd health and vaccination programs.

Kunz says, for sure, being on Herdtrax is a drawing card for the feedlot.



Pat Kunz

Developed by Dr. Troy Drake, a practicing veterinarian at Kathyryn, Alta., Herdtrax can be customized for commercial cow-calf, seedstock or feedlot needs to include details ranging from birth, genetics, health protocols and treatments, reproduction, growth and feed programs to carcass information for each animal, all tied to the dam’s record.

Their own cow herd and all of their regular clients’ cow herds are enrolled in Herdtrax and he has a separate account for the feedlot operation. Clients transfer calf records from their accounts to the feedlot account giving Kunz a good rundown on the history of each calf. He adds feedlot and carcass information before transferring the files back to clients’ Herdtrax accounts.

“Clients pay \$15 per head to get feedlot performance and carcass data giving them a fairly substantial look at what their calves did that year, and how they compared to any other calf in their own herds and all calves in the Herdtrax system in past years,” Kunz explains.

He says Herdtrax stores a lot of data that otherwise couldn’t be easily tracked. All in there are 16 data points for each of their calves that he considers key. The information accumulates on the cow’s record calf after calf and the reports feature graphs that pull it together, showing each cow’s performance relative to others in the herd as a way to rate cow performance. Each cow can also be

*Continued on page 18*



Ryan Kasko

*Continued from page 17*

compared to all cows in the Herdtrax benchmarking system.

There's nothing really new about the use of technology to collect all sorts of data in grain and livestock operations; the challenge has been packaging it in useful ways, Kunz says. That's where Herdtrax is a standout in his mind because the database is searchable with reporting features that summarize and present information in ways that producers can use to make management decisions, meet traceability reporting requirements, and easily share with partners and consultants in their networks.

### **GROWSAFE BEEF (GSB)**

GrowSafe Systems of Airdrie, Alta., installed GSB on a three-year trial basis in all eight pens and the hospital pen at Kunz Farms' feedlot for the start of the 2016 feeding period.

The GSB units fit over each water bowl to take partial body weights and scan EID numbers whenever animals drink. The system could be set to measure each animal's water intake as well.

The units will mount over any common style of waterer, but some styles are more conducive than others for having access to fix waterer problems, Kunz says, adding that the cages actually do a good job of protecting the waterers from being damaged by the animals.

Data are transmitted wirelessly to the

feedlot's computer where GrowSafe software calculates each animal's total weight and gain. The daily reports flag animals whose gains drop off and those that don't drink as indicators of the onset of disease.

Kunz says GSB has been very useful for keeping close tabs on gains and they always follow through by going out to the pens to decide whether flagged animals need to be treated. Still, it takes knowledge of animal behaviour and an eye for detail to figure out what's up with the animal, especially if it doesn't have a fever and nothing in particular seems to be out of the usual.

Based on the first year's data, Kunz found that more than 50 per cent of the calves they pulled had been flagged by GSB. The number pulled and subsequently recorded as "sick with no fever" was greater than the number pulled for "sick with fever."

Going through the data with his veterinarian, they saw that the percentage of those sick with no fever was higher than usual, but both the percentage of those sick with fever and the overall death loss were low, suggesting that they were pulling and treating the sick ones earlier.

GSB also forecasts weights and feed intakes for individual animals to suggest marketing dates once the cost of gain would start to exceed the value of gain. These market-ready cattle are automatically marked with spray paint the next time they drink.

Kunz can't yet say they've tested the marketing function because cattle were sold as

they neared finished weight and fed cattle prices rebounded last spring. The next two years should tell.

### **LINUS 7 CATTLE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Linus 7 online risk management tools were developed by cattle feeder John Lawton of Niton Junction, Alta., and tested by feeders in Canada and the U.S. over the years following the 2003 BSE trade crisis that triggered a 70 per cent loss in the value of Canadian cattle within 30 days.

Kasko uses the Linus 7 purchase calculator to identify risks and opportunities associated with various purchasing scenarios, for instance, buying yearlings versus calves, steers versus heifers, now versus later. The calculator pulls in ration cost and total cost of gain from his ITS program and he fills in expected gains and conversion rates to get the break-even sale price. The final calculation uses futures, Canadian dollar and basis values for the expected sale day to project the profit/loss per head and return on investment for each scenario.

Linus 7 also includes a summary report that shows all owned cattle, the month they are to be marketed, projected cash prices and associated contracts or futures positions, along with any feeder purchase contracts to monitor return on investment on an ongoing basis.

### **ATHENA**

Having some 350,000 carcass records and 40 to 50 data points on each animal is all



fine and dandy, Kasko says, but it's a lot to go through to try to spot trends such as the effect of health challenges on performance or to determine optimal carcass weights.

The Athena open-source application proved to be just the tool to create a common database for carcass data and feedlot production data collected through his ITS and MedLogic programs. All of the information uploaded to Athena is automatically synched by the animals' EID numbers.

"It's one thing to know the cattle gained and converted at certain rates, but in the end we sell carcasses and cattle yield at different rates and there might be discounts or premiums based on quality. If one group gained at 3.2 and another at 3.5, one might have yielded 62 per cent and the other 59 per cent, so which cattle did best? Really, what we are trying to do is carcass-adjusted performance benchmarking," Kasko explains.

He started work on the database in late 2011 and in January 2014 hired Dr. Steve Hendrick of Coaldale Veterinary Clinic

to analyze the data and help refine what needed to go into Athena. Now, he and four other cattle feeders compare all their information as a way to learn from one another's strengths. "If one is doing a good job with a certain class of cattle, I want to understand how to get to that level, too," he says.

### DRONE INVENTORY

Typically, it takes a full day to travel to each feedlot with the accountant to measure silage piles and sample pens by counting and weighing cattle for the official inventory audit. It always runs the risk of injuries to cattle and most accountants aren't too keen on climbing around on top of silage piles in January to take measurements.

Use of a drone with some measuring by the accountant to establish accuracy cut the trek down to four hours including travel time and the cattle didn't have to be disturbed other than to weigh some groups because the drone can't estimate weight — at least not yet — Kasko says.

The drone operator created a three-dimensional model by outlining the edges

of each silage pile from the air in combination with the known height. Density (pounds per cubic foot) was then used to determine the total tonnage in the piles. More work needs to be done on calculating silage volume because there were differences between the drone inventory, software inventory, and accountant-measured inventory.

He says double-yes to the use of a drone for the upcoming inventory audit because it was a time and money saver and that means more cash.

The link to feedlot school presentations is on the Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association website, [www.saskcattle.com](http://www.saskcattle.com), along with seven new videos on data collection, nutrition, feeding, animal health and animal handling. The 2018 Western Canadian Feedlot Management School runs February 6-8 in Regina.

More information: ITS Global ([www.itslivestock.com](http://www.itslivestock.com)), 1-877-333-7373; Herdtrax ([www.herdtrax.com](http://www.herdtrax.com)), 1-844-321-HERD; GrowSafe Systems ([www.growsafe.com](http://www.growsafe.com)), 1-403-912-1879; Linus7 ([www.linus7.com](http://www.linus7.com)), 1-780-722-5334. 🇨🇦



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# FORAGES WERE THE FOUNDATION FOR THIS RESEARCHER'S CELEBRATED CAREER

**I**n a career that already spans more than five decades, Dr. David Christensen, of the University of Saskatchewan, has been a major contributor to the research in support of Canadian forage crops. His substantial contributions on a regional, national and international level were recently recognized by the Saskatchewan Forage Council (SFC) when he was presented with the 2017 Forage Industry Innovation Award.

Christensen, an emeritus professor with the department of animal science, has been a professor and researcher at the University's College of Agriculture and Bioresources since 1965. He's received numerous honours over the years in recognition of his studies into dairy and beef cattle nutrition and meat science, and his major contributions to international agricultural initiatives.

"The productivity that can be obtained from forages is not always fully recognized or achieved," says Christensen. The role they play in animal agriculture has been an underlying theme of his career, whether he was studying their impact on individual animals or overall production systems.

Over time Christensen and his team investigated the nutritional composition of several forages and their influence on animal intake. "It's a matter of knowing what the energy and nutrient requirements are for a particular class of animal," Christensen adds. "We measured the intake and digestibility of everything we could find from slough hay to corn silage."

"A major finding that came out of that work was the recommendation for barley silage [in Western Canada] to be cut at mid-dough or later," he says. This updated recommendation overturned a previous Kansas-based standard that suggested barley should be cut at the boot stage.

"Compared to the American Midwest, we have a longer day length and lower growing temperatures, so forage quality holds up better under our growing conditions," he says.

His forage-related research covered a wide swath from storage strategies, palatability, barley variety evaluations, use of low-quality forages, forage degradation in the rumen to grazing behaviour and more.

Tech transfer was sometimes a catalyst.



Greg Penner of the University of Saskatchewan, congratulates Dr. David Christensen (right) on winning the 2017 SFC Forage Industry Innovation Award. PHOTO BY THE SASKATCHEWAN FORAGE COUNCIL



"A lot of research has been done to verify what innovative producers are doing," he adds. "One of the favourite questions to try and answer is whether corn silage is consistently better than barley silage," which has to account for growing conditions, varieties, and producer preferences, he says.

Though his career has been rich in research, Christensen was also a dedicated teacher, in Canada and abroad, and in some

cases taught two or more generations of students. "There's that challenge of people with young minds wanting to know how things work," says Christensen while admitting curious students motivated him to stay current with the latest work in forages and cattle. Many of the graduate and veterinary students he supervised have gone on to serve the Canadian livestock and forage industry, including Beef Industry Research Chair (and *Canadian Cattlemen* columnist) Dr. John McKinnon.

Christensen has made contributions on the international forage scene as well, visiting more than 25 countries. He created dairy and forage production programs in developing countries, served as a senior lecturer in Uganda, and worked to develop a dehydrated alfalfa export market in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. A highlight for him was working with the Canadian International Development Agency to complete baseline range surveys in the under land of China's Gobi Desert. "It was an effort to estimate the carrying capacity of the region," he says.

"Some areas were well managed, other areas were extensively overgrazed." Many projects built upon that reference data.

These days Christensen is co-operating on projects with colleagues such as John McKinnon and Peiqiang Yu, and organizations like Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. His current work includes assessing neutral detergent fibre (NDF) utilization in barley silages and evaluating feedlot and dairy barley silage varieties, and he acts as a technical adviser for Alberta Milk as well.

Dr. Christensen's lengthy career resulted in tangible improvements in Canada's forage sector. His extension efforts have an impact on farmers in Canada and abroad and he inspired countless students who went on to become leaders in their own right.

"My work was not always focused solely on forage, but it always circled back to forage," says Christensen reflecting on his award.

The SFC created the Forage Industry Innovation Award in 2008 to honour individuals or groups displaying exemplary innovation, leadership, service and stewardship in Saskatchewan's forage industry. Nominations are accepted annually until August 2. 🍁





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# HOME FOR THE WINTER AT MORSAN FARMS



**T**he three-mile stroll down a country road shortly after sunup on a crisp morning in late October went off as planned and the trail of silage from the feed wagon enticed the group of 700 cows straight into the stubble field where they will spend the winter.

It was a good start to the day as the crew closed the gate on the last big move of the year and a busy first summer of operations at Morsan Farms near Naicam in north-eastern Saskatchewan.

Farm manager Keith Rattray says about 600 of the ranch's 2,300 cows were purchased with the farm when owners Morris and Sandra Thalen of Ponoka, Alta., closed the deal in February. Another 600 purchased from a ranch near Carnduff, Sask., arrived in March, and the remainder were moved as pairs in June and July from the Thalens' ranch at Pigeon Lake, Alta.

They've already bumped calving from April to a June start in 2018. One reason, Rattray explains, is to free up time to get the feed and cash crops planted. Their first year of seeding got off to an unusual start with harvesting the 2016 crops left stranded in the fields because

of wet conditions topped off by an early October blizzard. Even at that, they managed to get the 3,000 acres of wheat, oats and corn in the ground while sowing 500 acres to new grass and breaking up 600 acres of old grass.

On the cattle side, June calving will get them away from the wet, unpredictable spring weather and give them time to get the cows settled on pasture before calving starts. This will also save the all-around stress of having to trail very young calves to summer pastures.

The network of country roads and trails allows them to safely trail cattle to almost all of the large pasture blocks spread across the 21,000-plus-acre land base, but the initial moves can be long hikes for tiny calves, Rattray says.

After that, summer moves are short because each group of 250 to 350 cows rotates within its own area for the entire grazing season. Only one group of cows has to be trucked to the 10-quarter block on the opposite side of Kipabiskau Lake.

The goal of the breeding program is to produce reputation feeder calves. They run Charolais bulls with the black cows to produce silver calves and with the red cows to

produce yellow calves. Another group of black cows is bred Simmental, and the black baldy and mixed cows are bred Limousin.

In October, calves over 550 pounds are weaned into the ranch's 2,500-head feedlot where they are sorted by colour and weight to be sold about three weeks later at a Canadian Satellite Livestock Auction (CSLA) sale through Vold Jones and Vold (VJV) Auction Co., Ponoka. The live satellite sales on [www.csla.com](http://www.csla.com) have the advantage of presenting cattle videoed on the ranch to potential buyers across Canada and the U.S., while retaining the essence of a live auction with phone-in and real-time online bidding as the auctioneer calls the sale. Cattle then move directly from the ranch to the buyer's location.

Lighter calves will stay with the cows in the wintering fields until sometime in January when they will be weaned and back-grounded for sale the same way, potentially into the spring grasser market.

Rattray says they won't be retaining calves to grass at the ranch. The farm's focus for now at least is on developing the cow herd and getting a good understanding of the ranch's carrying capacity.



Saskatchewan's parkland region isn't uncharted territory for the Thalens, though. They sold one of their dairy operations there after selling their Ponoka and Dawson Creek markets in 2014. Adding three more Alberta markets the following year, Morris and Sandra became owners of the Dawson Creek, Beaverlodge and Westlock markets, while their son, Henry, and his wife, Andrea, took over the Ponoka and Rimbey markets (*Canadian Cattlemen*, August 2015).

Sons Joe Thalen and Greg Thalen have a big hand in Morsan Farm operations as well. Joe manages the grain land and equipment for all locations, while Greg does the same on the cattle side.

Rattray, who has been working at Alberta feedlots and ranches since he was a kid, along with three cowboys, Glen Colby, Richard Nygaard and Devin Plantz, look after the cattle at the Saskatchewan ranch year-round with help as needed from other full-time employees, Kyle Colby and Dave Pisto.

The purchase of the Saskatchewan ranch from 3L Cattle Co. included three guest cabins overlooking a quiet lake at the end

of the road that is the perfect place for crews from Ponoka to stay when they fly in to help with seeding, harvest and processing cattle. The cabins sit next to the owner's lodge where Sandra keeps everyone well fed during those busy times.

The main ranch yard, with a house, barn, handling facilities and pens, is about four miles up the road.

Midway between the main yard and lodge is the feedlot, which has been the site of major upgrades over the summer months.

Concrete silage bunkers were constructed and work continued into fall on building concrete commodity bunkers for other ration ingredients, including ground hay, straw and dried distillers grains.

The pens have been brought back into like-new condition by rebuilding the gravel base, installing new water bowls, repairing the wind fences and adding extra cables above the feed bunks.

All pens now feature an open bunk design that saves all the work of shoveling snow and stale feed out of traditional two-sided feed bunks. The concrete footing that secures the posts and cables along the

front of the pens is flanked by a concrete apron on the inside to keep the calves high and dry and the addition of a concrete pad along the outside for feed. The pad makes clean work of pushing up feed with a bobcat before fresh feed is delivered each morning and afternoon, and then scraping the pads clear with a tractor and blade before the evening feeding. Any excess feed goes into into the cows' ration, Rattray explains.

Silage for the cows in the wintering fields is delivered into long rows of large steel bunks, which works well enough until ruts left by the tractor and feed wagon build up alongside the bunks. They are moveable, but that would only create ruts in the new spot, so plans have been set in motion to try a concrete bunk setup similar to that in the feedlot with a concrete runway down the centre for the tractor and feed wagon.

Looking back, Rattray says it was an excellent year and start for the Saskatchewan ranch. He could chalk it up to the combination of good cattle, land and weather, but without hesitation he says it was a lot of good communication and teamwork that got the job done. 🍁

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# YIKES — ANOTHER CRAZY WINTER!



John McKinnon is a beef cattle nutritionist at the University of Saskatchewan.

**T**he winter of 2017-18 is shaping up to be full of unexpected challenges, particularly for those wintering cows in Western Canada. Drought, as well as recent wildfires, have caused many producers to scramble for a forage supply. As well, “old man winter” in all his wisdom has arrived early, with November temperatures in the minus teens in many areas. As is typical in these circumstances, producers look to alternate feed sources to get their herd through the winter. These include cereal straw, poor-quality hay, and greedfeed as well as any number of energy and protein sources (i.e. grain screening pellets, mill run, feed barley or wheat grain, canola meal, dried distillers grains). When developing rations with these types of feeds, the primary goal is to meet the nutritional requirements of the herd with respect to stage of pregnancy and environmental conditions. However, in some cases it is necessary to understand the nature of the alternative feed, in order to ensure you do not run into any unexpected surprises. The intent of this article is to look at some of these alternatives and the issues you can encounter.

Before we begin, remember the major nutrients you need to supply are energy and protein, particularly energy. Salt, minerals and vitamin, while important, can be supplemented as required. A major factor influencing the amount of feed required over the winter is the body condition of your cattle. Mature cows in good body condition in the fall can get through much of the winter on a ration that maintains body condition and allows for fetal growth, while thin/older cows and replacement heifers will need to gain weight over and above that related to pregnancy. Separating your herd into two or three groups based on age and/or body condition can help you develop rations that meet the specific needs of each group. Also remember that all groups as they enter the last trimester have increased energy and protein requirements that need to be met to avoid weight loss and possible negative effects on rebreeding.

As discussed previously in this column, cereal straw is usually the first alternative that producers turn to in drought situations. Barley or wheat straw can be successfully fed throughout pregnancy; however, the key is understanding its nutritional limitations. Cereal straw is deficient in energy, protein and most minerals and vitamins. As such, straw-based rations require supplementation with a source of energy and depending on diet makeup, there may also be a need for a protein. One of the major issues with feeding straw relates to its high fibre content and poor rumen

digestibility. Cows, particularly those with free choice access, can become impacted when sudden drops in temperature occur. To prevent this, it is necessary to provide an adequate source of energy such as supplementing with a grain source and to limit the amount of straw consumed.

A handy rule when feeding cereal straw is to limit its intake to 1.5 per cent of body weight on a dry matter basis. For a 1,300-pound cow, this equates to 18 to 20 pounds of straw per day. To meet requirements for maintenance, weight gain and/or pregnancy, you will need to supplement this straw with either a good-quality hay or silage or turn to cereal grains and a protein supplement (i.e. canola meal, distillers grains or a commercial supplement). In the latter case, the amount of grain fed can reach 10 to 14 pounds per head per day. As such, be sure to adapt your cows to this high level of grain feeding. Byproducts such as grain screening pellets or mill run can substitute for barley although the amount fed would have to be increased since grain screenings are lower in energy.

If you planned ahead and seeded greenfeed as an alternative forage source, you should be in fairly good shape going into winter. Barley or oat greenfeed cut at an appropriate stage has an energy content similar to an alfalfa/grass hay, and protein levels similar to a good-quality grass hay. Limitations include the potential for nitrates if harvested under stress (i.e. drought). As well, there has been isolated issues with milk fever in cows fed greenfeed grown under drought conditions. This issue relates to imbalances in the mineral profile of the forage. If issues arise, feeding extra calcium and in some cases magnesium can help prevent this issue.

In terms of protein sources, canola meal and wheat or corn distillers grains should be relatively available. Canola meal is typically 36 to 38 per cent protein while distillers grains can range from 30 to 40 per cent, depending on the original grain source. Distillers grains are typically a better buy as they are higher in energy than canola meal and priced relative to cereal grains. By comparison, canola meal is priced as a protein source and thus brings a premium over barley or other cereals. Typically, 1.5 to two pounds of canola meal or DDGS can offset a protein deficiency in a straw/cereal grain-based diet.

These are just some of the alternatives that may be available. If you are short of forage this winter, I would strongly suggest you talk with your local livestock agrologist or nutritionist to determine the best alternative for your operation. 🍁



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# SEEKING PLANTS WITH POLY CULTURE POTENTIAL

**W**hen producers discuss the benefits of growing annual polycultures, also known as multi-species mixes or crop cocktails, the talk often revolves around soil-health and environmental improvements, oftentimes taking forage production for granted. Of course, production does occur, but yield and feed quality may be disappointing if the species chosen target soil problems rather than forage and beef production.

“Producers need to be aware of their end goals for the polyculture because production and improving soil are very different objectives,” says Dr. Mike Schellenberg, a range and forage plant ecologist at Agriculture Canada’s Swift Current Research and Development Centre where he and Dr. Jillian Bainard have completed several polyculture trials.

Given that most research on the use of polyculture crops is from humid eastern regions of the U.S. and Canada, they set out to learn whether the benefits seen in those parts actually do occur in the drier Prairie region.

The initial project evaluated the performance of monocultures and polycultures with up to 12 annual species from four functional groups: warm-season grasses (corn, millet, sorghum), cool-season grasses (barley, oat, triticale), legumes (field pea, forage pea, hairy vetch), and brassicas (kale, forage radish, purple-top turnip). Each crop treatment was planted in early June on its same plot three years in a row and meadow brome-alfalfa was grown as the traditional mix for comparison. No fertilizers and pesticides for weed, disease or insect control were used in any year, and approximately 98 per cent of the crop was removed for greenfeed each August.

The change in organic carbon was measured by looking at the percentage of water-stable aggregates (clumps of soil that don’t fall apart in water) in each plot at the start and end of the project. Organic carbon is an important energy source for soil micro-organisms so they can carry out their nutrient cycling role. All of the polyculture plots and the barley



Mike Schellenberg and Alan Iwaasa are evaluating the impact of polycrop mixtures on grazing capacity and soil health in the semi-arid prairie.

monoculture plot gained organic carbon, without rotating crop treatments or leaving much residue behind and under very dry conditions in 2015.

Thus, if you hope to improve the soil, Schellenberg suggests choosing species with the greatest potential to benefit the soil more than the cattle, and leave plenty of plant material behind to feed the soil and protect the surface from erosion.

Alternatively, grazing livestock will leave some nutrients behind in manure and urine and their hooves provide some tillage action to work plant material into the soil surface to speed nutrient recycling.

It’s important to follow up with soil tests to know whether your choice of species is meeting the mark, he adds.

If your goal is production, yield and quality as cattle feed would be priorities. Their work showed that crop biomass was highly correlated with the number of species and functional groups in the mix. Biomass was highest the first year and dropped significantly in each of the

next two years, partly due to dry conditions, but mainly because of dwindling soil nitrate levels resulting from the removal of nutrients in the form of plant material each harvest and not replenishing them with annual applications of nitrogen. Soil phosphate, potassium, iron, calcium and copper levels didn’t change much over the three years in any of the plots.

Plots with the least decline in soil nitrates were those sown to mixes that included legumes to fix atmospheric nitrogen and those with brassicas because they accumulate nitrates in plant tissues.

As a followup to evaluate implications for the subsequent annual crop, barley was planted on all of the plots and production was very poor due to the shortage of soil nitrates.

The initial trial showed that forage quality can be maintained or improved by planting mixtures. The combination of acid detergent fibre, neutral detergent fibre, and crude protein were the measures of quality. Overall quality of the mixes was not as high as some of the species on their own, but was higher than many single species offered.

Schellenberg reminds producers to consider perennial forage mixtures if they want a cover crop on the same piece of land for more than a year. Perennials still have a decided advantage over annual mixes because they are already established to take advantage of early-spring moisture and get a jump on weeds.

Equally as important as selecting species for a purpose is choosing varieties adapted to your growing area. They tested most species that producers have been growing in the semi-arid region and found nine provided most of the production. Kale and sorghum didn’t establish and grow well in any of the three years, whereas, hairy vetch performed very well as a high-quality forage while its nitrogen-fixing action benefitted the soil.

Pending funding approval, their next step will be to dig deeper into the proportion of species in mixtures best suited for achieving production and, or soil-building goals in the prairie region.



They also see a need for longer-term projects to pull out details and identify cumulative effects in dry soil zones and test mixes and strategies to mitigate plant disease issues.

Diseased plant residues and inoculum left in soils can set the stage for a large-scale outbreak in a susceptible field crop or even another polyculture crop of the same species grown on that field the following year, he explains.

Sclerotinia-infected brassicas in a polyculture, for example, could be a reservoir of infection for disease in a canola crop if environmental conditions are conducive.

Insect pests aren't commonly a problem in polyculture crops because a good mix of species from the four functional groups makes it difficult for insects to find their host of choice.

Schellenberg says the potential to control weeds is a very promising aspect of polyculture cropping. The more functional groups and more species included in the mix, the better it is for weed control, although the trend was less apparent

under dry conditions that limited production and weed growth.

The weed control likely stems from the polyculture species out-competing the weeds for nutrients and space at several levels below and above ground. The shading effect under the canopy that prevents light from reaching the weeds is an important feature, he says.

Additionally, some crops, such as triticale, radish and turnip, and the perennial, western wheatgrass, have an allelopathic effect on other plants. The roots of these plants exude chemicals that harm the growth and development of nearby plants, and it is most often aimed at specific plants. Western wheatgrass, for instance, has an allelopathic effect on dandelion, but not alfalfa and other grasses.

In a followup two-year weed control trial, they found planting single species with differing characteristics in alternating rows didn't control weeds quite as well as sowing all the species together in rows. Once again, the numbers of functional groups and species were the most important variables.

The bottom line, to date, is that having goals and a strategy for use of polycultures as part of a cropping or grazing system as a whole are very important because what goes into the mix and how the crop is managed can have positive or negative implications for the next crop.

A two-year swath grazing study is measuring the effect of a polycrop mix compared to a conventional annual forage on soil health, beef cattle performance, grazing capacity, and grazing system economics. The conventional forage is Maverick barley and the polycrop is 4010 peas with Union Forage's Ultimate Blend (hairy vetch, Crusader Italian ryegrass, sorghum, crimson clover, Winfred forage brassica, Hunter forage turnip, Graza forage radish). The sites in the semi-arid brown soil region at Swift Current Research and Development Centre and in the parkland region at the Western Beef Development Centre were planted in June this year for October swath grazing with the schedule to be repeated next year and results expected in late 2018. 🍁



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# BVD TESTING

**B**VD (bovine viral diarrhea) virus is a tricky pathogen that can affect cattle in different ways. It can cause abortion, mummification of a fetus, birth defects, stillborn full-term calves, normal-looking calves with immune deficiencies, and acute or chronic illness. BVD is an indirect cause of many other types of disease because it has adverse effects on the immune system.

Cattle can become exposed to BVD in several ways, and some U.S. studies have estimated that 70 to 90 per cent of infections go undetected, without visible symptoms. The only clue you might have that BVD virus is in your herd may be a poor reproductive rate due to pregnancy losses, or a higher than normal rate of sickness in calves.

Acute infections, in which a naive animal becomes exposed, triggers an immune response. The body fights off the infection and recovers. This form of BVD is not as big a concern as persistent infections in which the animal never gets rid of the virus. PI (persistently infected) calves are the result of the dam coming into contact with a certain type of BVD virus during early pregnancy, before the fetus' immune system is fully developed. After this fetal infection, the calf is born carrying BVD virus for the rest of

its life because it cannot recognize it as foreign and does not mount an attack against it.

Acute infections can raise havoc in a herd, resulting in abortions, sick calves, poor performance such as a drop in milk production, poor weight gain, reproductive inefficiency, and lowered resistance to other diseases. But persistent infection is the silent, sneaky thief. A persistently infected (PI) animal continues to shed the virus and creates a constant source of infection for the rest of the herd.

There are tests a producer can utilize to see if cattle are harbouring BVD virus, which is particularly important for seed-stock producers.

There are two kinds of tests for BVD. One looks for the virus itself. The other tests look for antibodies to the virus, to know if the animal has been exposed.

Antibody tests are useful in some circumstances but a positive antibody test just means the animal has been exposed to the virus or has been vaccinated at some point in its life.

This test proved useful as a screening tool with unvaccinated dairy calves in some studies but didn't work as well in large-scale studies with beef calves.

"This is probably because we don't have

that many unvaccinated animals in beef herds," says Dr. John Campbell, with the department of large animal clinical sciences at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon.

"So we mainly just use this test in outbreak situations to try to figure out if the animals have been exposed to the virus. Even then it can be confusing if they were vaccinated. It can be hard to decipher whether the titer is due to vaccination or due to natural exposure."

The ultimate test is to look for the virus, primarily to find PI animals. "Those are the ones that were infected before they were born, at a certain stage of gestation. Those calves, from the time they are born, are little virus factories, shedding more virus than acutely sick animals. In many outbreaks these PI calves may not be the only source of the virus but they can be the main source," says Campbell.

"Usually the reason we are doing BVD testing is to try to find those PI animals and get them out of the herd. They excrete large quantities of virus, and the virus test works fairly well to find them. If you test them with the antibody test they may not have a titer, however, because their immune system doesn't recognize the BVD virus and they may not create antibodies. They may have a slight titer to a different strain of the virus and that doesn't help us much," he says.

There are a couple of virus tests. The most common ones require a skin sample, which could be from the ear.

"An ear notch is easy to do, and I often use a brisket punch to get a sample from the ear," says Campbell.

"The test used at the lab here in Saskatchewan is immunohistochemistry which is a staining test. We fix the tissue sample in formalin and then stain it with a special stain that has antibodies attached to it. The sample actually lights up under the microscope when it has the virus in it — and this makes it easy to see," he says.

If the virus is in the skin sample, this is a good indication the animal is probably persistently infected and it's not just a transient infection. "The transient infec-



*Continued on page 30*



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*Continued from page 28*

tions don't get high quantities of virus in the skin," says Campbell.

Some labs use an antigen capture ELISA test. "For that one they use fresh tissue rather than fixed tissue, so you don't put it in formalin. It's a slightly different test, measuring the virus in a slightly different way. It doesn't have to go under the microscope and it uses different technology," he says.

The fresh samples can be collected (such as a skin sample from each new calf at birth), frozen and shipped in a single batch. Then the lab can do either test.

"At our lab there is some benefit in testing multiple samples at a time because it is cheaper. A number of samples can be pooled on one slide for the immunohistochemistry test. A slide costs approximately \$50 so it is cheaper per sample to pool them. With the antigen capture ELISA test they put the skin sample in saline fluid and let it

sit there awhile, and then analyze the fluid for the virus." Some labs can put multiple skin samples in the same vial/fluid and test them all together. If there's a positive, however, then they have to retest the individual samples to identify which one it is.

With the immunohistochemistry test, individual samples are identified before they are put on the slide so they don't have to retest if one or two show up positive on that slide.

"Check with your local laboratory to see if there is a possibility of pooling the antigen capture ELISA test samples," says Campbell.

The virus can be identified from a blood sample, but the disadvantage is that you should probably retest that animal in a week or two if it shows up positive to be sure it's not a transient infection. "We can't be sure that this animal is persistently infected, with just one test," says Campbell.

With a transient infection the virus is in the blood for a short period, but if that's

when you took the sample you might think it was a PI animal.

When PI animals are found, they should be removed from the herd, before breeding season. "You don't want animals shedding the virus when you've got cows in early gestation, since that's the biggest risk. If the cows are well vaccinated, the risk is much less, but the vaccines — even though they are good — are not 100 per cent protective. That's the main reason for testing and trying to get rid of any PI cattle," says Campbell.

There may be a few cows in the herd that for some reason don't mount a good immunity when vaccinated, or you miss some, or the vaccine isn't given appropriately. If the cow jumps when you administer the vaccine and some of it doesn't get into the cow, she may not have enough of it to be effective. And you want every cow protected.

"In a dairy herd there might be the odd cow that encounters the virus at the right stage of gestation to have the fetus affected,

## ► PROVINCIAL ASSISTANCE

# BVD screening and control program in Saskatchewan

Dr. Wendy Wilkins, disease surveillance veterinarian with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, administers the provincial BVD screening and control program. "Here in Saskatchewan this program provides free testing for producers who are looking for PI calves within their herd. We don't do whole-herd screening but we do offer testing for any dead, deformed, aborted or sick calves," she says. If any young animal raises suspicion that it could have (or could have died from) BVD, it should be tested — including yearlings, if those yearlings are still on the farm where they were born.

"We've had queries from feedlots wondering if we could test their feedlot cattle, thinking they might have a PI animal, but our purpose is to help the producer control BVD on farm," she explains.

"If producers want to test, we ask them to work with their veterinarian. The IHC (immunohistochemistry) test done at PDS laboratory (Prairie Diagnostic Services) is done on a skin sample. In the case of a live animal we recommend that producers take an ear notch and submit that through their veterinarian to PDS. If the veterinarians are aware of

our program and have contacted me, they likely have prepaid shipping labels and the cost of shipping the samples to the lab is covered, as well. If they don't, then the producer must pay the cost of shipping because we do not reimburse that cost," she says.

The veterinarian or the producer can collect the sample. If the calf is dead, or it's an aborted fetus, the producer can take the ear or a piece of the ear to the vet clinic and have the veterinarian submit it.

"If results come back positive, identifying that calf as a PI animal, this program will also reimburse the producer (up to \$500) for veterinary consultation fees related to development of a customized BVD control program for their herd, to start working toward getting rid of this disease in their herd," says Wilkins.

This program started with a pilot project in 2013. In 2014 it was rolled into an ongoing program, funded under Growing Forward II. "Funding for this program is only confirmed until March 31, 2018. It is likely the program will be continued beyond that, but we can't say for sure," she says.

"We have found that this program is underutilized, when we compare the tests requested at PDS versus those paid through our program. There are quite a number of tests being done at PDS for BVD outside of our program and it may be due to a lack of awareness about the program, or may be related to convenience. If a producer submits a test, outside of our program, and it comes back positive, they can still apply to our program for the \$500 reimbursement." They can utilize the program in their effort to work with their veterinarian to develop a plan to control BVD in their herd.

Some producers may not know about the program. "It's difficult to get the word out. A couple times a year we remind veterinarians about it and we go through our regional services specialists and government publications, but the targeted audience still has to read the message or hear about it," she says. Sometimes ranchers hear about these things by word of mouth, such as from a neighbour. Wilkins hopes that more producers will learn about the program and utilize it if they want to test an animal in their herd.



but there's more risk in a beef herd where we are calving and breeding them all in a short period of time. There could be a lot of cows at that vulnerable stage of gestation, and this could create a major problem. So it's very important to vaccinate and also have good biosecurity to make sure you don't get BVD coming into your herd in the first place," he says.

If you do suspect you have BVD, testing is recommended. Even if you never bring new cattle into your herd, your cows could be exposed through fenceline contact with neighbouring cattle.

"If your herd is well vaccinated the risk is less, but if you have an abortion problem or something suspicious (like a bunch of

calves that are sick and not improving) or evidence of BVD on a post-mortem examination, then it's wise to test those animals," Campbell says.

Seedstock producers may want to test, simply to make sure that cattle they are offering for sale are free of BVD. "There is more tendency today to test and prove that yearling bulls are negative, and it's also a good idea to test replacement heifers," he says.

"The main thing I try to get people to understand is that we are trying to protect the fetus. If a bull or a cow gets BVD they might be sick for a few days but unless it's a violent strain they usually recover. The main concern with BVD is to protect the fetus from infection at the wrong time, and

to prevent PI calves. So we try to protect the fetus in two ways — by vaccinating the cow as close to early gestation as we can, so her immunity is high at the proper time, and trying to prevent exposure via biosecurity and maybe testing if there may have been some exposure."

The recommendation is to test young stock, and if you get a positive, you should test the dam. "A person could spend a lot of money testing the whole herd looking for the odd older cow that is PI because that doesn't happen very often. So we usually just suggest testing young stock, or a dead calf, and then test their dams if they turn up positive. This can save a lot of time and money," he says. ❖



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Carcass traits in the past have been an area where the exotic or terminal breeds have excelled. However the more recent focus on a carcass with consistent superior marbling have made the Shorthorn breed a logical choice as feedlot tests reveal that Shorthorn influence cattle reach the optimum carcass weight at an earlier age with a higher percentage of AA+ marbling. This makes Shorthorn a good choice to use on both British and Exotic breeds as the Shorthorn crosses will provide consistent, well marbled, high yielding carcasses.

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# WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

Some pea crop residue that we have grazed.

**I** am a big fan of speakers at conferences that tell you about all the stuff that went wrong. I would rather learn from someone else's mistakes than my own. I already have far too many "learning experience's" here at Greener Pastures Ranching. Too many of the speakers explain how easy and trouble-free their particular production practice can be. I have found that that is not always the case.

I have had a few discussions on social media lately about swath grazing so I think we should "dig" into that this month. Feeding a large herd of cattle with an hour of work every week makes a lot of sense to me, but it is not always as easy and worry free as a lot of people lead you to believe.

With a little planning and being prepared for what can go wrong, it can lower your labour and equipment costs quite a bit compared to traditional feeding. I hope that you can learn from some of my experiences and try to keep your swath grazing mistakes to a minimum.

What can go wrong? How about not enough snow? The most common question I get about swath grazing is "what about too much snow." The truth is I have had more trouble swath grazing with not enough snow. Too much has

only stopped me once. Not enough has caused me trouble three times.

Twice I have been stopped while swath grazing because we only had two inches of snow. Here is the scenario. The cows were doing great on a field of pea straw residue. We were still grazing in February and had a warm spell that melted the snow on top of the swaths. It is always nice to get those warm spells but then it cooled off again very fast and froze the wet swaths solid. I ended up with concrete swaths that the cows could no longer graze.

We were also relying on the snow as a water source so they were totally out of feed and water literally overnight. The snow was gone and the swaths where solid as a rock. I learned that I needed to have a backup plan to get through that time period.

That warm weather might be a disaster in disguise. After a week or two the ice will disappear and the cattle will again be able to graze. It won't happen every year but plan for it. I know of a producer who had to deal with a few death losses due to the same situation. Watch the weather reports if you get a warm spell.

If I am counting on snow as a water source and if I don't get any, my labour costs go way up. I now always plan for a backup just in case. Hopefully there is a dugout close by

where, if I need to, I can set up a continuous flow water system of some type that won't cause me too much extra labour. One year, four months of pumping water and hauling water cost me an additional \$3,600 in labour.

"But what about too much snow?" Okay, if I get deep snow that gets hard and crusty, some cattle have trouble. If this happens, I start pulling out the "skinnies." With swath grazing, you get three types of cows: the diggers, the skinnies and the opportunists. The diggers open up the swaths and find the feed. They do fine every year. The skinnies are the cleanup crew. They follow behind and clean up whatever is left over after the diggers move on. They usually lose condition as they are eating less and get the lower-quality feed. Don't forget to cull these.

The opportunists hang around the front of the swaths with the diggers and steal the feed as the diggers pull it up. It's quite entertaining if you have a chance to watch it.

Sometimes when the snow is hard and deep, the face of the open swath will freeze overnight. If I think they are having trouble getting started again in the morning, I will help them a bit by digging down by hand and pulling up a handful of feed and sticking it in the snow. Repeat this on as many swaths as you would like to open up and then let them go to work. Once



they get started on the new swath their hooves should break up any ice and give them access to the swaths for the rest of the day. Some throw a horse or two in with the cattle to help find the swaths in the hard snow.

Of course common sense tells me not to turn untrained cows into two feet of hard snow and expect them to do well swath grazing for the first time. Starting them on the system when there is only a little bit of snow or having experienced cows with them should be enough to train any new cows.

I also plan ahead for severely cold weather. I've been swath grazing at -47 C (-53 F). Each year, I try to fence off a treed area that can be saved for these cold periods. I do not want the cattle to have continuous access to the treed area because they will damage the trees, remove most of the underbrush and pack down the snow. If I save this area, it will be much warmer on cold days as it will provide protection from the wind, and possibly a fresh bed of snow. Fluffy snow acts as insulation.

When the cold spell hits, I just open up the gate and offer them the protection of the trees. Stopping the wind is very important during those cold spells. If you don't have trees, wind breaks might be necessary.

If I am swath grazing crop residues or another lower-quality feed, I will plan to set up the bush as a bale grazing paddock. During the cold spell I need to increase the ration. If the crop residue is of low feed value, I switch to bale grazing with higher-quality hay. A week or two of bale grazing will usually get me through the cold spell.

When the swath quality is poor, I have seen cattle simply stop grazing at temperatures colder than -30 C (-22 F).

Wildlife is another concern. For me, this is mostly because of the maturity of the crop grazed. I had two fields side by side containing the same crop of oats that was seeded and swathed the same. But one field matured faster because of poor fertility. The first field was still in the milky stage when it was cut and the second had seed in the heads. I had about 50 to 100 deer on that second field every night going after the grain in the heads. They not only ate a good portion of the grain in each swath, they packed the snow down and caused it to freeze solid so the cattle were unable to graze it later.

The deer never touched the first field and we swath grazed it no problem.

How about spring breakup? One year we had cattle out grazing on a zero-till

grain field in April when the frost came out of the ground. Oops. Now I try to be done swath grazing by then. Not only did the cattle damage the field, they stepped a lot of feed into the mud. That is not a way to keep a grain farmer happy.

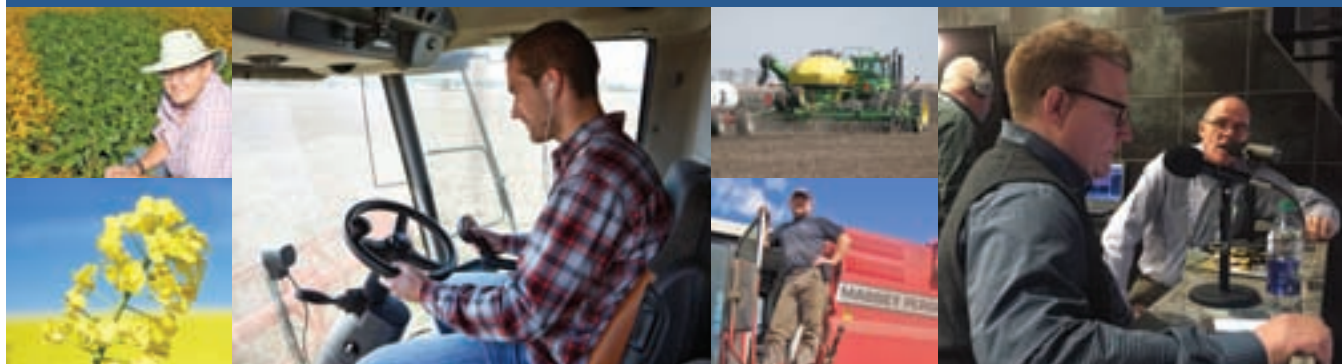
I'm also a fan of grazing polycultures. More than once while swath grazing, I have run into nutritional imbalances when grazing monoculture crops. One year it was a lack of protein, another it was a mineral imbalance that caused two cows to go down. Now, when I am offered a monoculture crop to graze, I make sure we supplement with some hay or pellets and ensure that we have a full mineral package available for them.

I hope this hasn't scared you off swath grazing, because I have found swath or residue grazing to be a very economical way to feed cattle during the winter months.

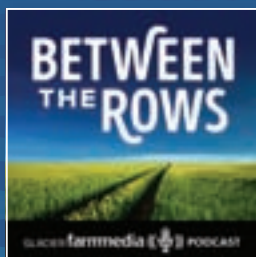
At the next conference you attend, keep the speakers on their game. Ask them "What can go wrong?" 🍁

*Steve Kenyon runs Greener Pastures Ranching Ltd. in Busby, Alta., [www.greenerpasturesranching.com](http://www.greenerpasturesranching.com), 780-307-6500, email [skenyon@greenerpasturesranching.com](mailto:skenyon@greenerpasturesranching.com) or find them on Facebook.*

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# MAINTAINING MOMENTUM IN FORAGES

**C**anada's pasture and rangelands have drier, colder, and shorter growing seasons than many other beef-producing areas in the world. The forage varieties that perform best in Canada are generally the ones that have been bred, selected and developed to germinate, grow, survive and thrive here. Forage varieties developed in foreign countries are sometimes marketed in Canada, but they weren't developed under our climate and may not perform as well as homegrown varieties.

A total of 144 new perennial forage cultivars (grasses and legumes) were developed in Canada and registered between 1932 and 2017. Although private or not-for-profit companies often sell these seeds, these companies rarely did the actual breeding and development work. Nearly all (98 per cent) of these 144 cultivars were developed by public (government and university) breeding programs. It is critically important that universities and governments continue these breeding programs, because when a program stops it takes years to rebuild its momentum.

Here are a few examples. Only eight new perennial forage varieties were registered during the 1930s; forage breeding programs that had lost manpower and momentum due to the First World War were still rebuilding when the Second World War started. Only three new perennial forage varieties were registered during the 1940s. Many more recruits were drafted and sent overseas during the Second World War, and some forage breeders who remained in Canada were reassigned to develop grasses that could reinforce and stabilize air force landing strips. The Second World War ended in 1945, but only four new Canadian perennial forage varieties were released in the 1950s, and only 15 in the 1960s. Forage breeding programs never really regained their momentum until the 1970s, with the release of 24 new varieties, and maintained their momentum through the '80s (23 new varieties), '90s (28), and 2000s (25 so far, including 14 perennial forage varieties since 2010).

It takes a long time to develop a new variety from scratch. Dr. Bruce Coulman of the University of Saskatchewan (who provided me with this list of Canada's forage varieties), recently recalled the start of his forage breeding career at McGill University. McGill had allowed its forage breeding program to collapse, and had no breeding lines under development when Coulman started. Starting from scratch in 1976, Coulman registered his first forage variety in 1993. After that, the new variety had to be commercialized, foundation seed multiplied and grown to commercial quantities, marketed and adopted. When starting with nothing, it can take the better part of two decades for a new variety to proceed from the initial crosses to commercial availability. The development pipeline is very long, so it takes a long time after the breeding tap is opened before any new varieties start to flow out the other end.

The reverse is also true. New varieties can emerge long after the breeding program has been closed. This can also give the false illusion that all is well as new varieties continue to trickle onto the market long after the tap has been turned off.

Funding determines whether governments and universities keep the taps open on their breeding programs. Historically, forage breeding (like all agricultural research) was funded almost entirely by tax dollars. Today, industry dollars are needed to help support and encourage continued government and university investment in these breeding and research programs. This is probably a symptom of how society has changed; in 1931, 32 per cent of Canadians lived on farms. In 2011, fewer than two per cent still lived on the farm. Agriculture's contribution to the Canadian economy is still very significant, but agricultural research now faces increasing competition for public support from urban healthcare, education, etc.

The Canadian Beef Cattle Check-Off provides a significant share of the industry funds that support government and university beef cattle and forage research programs in Canada. In recent years, provincial beef producer groups have increased the research allocation of the Canadian Beef Cattle Check-Off dollar from an average of six cents to an average of 18 cents. That has greatly increased the Beef Cattle Research Council's ability to leverage producer funds, and fund a broader variety of research projects.

The current Beef Science Cluster has allocated 30 per cent of its funds towards forage breeding and production research. Industry investments like this have encouraged governments and universities to also renew their commitment to forage research.

Over the past two years the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Manitoba, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada stations across the country have hired at least nine new forage researchers. Some were even hired before their more experienced counterparts retired. This is especially beneficial, in that they have an opportunity to benefit from the experience and wisdom their mentors gathered over the course of their careers. And that helps to maintain the research momentum that invigorates the breeding and management of the Canadian forages of tomorrow.

The Beef Research Cluster is funded by the Canadian Beef Cattle Check-Off and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada with additional contributions from provincial beef industry groups and governments to advance research and technology transfer supporting the Canadian beef industry's vision to be recognized as a preferred supplier of healthy, high-quality beef, cattle and genetics. 🌾

*Dr. Reynold Bergen is the science director of the Beef Cattle Research Council.*





## BIOSECURITY: YOUR LIFE CAN CHANGE IN AN INSTANT

Don't let unpreparedness set you back

Ask any livestock producer whose farm was the origin of a major disease outbreak. It's a good bet they would tell you their lives and their farms were changed forever.

Is that something you could afford as a producer? Not if you could avoid it. And what about less dramatic disease outbreak losses that are local to your farm? You'd give a lot to avoid those too.

No one thing can prevent disease outbreaks completely but little things can lead to big problems.

Workshops and meetings with producers in the VBP+ network are a rich resource. Here is advice on farm biosecurity VBP+ leaders have gleaned based on connections and experience:

**Have good on-farm signage.** It sets the tone for expectations of visitors and tells people you and your industry are serious about on-farm biosecurity.

**Three questions.** Keep these three questions handy to ask visitors prior to their coming to your farm or feedlot.

1. Are you from or have you been outside Canada in the previous two weeks?
2. Have you been on a farm, ranch or feedlot or exposed to livestock from outside Canada or the U.S.?
3. Have you been exposed to a situation involving a reportable animal health problem in the last six months?



Displaying visitor information signage shows commitment to protect animal health.

**Visitor services.** Provide a pair of boots for visitors to wear if going into pens at your operation. Don't be afraid to have disinfectant footbaths for all visitors to use. Have them fill out a visitor logbook with contact information including name, address and company if applicable.

**When you travel.** There are clear instructions available from Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) provincial co-ordinators. The document "Travel precautions for cattle producers visiting farms abroad" is very thorough.

It may sound a bit over the top at first glance. However, you do not want to bring

some problem back with you. At a minimum have a complete change of clothing and footwear before returning to your operation. And clean and disinfect any materials you are bringing back with you.

**Study up.** If you are travelling, a quick call to your federal or provincial veterinarian prior to the trip can help with advice on how to handle biosecurity and still enjoy your trip. Often producers are surprised at details they learn about always evolving biosecurity rules and recommendations.

**Travel wear.** Locally, it is a very good idea to have a separate set of boots and outer clothing not normally used for daily farm use, for wearing to the vet clinic or auction market.

### THE NEW REALITY

We live in a highly mobile world these days and biosecurity is an important part of farm, ranch and feedlot business operation and success. It also is critical at an industry level in maintaining trade opportunities and international responsibilities.

Requiring visitors to respect your operation's biosecurity expectations may make farm visits a bit more cumbersome. But it tells everyone in no uncertain terms that your operation is professionally run with serious requirements. That's a good message.



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# NAFTA ANXIETY



Steve Dittmer is the CEO of Agribusiness Freedom Foundation, a non-profit group promoting free market principles throughout the food chain. He can be reached at [steve@agfreedom.ag](mailto:steve@agfreedom.ag).

**T**he intent of everyone going into the renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was to get it over quickly, at least quickly by international trade negotiation standards. Canada didn't think there was a lot to fix, Mexico had presidential elections set for next July and the U.S. general opinion, except for President Trump and a few of his associates in the executive branch, seemed to be, the faster it's over, the less chance there would be of screwing up a good thing.

Of course, it's not working out that way. The parties have already announced negotiations will go on until at least sometime in the first quarter of 2018, and precious little progress seems to be happening on the toughest issues. *The Hill*, a Washington news source, claims behind the scenes differences are growing, not narrowing. I asked a trusted Washington source if there was a real possibility President Trump would pull the U.S. out of NAFTA. Yes, was the reply.

On his recent Asian trip President Trump added more fuel to the fire in speeches by re-emphasizing his preference for bilateral treaties to keep the U.S. from being cheated.

At the same time the administration's Director of the Economic Council Gary Cohn went on television to explain that their top priority is economic growth. How dismantling NAFTA would contribute to economic growth I cannot fathom.

With business organizations and most industries opposed to Trump's thinking on NAFTA, his position is looking more and more like something out of the playbook of the United Autoworkers or U.S. Steelworkers — something that might help fewer than a million workers at the expense of the other 330 million Americans. The last time the autoworkers played hardball decades ago they started the movement of the auto industry out of Michigan to the southern U.S. and eventually into Mexico.

One of the most contentious proposals the U.S. has put forward involves upping the North American content of autos to 85 per cent, with 50 per cent U.S. content. Currently NAFTA requires 62.5 per cent North American content, with no specific country requirement. One of the reasons auto companies finish cars in Mexico is that Mexico has free trade agreements with 46 other countries, far exceeding the U.S. in this regard.

The U.S. has also proposed a five-year sunset clause on NAFTA unless everyone agrees to renew it, which is tantamount to killing the agreement. Changing the arbitration process is close behind as a deal breaker.

Unfortunately, the few discussions regarding agriculture are as close to non-starters as one can get. The U.S. has proposed that Canada dismantle its dairy supply management system, which caps production to match domestic demand at prices set by the cost of production, and is protected by tariffs high enough to pretty much

eliminate imports from the U.S. We're not sure why dairy producers on both sides of the border require the most complicated and favourable government subsidy and management regimes but that seems to be the case. It would require heavily tinted rose-colored glasses to envision Canada moving very far on this subject.

Both Canada and America are trying to force significant labour changes on Mexico. The U.S. proposal looks like a union negotiation list involving rights to organize, child labour, discrimination, minimum wages, numerous health and safety rules, maximum hours, etc., etc., according to a report from Haynes and Boone, LLP, an international trade firm. Mexico agrees that it needs to reform its labour practices but let's face it, this will be a long slog. Both Canada and the U.S. labour rates average over \$35/hr. In Mexico it's just over \$6.

Not to be outdone, Canada suggested the U.S. pass a federal law negating the ability of employees in 28 U.S. states to take advantage of "right-to-work" laws, meaning they cannot be forced to join a union to take a job. Missouri passed such a law this year. The U.S. trend is to less unionism, not more, with only about seven per cent of the private workforce unionized today. Government, of course, is the main source of union growth, via public employee unions.

Trade deficits are another one of President Trump's bugaboos. I've commented previously on the lack of validity of deficits as a measure of trade success or failure, and I haven't seen anything since then to change my mind. Neither have the negotiators for Canada and Mexico.

Haynes and Boone is not aware of any free trade agreement that tracks trade deficits.

What are the chances that outside forces will ultimately convince President Trump that withdrawing from NAFTA is a bad idea?

We won't know that until a final decision is made; however, we can say that many have tried to convince him. *The Hill* reports multiple business organizations have called on 250 House congressional offices in an attempt to secure support for NAFTA. Canadian, American and Mexican agribusinesses, including the CEOs of major produce companies and the chair of the United Fresh Produce Association, met in Mexico City on the sidelines during that phase of the NAFTA negotiations in a united effort to emphasize the benefits of NAFTA to producers and consumers in all three countries.

If political pressure doesn't have any effect, those who favour free trade may have to turn to the courts. America is a litigious country and the political left has already filed several lawsuits to halt or lighten the impact of executive orders issued by President Trump. So the chances are very good that if he does decide to withdraw the U.S. from NAFTA, the first result will be a blizzard of suits filed by the right, left and middle of the political spectrum in the United States. 🍷



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# NEW DRUG REGULATIONS REQUIRE ADJUSTMENT

**N**o issue over the past 15 years occupied more space in agriculture, veterinary or public health-related press than antimicrobial resistance (AMR). No single topic appears more often on conference and seminar agendas than topics addressing the use, abuse and prudent use of antimicrobials in humans and animals. Petitions, a plethora of committees of every description, and scientific debate has done little to lessen the stain of agriculture's influence on antimicrobial resistance, or initiate concrete steps to fix it — until recently.

World Antibiotic Awareness Week began Monday, November 13. The United Nations, through its Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), summoned all those responsible to take steps toward prudent use of antibiotics. The emergence of bacterial resistance is a troubling issue tied to the use of antimicrobials in both animals and humans. The issue is complex and global in nature. Answers are hard to find.

No subject touches modern livestock production more fully than antimicrobial use in animal-based food production and the relationship it has to AMR (antimicrobial-resistance) in humans. The assignment of cause for the growing dilemma of highly resistant, life-threatening bacterial infections on hospital wards stimulates arduous debate and finger pointing over the judicious use of antimicrobials. Agriculture must approach the future with the responsibility to be actively engaged in finding answers or stand suspect and untrustworthy. Regulatory changes, now underway in both the U.S. and Canada, will affect producers, veterinarians, and businesses in the business of selling antimicrobials.

"Antibiotic resistance is a global crisis that we cannot ignore," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of WHO. "If we don't tackle this threat with strong, co-ordinated action, antimicrobial resistance will take us back to a time when people feared common infections and risked their lives from minor surgery." Animal diseases are becoming harder, and sometimes impossible, to treat as antibiotics become less effective. The WHO has gone as far as recommending the elimination of antibiotic use in animal agriculture. As implausible as this might seem, we must remember that WHO called for the reduction of feed-grade antibiotics for growth promotion, which the animal health industry readily adopted. Also on the table: the elimination of antibiotics for disease prevention, unless a veterinarian has diagnosed a disease condition within a herd or flock. With WHO's recommendations comes rising pressure for food companies to develop "antibiotic-free" policies. In Europe, companies like Domino's Pizza Group U.K. have committed to phasing out the routine use of antibiotics in beef, pork and poultry.

The federal government has proposed new rules for veterinary drugs used in livestock. In that agriculture uses an estimated 80 per cent of antimicrobials produced, Health Canada has clearly taken the stand that overuse and misuse of antimicrobials in animals is a contributing factor to the development and spread of AMR in humans. Health Canada says the decreasing effectiveness of antimicrobials is having a significant impact on the government's ability to protect Canadians from infectious diseases. In their view, current regulations do not provide the necessary regulatory oversight to mitigate risk.

Both Canada and the U.S. have been criticized for lagging behind

Europe in regulations governing prudent use of antimicrobials. North American agriculture is under pressure to enact major changes. Significant trade sanctions lie at the crux of inattention.

Health Canada updated the framework for veterinary-use antimicrobials by publishing regulatory changes to the Food and Drug Regulations in the *Canada Gazette*, Part II on May 17, 2017. These changes aim to increase oversight of antimicrobials available for use in animals. In particular, Health Canada addressed gaps in the regulations identified as issues multiple times over the last decade:

- Active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) for veterinary use.
- Personal importation of certain drugs for food-producing animals (Own Use Imports).
- Reporting antimicrobial sales information (surveillance).
- Use of veterinary health products (VHP) — low-risk drugs used to maintain or promote the health and welfare of companion and food-producing animals. VHPs contain ingredients like vitamins, minerals and traditional medicines.

In addition, Health Canada has implemented microbiological safety requirements for assessing new veterinary antimicrobial drug submissions for use in food-producing animals. They have also categorized antimicrobials into four categories based on their importance in human medicine to help prioritize risk management options, and added warnings on certain medically important antimicrobials in Categories I, II, and III. Steps have been taken to increase surveillance activity and enhance communication on prudent use of antimicrobials with a wide network of stakeholders including: provincial and territorial authorities, international counterparts, veterinarians, industry, food animal producers, associations, other animal health stakeholders, other federal departments and agencies.

Many producers do not understand the implication of changes coming forward in 2018 in the form of regulations. By default, everyone handling antimicrobials will assume ownership of a major international crisis. There will be a need to understand the issues and a need to correct any deficiencies in your health practices.

Practices associated with how antimicrobials are purchased and used will change, and there will be costs tied to these changes. Key among them will be the need to develop a veterinary client-patient relationship with a veterinary practitioner who will facilitate the maintenance of appropriate animal care practices and issue prescriptions for the purchase of antimicrobials. Registered pharmacists may be a part of the equation. The loss of API and own use permit privileges (as they existed) will affect some production units.

If industry and government don't carry out this transition cleanly and smoothly, the outcome could range from trade sanctions to erosion of consumer confidence. Whether we like it or not, animal agriculture must play a part in tackling antibiotic resistance. It is essential that the public and consumers understand we are there and doing the right thing. 🌟

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*Dr. Ron Clarke prepares this column on behalf of the Western Canadian Association of Bovine Practitioners. Suggestions for future articles can be sent to Canadian Cattlemen ([gren@fbcpublishing.com](mailto:gren@fbcpublishing.com)) or WCABP ([info@wcabp.com](mailto:info@wcabp.com)).*





# A DIFFERENT KIND OF MAN

**I**t was a unique classroom setting, sitting upon a log at the seaside. In the distance the mountain peaks were blue shadows and the ocean was this day like glass; gentle and caressing her shores with the hand of a guiding mother.

The topic between this day's teacher and I was the relationship between gross domestic product (GDP) and the well-being of a nation. Well-being is a term reflecting the human rights of all the citizens. This includes food and water security, literacy, health, education, shelter, safety, peace, democracy, social connection and belonging, and most importantly, the ability of the citizen to make decisions that have a positive impact on his or her life. It is termed GDH or gross domestic happiness.

In Canada, the growth in GDP over the last five years had been 7.8 per cent with agriculture a stellar performer at a growth of 11 per cent. One could assume an increase in GDP equates to a better life for citizens and farmers or that economic growth of any nature is enjoyed by all persons in a country.

The reality is that there is no economic or research evidence that relates an increase in a developed or developing country's GDP and the well-being of her citizens. There are moderate gains to the well-being of people in those least developed countries but this quickly tapers off.

Consider Canada, one of the top five trading nations on the globe, which has an illiteracy rate of 22 per cent with food insecurity at 11.1 per cent and one of the highest infant mortalities rates in the developed world along with a failing grade at gender equality. 200,000 persons are homeless. Has the increase in economic activity, measured by GDP, increased the well-being or GDH of our citizens?

The question from my classroom by the sea pulled at my heart. Have we been running hard and working long only to age and not to change? And in our quest for prosperity as a nation, are we measuring the wrong things? If literacy, health and gender equality are foundational to secure food systems, which is my belief, then how well are we as a nation?

My teacher for this day commented that he supposed it came back to how you measured prosperity. There are those in the world with very little and by our standards are happy and well. And there are those who have much who are unhappy and sick in body and soul. Furthermore, who are we to judge what another human considers prosperity?

Cuba, for example, has well-being handled in the physical sense as there is less than one per cent illiteracy, gender equity is not an issue as everyone is paid the same, and food security is focused, particularly on maternal health. In reality Cuba has slowly over time delivered physical services but there remains a lack of freedoms and of choice.

Costa Rica, poor as we may see it by our standards,

is considered the world's happiest and greenest country because of the focus on education and environment. With an average per capita income of US\$15,750 there are roadblocks to complete freedom of decision, but you may leave should you wish to and there is opportunity. It is one of the few countries in the world with a regenerative environmental model.

GDH has to be inclusive of economic, environmental and social needs of the citizen. It is outcome based or in other words we can measure our success by our happiness, not our income. Certainly, globalization has brought about great market and import access, frenzied consumerism and a sightline to all things possible. To say you don't want this as a Canadian is to say that you reject what is on your plate, the clothes you wear, the car you drive and the technical platforms you use. It has not, however, secured us against the vulnerability of global pricing and has kept us victim to elements completely out of our jurisdiction. For farm families, food insecurity, lack of affordability of education, poor health from stress, isolation and moving away from acceptable societal norms can be one extended commodity price collapse away.

Think about this. What will it take to change what we are chasing to turn inward to build in these securities and the consequential well-being within our homes and communities. How do we do this?

After a moment of silence my thoughtful teacher offered that "it would take a different kind of man to change our world today." It would take a person who does not see ensuring food security, shelter, education, equality and health services for every Canadian, especially the marginalized, as a charity — but as an act of justice — as a human right.

Putting people in the centre of change, on a family, community, country and global scale may be the only way to true prosperity. The goal of human development must take the shape of feeding, clothing, sheltering and keeping well and safe every person in a sound and regenerative environmental way. Anything less has the potential to expand marginalized groups.

My teacher for this day gave me a new lens through which to look at our world. His vast experience living across our nation made him a valuable resource. His thoughtful and measured responses took me to a higher plane of thought.

As the sun set on the sand and the blues turned to oranges and yellows, I watched my teacher proudly walk away. I wondered where he would go — for he was homeless: Homeless, alone and marginalized in a society of measurable economic wealth.

---

Contact Brenda through her website: [www.brendaschoepp.com](http://www.brendaschoepp.com).  
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# WRAPPING UP 2017



Dan Darling  
is president  
of the Canadian  
Cattlemen's  
Association.

Several important developments occurred in November that hold promise for Canada's beef producers as 2017 begins to wind down and business plans for next year start to take shape. These include progress in securing the groundwork for improved market access in the Asia Pacific region, and continual improvements to practices that producers already recognize as essential to sustainable and humane cattle production. The winds of change are constantly upon us, and producers can continue to count on the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) to represent their interests in these important matters going forward.

I would like to take a moment to thank Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Lawrence MacAulay for the tax relief measures he announced in November for cattle producers affected by bovine tuberculosis (bTB) and drought, flood or excess moisture conditions. These measures will help producers affected by the bTB investigation that began in September 2016 to make more optimal herd repopulation decisions, and help eligible producers forced to sell part of their breeding herd due to extreme weather to defer a portion of sale proceeds to the following year to partially offset the cost of reacquiring breeding stock. The CCA also commends the Government of Canada for revisiting the changes outlined in the Tax Planning Using Private Corporations proposal. The amendments to the proposed tax plan are a step in right direction.

On the trade front, the CCA is encouraged by the significant progress made at the Ministerial meeting of the 11 Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) countries in Da Nang, Vietnam, towards achieving a so-called "TPP11 agreement." Talks will continue under a new agreement, called the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). This is potentially good news for beef producers, as it appears the market access elements of the original TPP12 agreement will remain intact; however, we do know that nothing is guaranteed until the negotiations are complete, and the agreement is signed. The CCA will follow up with officials and politicians to ensure the remaining work and negotiations to bring this new agreement into effect are undertaken as expeditiously as possible.

Many thanks to International Trade Minister François-Philippe Champagne for his strong efforts on behalf of Canadian beef producers at the TPP11 negotiating table. We encourage Canada to be a constructive partner as the negotiations continue.

An agreement in the TPP11 region will ensure Canada's beef producers can improve access to Japan and other growing markets in Asia. With an agreement, there is potential to double or triple our annual beef exports to Japan to more than \$300 million.

There is an opportunity to exempt Canadian beef

from tariffs in Japan as high as 38.5 per cent to 50 per cent and restore Canada's competitive position with Australian beef. Other potential wins for Canadian beef producers in an agreement include achieving elimination of beef tariffs in Vietnam and Malaysia, potentially important markets in the future. It is a major priority for Canadian beef producers to achieve a level playing field for all beef competitors in the TPP11 region.

Canada's beef industry has an enviable track record of prudent and judicious use of veterinary antimicrobials. However, action is being taken around the world on reducing the risk of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). AMR is a global issue that has an impact on the ability of medicines to treat infections and disease in both animals and humans. Canada has its own pan-Canadian framework to address AMR including some changes to how livestock producers can access antimicrobials. These changes ensure that the antimicrobial products we have now continue to be effective into the future, and it will require producers to consider the impact on their business operations and plan accordingly.

Of note to Canadian beef producers is a change to the own use importation (OUI) process that came into effect on November 13, 2017. Only those products registered on "List B," published on the Health Canada website are now permitted for OUI.

Additional changes coming will see claims for growth promotion dropped from labels of medically important antimicrobials used in livestock production, and access to all Category I, II, and III antimicrobials restricted to prescription only effective December 1, 2018. This will mean all livestock producers will require a valid veterinary-client-patient relationship to obtain the necessary prescription to access these antimicrobials.

The responsible use of antibiotics is a necessary component of sustainable beef production, which requires that cattle are well cared for and treated when necessary. The CCA recognizes that all stakeholders in Canada's human and animal health systems must play a role in minimizing AMR development. These include doctors, hospitals, and patients on the human side; veterinarians, producers and animal caregivers on the livestock side. Our mutual goal is to ensure that the medicines we currently have, and new ones in the future, will be effective when used properly.

As 2017 draws to a close, herd expansion remains stalled given the surprising strength for fed prices this spring and calf prices this fall. International demand remains strong in the face of larger protein supplies supporting red meat prices. Moving forward, continued strong export demand will be critical to maintaining North American cattle prices and encouraging expansion of the Canadian herd.

Here's wishing you a safe, restful and joyous holiday season with your loved ones, and a happy new year. 🍁





# CHINA DANGLES CARROTS

China is getting increasingly adept at dangling carrots to keep the U.S. at bay. Its latest carrot was to announce on November 9 that it had signed US\$253 billion of business deals with U.S. companies. News reports quickly questioned whether the deals will turn into actual business. Buried in the massive total was news that JD.com, China's second largest retailer and e-commerce company, had signed agreements to purchase US\$200 million of Montana beef over the next three years. Skepticism also greeted this news, for reasons that have bedeviled the re-entry of Canadian and U.S. beef into China.

China reopened its market to U.S. beef last June. But only a trickle (800 metric tonnes by the end of October) has been shipped. That's because few U.S. cattle satisfy China's requirements that the beef comes from cattle that have not been implanted or fed ractopamine (the feed supplement Optaflexx). The same requirements will make it difficult for Montana to supply the amount of beef JD wants. JD also says it intends to invest up to US\$100 million to build a new processing facility in Montana to support Montana beef production, another deal that industry analysts greeted with skepticism.

JD says it will purchase beef from the Montana Stock Growers Association (MSGA), Cross Four Ranch and other MSGA members. The agreement contains commitments to import an increasing amount of beef over the three-year term. This will increase Montana beef export sales by as much as 40 per cent in 2018, says MSGA. The agreement calls for JD to purchase the equivalent of US\$50 million of cattle in 2018, US\$70 million in 2019 and US\$80 million in 2020.

My calculations suggest this would involve 28,000 steers

or 31,500 heifers in 2018, just over 39,000 steers or 44,000 heifers in 2019, and nearly 45,000 steers or 50,300 heifers in 2020. Yet there are not enough cattle in Montana currently that satisfy China's "natural" requirements to fill the amount of beef that JD says it will buy in 2018. Even if more Montana producers and cattle feeders were persuaded to change their production practices, it would take two or three years to build up numbers of eligible cattle.

Producers would also have to enter into special feeding arrangements with feedlots. Montana is a sizeable cow-calf state but has little feeding capacity. Its cattle total on January 1 this year was 2.650 million head. Beef cows totaled 1.486 million head and its 2016 calf crop totaled 1.470 million head. Nearly all calves and feeder cattle go out of state to be finished. Montana had only 45,000 head on feed on January 1 this year.

Producers and feedlots will only produce beef that qualifies for China if they are guaranteed premiums to cover the additional cost of production due to slower growth rates in cattle on feed. JD says it will buy the beef at fair market value. But what does that mean? The agreement also makes no mention of what percentage of the carcass JD will buy. Buying only a certain number of items won't work economically for producers.

The likelihood of a new processing plant appears to be even more remote. It might take two or three years for a plant to be approved let alone built, say analysts. Various attempts have been made in the past 25 years to build a plant in Montana but to no avail. If one was eventually built, the only way it could survive is for Montana to increase its feeding capacity. JD's agreement will remain a carrot until Montana starts producing meaningful amounts of beef for China. 🍁

A North American view of the meat industry. Steve Kay is publisher and editor of *Cattle Buyers Weekly*.

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# NewsRoundup

## SEEDSTOCK

### Agribition unveils new trade centre

Canadian Western Agribition 2017 has gone into the books as the first event to be held in Regina's new International Trade Centre.

The 150,000-square-foot multi-purpose facility at Everaz Place replaces 14 aging barns and buildings built during the 1950s, '60s and '70s, as well as the 1919 Exhibition

Stadium that came to life each year as the main show ring at Agribition.

Planning started more than a decade ago and a 2014 study put forward a good business case for revitalizing the barn area with a multi-purpose facility that could host the annual Agribition and Farm Progress shows along with other trade shows, conventions and large commercial events.

With funding in place from the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan

(\$22 M), City of Regina (\$11M), Regina Hotels Association (\$3M) and Canadian Western Agribition (\$1M), the staged demolition-construction project got underway in January 2016. Part of the unfinished ITC along with the old stadium, half of the Winter Fair Building and storage buildings were available for Agribition last year.

The completed ITC was officially opened to the world for business on November 6, and as Agribition's CEO Chris Lane put it,



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The ITC features three halls with moveable partitioning to accommodate any event. During Agribition, that's the show-casing and marketing beef cattle.

The centre hall (22,000 sq. ft.) serves as a dedicated show ring, while a hall of the same size on one side holds cattle stalls and the largest hall (46,000 sq. ft.) on the other side houses cattle and horses.

The second-floor mezzanine area overlooking all three halls is home to Agribition's International Business Centre, where guests have prime seating for the shows and an inviting, comfortable place to do business.

In addition to its international reputation as a top-notch beef cattle show, Agribition is widely known for its spirit of volunteerism and first-class hospitality. In 2016, the cattle show attracted 1,200 registered international guests from 75 countries who doubled their spending over the previous year, contributing to the \$2.9 million in livestock sales, the second highest value in decades.

As one who has shown cattle many times through Agribition's 47 years, Agribition president Bruce Holmquist knows how important

the environment is to the large contingency of international buyers as well as exhibitors.

“The biggest advantage for exhibitors is having the conveniences of a modern facility. It is bright, to better display cattle and products, the power supply is intended to be better, and it has a professionally designed ventilation system with air exchange to make sure air quality is the best possible for the livestock,” Holmquist says when asked to list the conveniences appreciated by exhibitors and visitors alike.

As in past years, the Stockman's Arena, Canada Centre West and Canada Centre East adjoining the ITC were used to house pure-bred breeds, while the sheep and dairy display moved to the Canada Centre Show and Sale Arena at the front of the building.

The commercial barn remains the home of the Stock Exchange with penning for cattle and bison, The Yards live-cattle exhibit booths, and the upgraded John Deere Sale Ring, which is now the venue for all cattle sales.

The bright corridor across the front of the ITC makes it the centrepiece of the 100-acre Everaz Place by connecting the west-side buildings with the east-side halls and sports arenas. Visitors can now take in

the livestock exhibits and carry on through the agricultural trade show areas, consumer marketplace, family ag, Indigenous and food pavilions, and entertainment and hospitality venues without having to set foot outdoors.

## CATTLE CARE

### Cattle Handling Clinic Connects

In Manitoba By Duncan Morrison

Raising cattle on Canada's prairies is often a family business that requires all hands on deck working together for the best results. This necessary cohesion is never more evident than during cattle-handling times that can be stressful for cattle and pressure-packed for cattle handlers. The human-animal communication and tactics of handlers are always key factors in how the day goes.

And that is exactly why Merck's Creating Connections program hosted two workshops recently at Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiative's (MBFI) Brookdale site near Brandon, Man. The outputs of the two workshops were the same: Cattle handled

*Continued on page 44*

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# News Roundup

Continued from page 43

with low-stress methods are more productive and cost-effective whether measuring feeding efficiency, net gain, meat quality or milk yield.

The focus on productivity and cost-effectiveness spiked a lot of interest from producers for both MBFI workshops. But the two events were different in that one of the workshops was for women only.

"Our main concept with Creating Connections is a little different in that we are guiding animals instead of pushing them, which is a little outside the box for some long-time cattle handlers," said Amanda Elzinga-Pugh, a Merck Animal Health rep from Alberta who, along with Merck colleagues Dr. Colleen Pollock and Heather Davis, delivered the women-only workshop. "The decision to hold one workshop specifically for women resulted out of pure inter-



Everyone got a chance to put their new low-stress techniques to work during the one-day workshop.

est for the program and our want to get as many persons to our workshop as possible."

According to Elzinga-Pugh, the opportunity to learn new approaches to cattle handling with their peers was a welcoming factor for many of the women who attended the workshop.

"They all shared the same interest in care for animal health and doing their part to help improve that potential."

Low stress is a positive thing and that applies to cattle too. Regina-based Lee Sinclair is an account manager for the farm

animal business unit for Merck Animal Health who oversees the company's cattle handling program in Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta.

Sinclair says Merck developed the Creating Connections program in 2014. Low-stress handling offers health benefits to the cattle by decreasing physical and psychological stress. The Merck Creating Connections website contains eight modules around cattle handling, including references to studies that show it improves an animal's immunity, response to vaccination and reproduc-

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tive performance, while lowering the incidence of death and disease. On top of all that, low-stress handling also prevents injury to animals and producers alike.

"We are seeing a great deal of producer interest," said Sinclair, pointing to the open-to-all producers MBFI workshop that was full a week in advance.

"There are two primary goals with our workshops. The first is to train people to utilize the methods Merck endorses to care for the animals and the second is to connect the audiences to our Merck product line for animal health."

Sinclair says the origins and concepts of the Merck Creating Connections program took shape from the animal handling observations and expertise of three veterinarians, one each from Brazil, the United States and Australia. Sinclair says that tailoring to a specific audience — as in the case of the women-only MBFI clinic — is something they have the flexibility to do on a number of fronts.

Ramona Blyth, MBFI chair and a beef producer from MacGregor Man., says the interest of women in general extends well beyond specialized events.

"There were women at the producers event held a week later at MBFI," notes Blyth. "And truthfully, for some at the women's event it did matter and for some it didn't matter that there were only women in attendance. The two workshops did give opportunity for everyone to take part in whatever workshop suited their needs best."

The two workshops were staggered, she adds, to allow different members of a family to take part.

*Continued on page 46*

**Willner-Elbow Grazing (WEG)**, a 40,000 acre, 2200 cow/calf pair pasture located east of Lake Diefenbaker, halfway between Saskatoon and Regina is seeking applications for

## Pasture Manager

The position requires a self starter, able to work well with community based board of directors as well as seasonal staff. WEG also runs a small ruminant, noxious weed management program that requires some operational oversight.

The successful candidate will have the following attributes:

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- Expertise in recognizing and treating common cattle ailments
- Excellent human resource management skills.
- Able to work well with board of directors including regular reports on pasture management issues including financial reports.

WEG is in a position to offer a competitive compensation package including housing.

*For further information or to submit a resume for consideration, contact Doug Vollmer, Chair, Willner-Elbow Grazing, [dvollmer@sasktel.net](mailto:dvollmer@sasktel.net) 306 567-7616*

*Applications due December 31, 2017.*

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# News Roundup

Continued from page 45

"Running a farm operation requires a lot of attention and knowledge," says Blyth. "These two workshops did allow for at least one person from the farm to attend on each day as opposed to only sending one or the other or both on the same day."

MBFI is a Brandon-based collaborative effort between Manitoba Agriculture, Manitoba Beef Producers (MBP), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Manitoba Forage & Grassland Association (MFGA), with input from producers, researchers and other industry stakeholders across Canada.

Blyth believes anyone who attended the workshop took something home, regardless of age, ability or gender.

"It was a good personal development day for each of us to take home what we learned and advance it within our own operations," she says. "When it comes to raising cattle

with the best care possible, knowledge is power and we all learned something today."

## MARKETING Lemoyne brings Canadian focus to Certified Angus Beef

To get premiums for raising high-quality beef, there must be somebody marketing that beef. To sell more, it's good to have a plan. When you have a plan, it helps to have a person in charge of seeing it through.

That's why the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) brand believes it has gained by hiring Martin Lemoyne as its director of Canadian business development. Lemoyne will guide food service and retail companies in Canada to develop and implement beef merchandising, marketing and training strategies.

A Montreal native, Lemoyne brings extensive experience in beef marketing to the role, most recently as director of market development for Canada Beef.

"Martin has a deep understanding of high-quality beef from gate to plate and the impact a strong brand can have on the success of food businesses," says Geof Bednar, CAB international director.

Certified Angus Beef brand products have been available in Canada since 1991 and it is now the top international market for the brand.

Canadian production began in 2000 and continues today supplying 1,300 licensed restaurants and grocery stores in Canada.

A growing share of that beef is produced in-country. That first fiscal year, Canadian Angus farmers and ranchers raised four million of the nearly nine million kg sold in Canada. Eight years later Canadians supplied 6.7 million of 12.6 million kg sold, and last year native Canadian Angus cattle made up 16.2 million kg of the 19.3 million kg of CAB product sold in Canada.

Those cattle have to meet the live specification of a predominantly black hide, plus the brand's 10 carcass specifications under the auspices of the Canadian Beef Grading Agency.

In his role at Canada Beef, Lemoyne collaborated with industry leaders and food businesses on beef promotions and sales strategies. His prior experience included senior purchasing and merchandising lead, as well as a food service key account director for Loblaw Companies Limited. He



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☐ I'm ranching or farming

Enterprise	# of head
Total beef cattle	
Yearlings on feed/pasture	
Registered cows	
Fed cattle (sold yearly)	
Commercial cows	
Horses	
Calves on feed/pasture	
Other livestock	

☐ I no longer take an active part in farming

If not an owner/operator of a farm, are you:

☐ In agribusiness (bank, elevator, ag supplies, etc.)

☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

My approximate age is:

☐ a) Under 35 ☐ b) 36 to 44 ☐ c) 45 to 54

☐ d) 55 to 64 ☐ e) 65 or over

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

worked in sales, buying and production for Canada Packers, a role he began while earning a bachelor's degree in marketing, finance and business administration from the Université de Montréal.

### MANAGEMENT

**Well-supported benchmarks make the best targets** By Kris Ringwall

Friendly, conversational chit-chat rules at cattle gatherings. Conversation guides us, particularly when someone casually notes the ranch had just marketed a 91 per cent calf crop with an average weight of 568 pounds for 192-day-old steer calves.

Silence prevailed until the neighbour asked, "Are you sure?" "Yep," the rancher replied, "but I was just average. Maybe someday I can manage my way to the upper third."

Another rancher offered that the culling process this year was "deeper than usual and we hope the hay supply will hold over the core cow herd." The hope is for a mild winter and a return to a normal growing season to raise some more of those 550-plus-pound steer calves.

The dialogue continues, which is a good

thing, but the comments are generally not data driven, which is critical in assessing the status of the cow enterprise. The best way to make cow-culling decisions is to access and utilize production benchmarks.

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association recently updated the CHAPS (Cow Herd Appraisal of Performance Software) benchmarks, a running five-year average of herds in the CHAPS program for a minimum of three years. CHAPS is an inventory-based program and does not allow for the omission of cow records because the program is based on a total-herd inventory. Reproductive and performance data are collected and processed within CHAPS and provide a good indication of today's upper Great Plains beef cattle production.

Simple data is best, so if a producer wants a quick evaluation of where the herd is, pounds weaned per cow exposed is a good way to get an overall feel for the herd data because the value combines reproductive and performance data.

So let's look at the benchmark. Although annual trends are evident in the database,

*Continued on page 48*



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# News Roundup

Continued from page 47

the bottom-line benchmark number — pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed — is 498 pounds. Simply rounding the number up to 500 pounds would be nice, but I will leave that to the chit-chatting.

The benchmark for pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed has been quite consistent. Historically (10-plus years ago), the benchmark was 501 pounds for 2003, 498 pounds for 2004, 500 pounds for 2005, and 502 pounds for 2006 and 2007.

Has the industry changed much? Not really. In 2008, the benchmark for pounds weaned per cow exposed was again at 500 pounds, and it was 507 pounds in 2009, 505 pounds in 2010, 503 pounds in 2011 and 501 pounds in 2012.

Interestingly, the average producer has not been able to sustain the 500-pound threshold in recent years. In 2013, the bench-

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## NEWS ROUNDUP

mark dropped below 500 pounds to 499 pounds. The chit-chat did not pick up that difference and the thought was still at 500 pounds. But in 2014, pounds weaned per cow exposed dropped to 496, and it dropped again in 2015 to 495 pounds and again in 2016 to 494 pounds. This was a somewhat challenging trend, although 2017 did see an increase back up to 498 pounds weaned per cow exposed.

In the 1990s, pounds weaned per cow exposed was even lower, suggesting the beef industry is fairly dynamic in annual production characteristics. But, in the big picture, production traits are relatively consistent. Pounds weaned per cow exposed, as well as other production traits, are very informative and can be utilized to “benchmark” current herd production within an individual producer’s herd.

As has been noted, for every cow exposed, CHAPS producers are weaning 498 pounds of calf per cow exposed. The number itself is not as critical as is the ability for producers to gauge their own level of production.

Goals are set and measured against the CHAPS benchmarks. Attaining greater production or even just holding even may be the goal. Knowledge allows for the setting of goals, and the process of reaching a goal occurs through evaluation, modification and implementation of appropriate management or genetics.

However, financial and economic evaluations are needed to complement production traits to truly assess a cattle operation. No absolute answers are available on what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization. ★★

*Kris Ringwall is a beef specialist at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, N.D. (kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).*

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■ The Friends of the Canadian Simmental Foundation (FCSF) 2017 scholarship recipients were announced in late October.

The Friends of the Canadian Simmental Foundation \$3,000 scholarships were awarded to Jessica Sperber of Rimbey, Alta., and Matt Bates of Coboconk, Ont. Jessica is currently working toward a masters of animal science at West Texas A&M and Matt is taking a doctor of veterinary medicine degree at the University of Guelph.

The \$2,000 Dr. Dixon Memorial Scholarships, in memory of Dr. Allan A. Dixon were awarded to Breana McKenzie of Rocky Mountain House, Alta., and Michaela Lievre of Woodstock, Ont. Breana is currently at the University of Calgary taking a bachelor of science, majoring in zoology. Michaela is attending the University of Guelph taking honours agriculture.

The \$2,000 Trevor Vance scholarship, in memory of Trevor Edward Vance goes to Mackenzie Skeels of Rimbey, Alta., who is attending Red Deer College majoring in media studies and professional communications.

■ Cattle producers from all breeds and supporters alike came together at ANL Polled Herefords and guests production sale on October 21 to support one of their own and help make a difference to the most vulnerable in our society, babies in need. To give you a little history, Jeremy and Rachelle Brooks of Brooks Farms, consignors to the sale spent 112 days in the Regina Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) with their son Hudson last January when he was born 16 weeks premature.

Fast forward to this fall with the sale getting closer and doing much better, the Brookses wanted a way to give back and



Brooks 23B 342X Lady 27E

decided to donate the entire proceeds of the heifer Brooks 23B 342X Lady 27E to the Regina NICU. Over \$44,000 was raised at the sale through the sale of tickets, with the lucky winner being Beiber Herefords, Herman and Christina Beiber and family.

After the sale to the surprise of everyone involved a cheque for over \$6,000 was received from George and Chris Haux.

Jeremy and Rachelle truly appreciate and thank the long list of breeders and buyers too numerous to mention here who contributed to make this lasting donation possible to Regina Hospital's NICU.

■ Congratulations to Vern and Eileen Davidson, Davidson Gelbvieh of Ponteix, Sask., for being recognized by the Canadian Gelbvieh Association (CGA) as the owner of 36 Gelbvieh cows exhibiting the consistent maternal efficiency typical of "The Continental Breed of Choice." The CGA has designated these outstanding beef females as Dam of Merit and Dam of Distinction. Of the 4,613 active cows in the Gelbvieh breed, only 4.6 per cent qualify for Dam of Merit and only 0.8 per cent qualify for Dam of Distinction.

■ The Grand Champion Gelbvieh female at the breed's national show and sale at Farmfair was VV Wind Zong 45Z from Stone Gate Farm, Vermilion, Alta. The Grand Champion bull was RWG Right Combination 5506 from Royal Western Gelbvieh, Red Deer County, Alta.

■ Canadian Charolais National Champions named on October 28 in Brandon were PZC Lily 5013 ET, exhibited by Prairie Cove Charolais, Bashaw, Alta., and JMB Fisher 604D, exhibited by C2 Charolais, LaRiviere, Man., and JMB Charolais, Brookdale, Man.

■ The Canadian Angus Association (CAA) has honoured Don Bell of Bemoral Angus, at Dubuc, Sask., for his 50 years of membership in the association. Going back to the 1920s when Don's grandfather purchased the family's first Angus cows, Bemoral Angus today runs 150 Black Angus females, all with straight Canadian genetics, on 5,000 acres of grain and pasture. The Bell fam-



CAA director Bob Toner with Glenda Bell and Don Bell.

ily received a 100 Year Homestead Award in 2013. Bemoral Angus cattle have been exported to Japan and Scotland.

■ A record setting fundraiser for Manitoba Junior Charolais Association was held at the start of the National Charolais sale in Brandon on October 26. \$16,890 was raised to offset the costs of the Canadian Charolais Youth Association Conference and Show being held in Brandon July 25 to 28. The quality heifer that won her class in the national show the next day was Stepler Miss CCYA 2018 41E, donated by Stepler Farms, Miami, and acquired by Paisley Baron, Carberry. Over 100 head from across Canada competed in the national show. The 22 lots in the sale including semen and embryos, averaged \$7,830.

■ Over 1,300 head of livestock, including 800 cattle, showed at Manitoba AG-EX during the four days of the Brandon, Man., show and sale.

The Supreme Breeder's Herd Champion banner went to Young Dale Angus of Carievale, Sask. High Country Cattle Services of Breton, Alta., took home the Supreme Grand Champion Bull banner for RJY Casino 11C, and Tableland Cattle Co. of Estevan, Sask., showed the Supreme Grand Champion Female, Early Sunset Queen 8C.

■ The Canadian Limousin Association presented Jim and Susan Butt of Maple Key Farms, Embro, Ont., with the 2017 Canadian Limousin Association Award of Distinction



during the Limousin show at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair on November 5 in Toronto. Jim and Susan have been dedicated members of the Canadian Limousin Association for 29 years and have been great supporters and multiple time attendees of the International Limousin Congress.

Registration for the International Limousin Congress to be held July 19-28, 2018 in Colorado is now open. Interested Canadian breeders can contact the Canadian Limousin Association for details.

■ **BIG-GULLY 102 HURLEY 271C** was named Grand Champion Hereford Bull at Farmfair International 2017. The bull is owned by Lance and Shari Leachman, Big Gully Farms. It marks their first time back at Farmfair with cattle since 1998 and first time participating in the Hereford Genes Event and Alberta Supreme Show. Leachman is using HURLEY on his Angus and Angus-influenced females for the production of F1 baldies.

■ The winners of the Canadian Junior Limousin Association 2017 scholarships and Australia Travel Opportunity have been announced. The \$500 scholarships went to Angus Smyth of Roblin, Man., and Samantha Kennedy of Omemee, Ont. The \$250 CJLA scholarships went to Amanda Scott of Virden, Man, and Nolan McLarty of West Lorne, Ont.

Megan Wynn of Belmont, Nova Scotia has been selected to travel to Australia in August to participate in the Ekka Royal Queensland Show.

■ The Alberta Supreme Champions were named at Farmfair early last month.



The Supreme Champion Female was PZC Lily 5013 ET with calf at side, Miss Prairie Cove 716E, from Prairie Cove Charolais. She also took top honours at the Canadian National Charolais show in Brandon the week before.



The Supreme Champion Bull was Greenwood Canadian Impact ET from Greenwood Limousin Angus.

■ The Limousin sired feeding contest directed by the Canadian Limousin Association is underway. The association assembled steer calves that entered the Kunz Farms Feed Yard in Beiseker, Alta., in November. Kunz Farms utilizes the

GrowSafe system that tracks weights each time an animal takes a drink to get a jump on sick cattle, as well as manage the cattle for optimum profitability. The cattle will be sold in load lots on Cargill's grid and tracked through the plant. Producers cover the costs but receive individual carcass weights, yield and quality grades plus a ranking of how their animals compare to others in the contest and industry averages. For an extra \$50 per animal they could enter a pool with the money going to those who own the steers with either the best carcass or the most profit.

■ The Limousin yearling heifer **BOSS LAKE DAY DREAMER**, owned by Boss Lake Genetics, was named Alberta Supreme Stakes Female Co-Grand Champion at Farmfair International (based on aggregate from Olds Fall Classic, Stockade Round-Up and Farmfair International). She also took top honours in the National Limousin show held at Farmfair.

■ The Hereford and Shorthorn breeds came out on top November 5th at the 95th Royal Winter Agricultural Fair in the culminating event of the Masterfeeds Canadian Beef Show — the Masterfeeds Supreme Beef Champion. In the female class, the winner was JDL Janice 11X 119C owned by Grosvenor Farm and JDL Cattle Company of Shelburne, Ont. Supreme Bull was Hill Haven Fire Storm 28C owned by Dale Asser and Bob Meldrum of Hill Haven Shorthorns

*Continued on page 52*

*If it weren't for the messages from some of the leaders I connected with, I wouldn't have this clear vision nor the motivation to go after it. I can't thank you enough for that. — Jen C., AWC Delegate*

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## PURELY PUREBRED

Continued from page 51

in Duntroon, Ont. Each of the winning exhibitors received a banner and a cheque for \$2,500 from Masterfeeds, along with the honour of being the 2017 Supreme Champion.

■ The Grand Champions at the 2017 Lloydminster Stockade Roundup are:

- Red Angus Female, RED TER-RON DIAMOND MIST 26C RPAH 26C, exhibited by Ter-Ron Farms, Forestburg, Alta., bred by Rob Adams of Forestburg.
- Red Angus Bull, RED COMBEST JUGGERNAUT 1613D CLFX 1613D, exhibited by Ter-Ron Farms, bred by All Bull Holdings, David and Lynne Lonshore, Stettler, Alta.
- Black Angus Female, MERIT SOCIALITE 5121 TJL 5121C, exhibited by Merit Cattle Co., Radville, Sask., bred by Trent Liebreich, Radville.
- Black Angus Bull, DMM INTERNATIONAL 54D DMM 54D, exhibited and bred by Miller Wilson Angus, Bashaw, Alta.
- Speckle Park Female, RAVENWORTH NORTHERN STAR 117A GDB 117A, exhibited and bred by Garry and Donna Berting, Ravenworth Cattle, Middle Lake, Sask.
- Speckle Park Bull, JSF UNMARKED 2D JSF 2D 11, exhibited and bred by Johner Stock Farm Ltd., Maidstone, Sask.
- Polled Hereford Female, JDH MS 20R VICTOR 33Z 55D ET 55D, exhibited by Jacey Massey, JM New Trend Cattle Co., Strathmore, Alta., bred by Delaney Herefords.
- Polled Hereford Bull, MLL 10Y ROCKY ET 225D ANJU 225D, exhibited by MJT Cattle Co Ltd., Edgerton, Alta., bred by Mark Lohner.
- Horned Hereford Female, MJT 495Y CINDY 105C MT 105C, exhibited and bred by MJT Cattle Co.
- Horned Hereford Bull, H WR SUSTAINABLE 5511 ET 5511, exhibited by Rocking G Land & Cattle Co., and Hoffman Hereford, Gull Lake, Sask., bred by Hoffman Hereford.
- Shorthorn Female, FRASER'S 27C GENEVA 128D BR 128D, exhibited by Matlock Farms Ltd., Lloydminster, Sask., bred by Carrie Braun, Simmie, Sask.
- Shorthorn Bull, BAR 33 EASY MONEY 12E DEN 12E, exhibited and bred by BAR 33 Ranch, Pierceland, Sask.
- Maine-Anjou Female, MISS RUSYLIVIA ECHO 15E KJP 15E, exhibited and bred by Rusylivia Cattle Co, Derwent, Alta.
- Maine-Anjou Bull, MANITOU'S ECHO 94E GG 94E, exhibited by Manitou Maine Anjou, Marsden, Sask., bred by Gary Graham, Marsden, Sask.
- Charolais Female, CEE MS. VENEZUELA 607D CEE 607D, exhibited by K-Cow Ranch, Elk Point, Alta., bred by Circle Cee Charolais.
- Charolais Bull, SOS GAUCHO 139D SOS 139D, exhibited by Hopewell Charolais, Springside Farms and Bob Charolais, bred by Springside Farms, Salmon Arm, B.C.
- Limousin Female, 200 BOSS LAKE DAY DREAMER CWP 613D, exhibited and bred by Boss Lake Genetics, Parkland County, Alta.
- Limousin Bull, GREENWOOD CANADIAN IMPACT JSP 706C, exhibited by Greenwood, Lloydminster, Sask., bred by Jayden Payne, Lloydminster, Sask.
- Simmental Female, CMS SODA POP 425B CMS 435B, exhibited by Black Gold Simmental, Lloydminster, Sask., bred by Czech-Mate Simmentals, Carstairs, Alta.
- Simmental Bull, BGS/BM CAPTAIN SCREAM 63D CLNO 63D, exhibited by Black Gold Simmental, Lloydminster, Sask., bred by Rust Mountainview Ranch, Mercer, North Dakota. 🍁



# TheMarkets



## FED CATTLE

Fed cattle prices have strengthened over the past seven weeks following the low in September. Tighter volumes, recent strength in the technical market and increased seasonal beef demand have pushed prices higher as we moved later into the year. Packers and wholesale buyers continue to look to secure middle meats for holiday demand. Since the low in September, the cash fed cattle price has increased nearly \$16/cwt or 12 per cent to an average \$147.32/cwt by mid-November. The fed steer basis is -\$5.04/cwt.

Cattle-on-feed data shows Alberta and Saskatchewan with 799,148 head in lots on November 1. This is eight per cent above a year ago. However, it is the third-lowest cattle-on-feed total since the start of the report in 2000. Feedlots marketed and placed cattle more aggressively in October. With the increased volume available and the drop in feeder exports, placements increased eight per cent from last year at 323,806 head. Fed steer slaughter is up two per cent at 1,332,297 head while heifer slaughter is up 10 per cent at 733,647 head.

The increased heifer slaughter in Canada further emphasizes the lack of growth in the Canadian cow herd.

Carcass weights are lower which helps support feedlots remaining current with cattle moving through the system in a timely manner. The average steer carcass weight in Canada is 922 lbs. which is 11 lbs. lighter than a year ago. The year-to-date average is 892 lbs., 26 lbs. lighter than the same time period last year.

## FEEDER CATTLE

Feeder calf prices were well supported through the fall run, a much different trend from a year ago when prices plummeted through the end of September and October. In 2017 calf prices reached annual lows much earlier as 550-lb. steers reached \$204.50/cwt in September, then rallied in October and held in a tight trading range just over \$230/cwt for the past several weeks. With the larger volumes in recent weeks trucking has been an issue; however, most of the volume is likely behind us now. Although the numbers arriv-

ing at auction the past couple weeks were significantly larger than last year at this time.

Good demand on fresh weaned calves has been noted on all classes of feeder calves. Obviously quality and type play a role in the premiums; however, the average 550-lb. feeder steer average is \$229.88/cwt, which is \$25.38/cwt higher than just 10 weeks ago and up \$44.47/cwt from the same time last year.

Support in the feeder market has come from the positive margins seen in the feeding sector earlier in the year as well as the recent drop in the Canadian dollar and overall optimism towards 2018.

A strong local feeder price has also been evident in the heavier classes. The 850-lb. feeder steer price is currently \$202.75/cwt, which is over \$38/cwt higher than the same week last year and \$19.50/cwt above the low seen at the start of September.

## NON-FED CATTLE

Non-fed cattle have continued to come under seasonal pressure as available supplies increase. However, while cow volumes have grown in the past month they are not as large as in recent years. Cow prices are still strong relative to the U.S. cow market as additional support has come from profitable packer margins, a strengthened fed market and reduced beef imports. D1,2 prices have stayed within a trading range of \$87-\$89/cwt for the past eight weeks. The mid-November average was \$87.64/cwt, which is \$4.58/cwt higher than the same week in 2016. As a result of the larger U.S. cow supply and a premium in the Canadian cow market, the number of cows exported to the U.S. for slaughter has shrunk and is down 32 per cent to a total of 117,270 to date. Butcher bull exports are also lower, down three per cent at a total of 45,755 head. Domestically, cow slaughter is 14 per cent larger in part due to the lack of exports, the current total cow slaughter in Canada is 357,563 head, while bull slaughter is up 42 per cent at 16,094 head. Butcher bulls have come under some seasonal pressure in recent weeks as well, and are currently trading at an average \$96.56/cwt. ★

*Debbie McMillin is a market analyst who ranches at Hanna, Alta.*

## ▶ DEB'S OUTLOOK

### FED CATTLE

Fed cattle prices should be well supported as we near the end of 2017. Drivers in the market have been both technical and fundamental which should continue to support the market moving forward. Positive packer margins, smaller carcass weights and increased holiday beef movement should contribute to a strength in the market in the coming weeks. Feedlots are ending the year in a current marketing position as cattle have been pulled ahead to meet packer needs. In addition, current strength in the live cattle futures would suggest a strong start as we move into 2018.

### FEEDER CATTLE

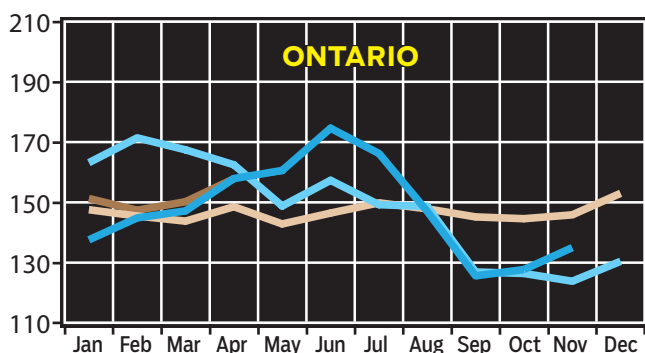
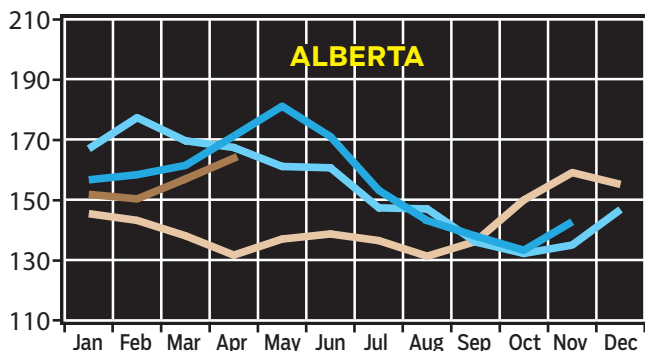
Volumes of feeder cattle should taper off as we move towards the end of the year. Most special calf sale dates are coming to an end and many producers will have weaned and sold if they plan to before the new year. The softer Canadian dollar and stronger LC technical market should help support the feeder market moving forward. The feeder market should remain steady to stronger as feedlots look to fill pens before the end of the year.

### NON-FED CATTLE

Support should continue to come from the reduced beef imports as well as a solid fed cattle market. However, the smaller fall run cow volumes could indicate that there are more cow numbers ahead which could slow any rally at the start of the year. Strong seasonal tendencies would suggest solid to higher cow prices as we work through the first quarter of 2018.

**More markets ▶**

## Break-even Prices on A-Grade Steers



Canfax weighted average price on A-Grade steers

2017 ■  
2016 ■

Break-even price for steers on date sold

2018 ■  
2016 ■

## November 2017 prices\*

### Alberta

Yearling steers (850 lb.)	\$202.23/cwt
Barley	4.63/bu.
Barley silage	57.88/ton
Cost of gain (feed)	71.22/cwt
Cost of gain (all costs)	104.33/cwt
Fed steers	142.68/cwt
Break-even (April 2018)	163.77/cwt

### Ontario

Yearling steers (850 lb.)	\$199.88/cwt
Grain corn	4.51/bu.
Corn silage	38.08/ton
Cost of gain (feed)	65.28/cwt
Cost of gain (all costs)	100.72/cwt
Fed steers	134.98/cwt
Break-even (May 2018)	160.22/cwt

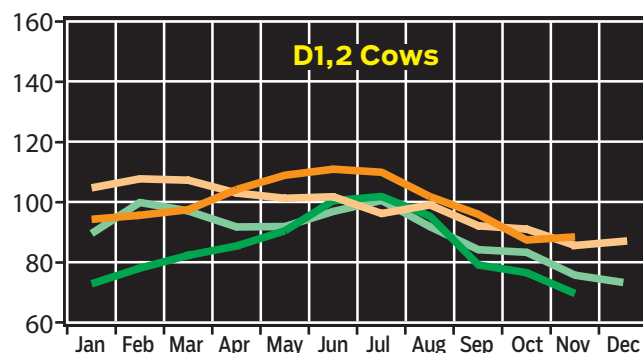
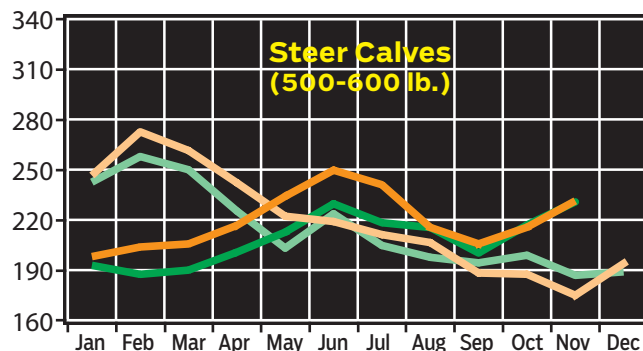
\*Mid-month to mid-month prices

Breakevens

East: end wt 1,450, 183 days

West end wt 1,325 lb., 125 days

## Market Prices



### Ontario

2017 ■  
2016 ■

Ontario prices based on a 50/50 east/west mix

### Alberta

2017 ■  
2016 ■

## Market Summary (to November 4, 2017)

	2017	2016
Total Canadian federally inspected slaughter	2,390,811	2,252,684
Average steer carcass weight	891 lb.	918 lb.
Total U.S. slaughter	27,461,000	26,016,000

### TRADE SUMMARY

#### EXPORTS

	2017	2016
Fed cattle to U.S. (to October 28)	270,179	256,870
Feeder cattle and calves to U.S. (to October 28)	107,489	169,679
Dressed beef to U.S. (to September)	460.92 mil.lbs	447.50 mil.lbs
Total dressed beef (to September)	623.23 mil.lbs	582.55 mil.lbs

#### IMPORTS

	2017	2016
Slaughter cattle from U.S. (to September)	0	0
*Dressed beef from U.S. (to September)	183.41 mil.lbs	180.57 mil.lbs
*Dressed beef from Australia (to September)	29.10 mil.lbs	54.50 mil.lbs
*Dressed beef from New Zealand (to September)	32.11 mil.lbs	37.23 mil.lbs
*Dressed beef from Uruguay (to September)	20.79 mil.lbs	26.21 mil.lbs

### Canadian Grades (to November 18, 2017)

% of A grades	+59%	54-58%	-53%	Yield	Total
Prime	0.1	0.4	1.2		1.7
AAA	14.2	21.2	22.8		58.2
AA	20.0	10.9	5.1		36.0
A	1.6	0.3	0.1		2.0
Total	35.9	32.8	29.2		

Total A grade 97.9%

	Total graded	Total ungraded	% carcass basis
EAST	534,403	23,093	81.0%
WEST	1,933,080	12,530	86.4%

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# MIXED OUTLOOK FOR FEED GRAINS

I've received many inquiries into the outlook for corn and barley prices over the winter period. Feeder cattle prices have strengthened so that it's difficult to pencil a profit and feedlot operators are wondering how the cost per pound gain will vary for the next round of feeding. At the time of writing this article, feed barley was trading in the range of \$210/MT to \$215/MT delivered in southern Alberta; feedlots were showing bids from \$195/MT to \$200/MT in the central Alberta region. Feed barley prices in Western Canada are expected to strengthen by \$15/MT to \$20/MT given the tighter fundamental structure. The market needs to ration demand by limiting offshore movement and encouraging the use of alternate feed grains. U.S. corn prices remain under pressure because the supply situation is extremely burdensome south of the border. Imported U.S. corn has been trading from \$215/MT to \$220/MT in southern Alberta. In this issue, I'll review the market outlook for barley and corn.

There are four main factors that will cause barley prices to strengthen over the winter. First, approximately 65 per cent of the barley seeded in Western Canada is of malt varieties. Growing and harvest conditions were quite favourable this year, and according to the industry estimates approximately 50 per cent of the crop is malt quality. Farmers with malt quality barley are not willing to sell into feed channels and hold out for higher malt barley prices.

Second, the approximately 90 per cent of the Canadian wheat crop will grade in the top two milling categories. Last year, there was a fair amount of feed wheat and feed durum trading into feed channels. Farmers holding high-quality milling wheat appear to be holding out for higher prices rather than selling into the domestic feed market. Third, domestic feed demand increases over the winter. Cattle-on-feed numbers in Alberta and Saskatchewan reach a seasonal high in mid-December and then again in April.

Given the tighter Canadian feed barley supplies, the domestic market needs to trade at a premium to the world market to limit offshore movement. At major seaports, export values are US\$25 to as much as US\$50 above

U.S. CORN SUPPLY AND DEMAND							
	USDA 12/13	USDA 13/14	USDA 14/15	USDA 15/16	USDA 16/17	5-year average	USDA 17/18
Acres seeded	97.2	95.4	90.6	88.0	94.0	93.0	90.4
Acres harvested	87.4	87.7	83.1	80.8	86.7	85.1	83.1
Yield (bu./ac.)	123.4	158.8	171	168.4	174.6	159.2	175.4
<b>SUPPLY (million bushels)</b>							
Opening stocks Aug. 1	989	821	1,232	1,731	1,737	1,302	2,295
Production	10,780	13,927	14,216	13,602	15,148	13,535	14,578
Imports	162	35	32	68	57	71	50
<b>TOTAL SUPPLY</b>	<b>11,931</b>	<b>14,783</b>	<b>15,480</b>	<b>15,401</b>	<b>16,942</b>	<b>14,907</b>	<b>16,923</b>
<b>USE (million bushels)</b>							
Feed-waste-dockage	4,335	5,126	5,325	5,131	5,464	5,076	5,576
Food seed industrial	6,044	6,505	6,560	6,635	6,890	6,527	6,935
Ethanol	4,648	5,075	5,200	5,206	5,438	5,113	5,475
Domestic demand	10,379	11,631	11,885	11,766	12,354	11,603	12,511
Exports	731	1,920	1,864	1,898	2,293	1,741	1,925
<b>TOTAL USE</b>	<b>11,110</b>	<b>13,551</b>	<b>13,749</b>	<b>13,664</b>	<b>14,647</b>	<b>13,344</b>	<b>14,436</b>
<b>TOTAL CARRY-OVER</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>1,232</b>	<b>1,731</b>	<b>1,737</b>	<b>2,295</b>	<b>1,563</b>	<b>2,487</b>
<b>Stocks to USE Ratio</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>12.7%</b>	<b>15.7%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>

year-ago levels. Russian and Ukraine feed barley is offered at US\$193/MT fob the Black Sea while French feed barley is offered US\$195/MT fob the Atlantic Coast. Canadian domestic prices are only a small premium above world values so the strength in the export market will continue to support Alberta feed prices.

While the market is bullish for barley, it's bearish for corn prices. The USDA estimated average corn yields at 175.4 bushels per acre, which is a record. Despite the year-over-year decline in acreage, total beginning supplies are estimated at 16.9 billion bushels, about the same as last year. Without going into details of demand, the 2017-18 U.S. corn carry-out is projected to finish at 2.5 billion bushels, up from 2.3 billion bushels last year and up from the five-year average of 1.6 billion bushels. Over the winter, the U.S. corn market will function to encourage demand through lower prices.

Readers may remember that South America is coming off record corn production resulting in a year-over-year increase in their exportable surplus. We're seeing more competition in the world market, which makes Canada a logical home for U.S. corn. It's interesting to note that on the recent USDA report, North Dakota yields were increased from 126 bushels per acre to 134 bushels per acre. The drought hurt the wheat crop but not the corn. Western

Canada is a major outlet for U.S. corn in the Northern Plains. The Mississippi closes in the northern areas over the winter due to freeze-up. Currently, Brazil and Argentina growing conditions are quite favourable and additional rain is in the forecast. Remember, their harvest is in April and May so this will keep the market on the defensive. One caveat on the corn market is the fact that ethanol demand is coming in larger than anticipated. This can sometimes underpin the market regardless how burdensome the carry-out. Another factor to consider is the Canadian dollar. If the Canadian dollar weakens, this would be bullish for feed grains in Western Canada.

In conclusion, feed barley supplies in Western Canada are historically tighter while the U.S. corn carry-out for 2017-18 will be sharply above the five-year average. The barley market needs to ration demand by trading at a significant premium to imported U.S. corn values. This will cause Alberta and Saskatchewan feedlots to switch over to U.S. corn. 🍷

*Jerry Klassen manages the Canadian office of Swiss-based grain trader GAP SA Grains and Produits Ltd., and is president and founder of Resilient Capital specializing in proprietary commodity futures trading and market analysis. Jerry consults with feedlots on risk management and writes a weekly cattle market commentary.*

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# Sales & Events

## EVENTS

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- 3 Grey Bruce Beef Day, Elmood Community Centre, Elmwood, Ont.
- 11-13 20th Ontario Beef Industry Convention, Best Western Lamplighter Inn, London, Ont.
- 18-20 Western Canadian Bovine Practitioners annual conference, Sheraton Cavalier Hotel, Calgary, Alta.
- 24-25 Saskatchewan Beef Industry Conference 2018, Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon, Sask.
- 31- National Cattlemen's Beef Association Feb. 2 annual convention, Phoenix, Arizona

### FEBRUARY

- 8-9 Manitoba Beef Producers annual meeting, Victoria Inn Hotel and Convention Centre, Brandon, Man.
- 10 Advance Agricultural Leadership Program Dream Auction gala, Delta Guelph Hotel and Conference Centre, Guelph, Ont.

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- 11-25 Foothills Forage and Grazing Association, Spain and Portugal Ag Tour
- 21-23 15th Annual Alberta Beef Industry Conference, Sheraton Hotel, Red Deer, Alta.

### MARCH

- 16-17 Maritime Beef Conference, Hotel Beausejour, Moncton, N.B.
- 17-18 Cody Sibbald Legacy Classic, at Exhibition Grounds, Medicine Hat, Alta.

### MAY

- 31- B.C. Cattlemen's Association annual June 2 meeting, Smithers, B.C.

## SALES

### DECEMBER

- 11 Diamond K Cattle Co. "Buy 'Em Red, Breed 'Em White" Bred Heifer Sale, at the Bircham ranch, Piapot, Sask.
- 11 Y Coulee Land & Cattle Co. "You Be the Judge" Bull and Heifer Sale, at NCL Vermilion, Alta.

### JANUARY 2018

- 26 Dayspring Cattle Private Treaty Sale, Sylvan Lake, Alta.
- 26 Lazy S Ranch Bull Power Sale, at the ranch, Mayerthorpe, Alta.
- 27 M.C. Quantock "Canada's Bulls" Bull Sale, Lloydminster Exhibition Grounds, Lloydminster, Alta.
- 31 Moose Creek Red Angus 2-Year-Old Bull Sale, at the ranch, Kisbey, Sask.

### FEBRUARY

- 3 Hill 70 Quantock Ranch, Barn Burnin' Bull Sale, at the ranch, Lloydminster, Sask.
- 11 Diamond M Ranch 7th Annual Bull Sale, at the ranch, Estevan, Sask.
- 28- Calgary Bull Sale, Century Downs, Mar. 1 Calgary, Alta.

### MARCH

- 3 Davidson Gelbvieh & Lonesome Dove Ranch 29th Annual Bull Sale, at our bull yards, Ponteix, Sask.
- 4 R Plus Simmentals 18th Annual Bull & Female Sale, at the farm, Estevan, Sask.
- 6 Belvin Angus 5th Annual Bull Sale, at the ranch, Innisfail, Alta.
- 27 Anderson Cattle Company Annual Bull & Female Sale, at the farm, Swan River, Man.
- 29 Rivercrest Angus Ranch, at the Rivercrest ranch, Alliance, Alta.
- 29 Tannis Ranches 2nd Annual Bull Sale, at the ranch, Water Valley, Alta.

### APRIL

- 7 Crescent Creek Angus 20th Annual Bull & Female Sale, on the farm, Goodeve, Sask.
- 10 Rodgers Red 45th Annual Performance Bull Sale, at Perlich Bros. Auction Mart, Lethbridge, Alta.
- 12 South View Ranch Red and Black Angus Bull Sale, at the ranch, Ceylon, Sask. 🍁

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Your contact is Mike Millar  
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The Canadian Gelbvieh Association held its 44th annual general meeting during Farmfair in Edmonton. The newly elected board of directors for 2017-18 are top row (l. to r.): Trevor Burks, Ryan Sommerfeld, James Jasper and Neil Overby (vice-president). Bottom row (l. to r.): Don Okell, Aaron Birch, Lee Wirgau (president).

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