



**FOOTHILLS FORAGE
AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION**

Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

Unit 4A, 710 Centre St. SE, High River, AB T1V 0H3
Phone: (403) 995-9466 ~ www.foothillsforage.com

GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS February 2025

Director's Note — Ben Campbell

Greetings FFGA Members

I hope this message finds you all well and energized as we kick off the new year. We live in Alberta so the Groundhog always says 6 more weeks of winter, but usually it's 8. I know many of you have been staying busy, so I wanted to take a moment to update you on some exciting events, opportunities, and a few important reminders as we move through January and into February.

In January, we hosted a fantastic Securing Success event aimed at helping producers access the RALP grant. If you haven't taken advantage of this grant yet, I highly recommend it—it's hands down the best support program we've had for our members. It's truly a game-changer when it comes to helping support the sustainability of your operations.

We have a few exciting events coming up in the next month that I encourage you to take part in. One of my favourites is Ranching Opportunities Conference – Feb 5 in Olds. It seems to always have something new but filled with old friends. Plus the college brewery is on campus and refills growlers! This conference covers everything from on-farm best practices to livestock health and market updates, all designed with the goal of promoting sustainable production. You'll find innovative sessions and workshops focused on practical solutions for today's industry challenges. There's also a Roots So Deep Documentary Viewing – Feb 13 in Strathmore for anyone interested in learning more about the positive impact ranching can have on soil health, this documentary

screening is a great opportunity to see how our industry can play a pivotal role in environmental stewardship.

We are pretty excited to be putting on a Gopher Control Workshop, if there's enough demand we might have to put on another. This workshop covered the gopher lifecycle, control methods, and strategies for managing ungulate damage and predation. You can even join (or look up afterwards) via livestream if you can't attend in person. You'll still be able to interact with presenters and ask questions live.

As we step into 2025 with historically high cattle prices hopes are high, a good time to consider livestock price insurance maybe? There's plenty to be excited about—new opportunities, more events, and, of course, continuing to build a stronger community of producers committed to sustainable ranching. I look forward to seeing you all at these upcoming events and continuing to work together to grow and strengthen our association.

Thank you again to our incredible FFGA staff and board members for your hard work and dedication to making these events happen. Let's continue to support each other as we work to make our operations better, more sustainable, and more successful.

Ben Campbell

(Photo: Ben Campbell)



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FOOTHILLS FORAGE & GRAZING ASSOCIATION

Member Renewal 2025

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association Membership is \$50 (+GST), Membership is per operation and covers family & staff of each operation.

For Details:
www.foothillsforage.com/membership

On the Cover: Photo: Novel Auscultation Technology for Sheep Pregnancy at Ranching Opportunities in Olds

Thank you for your support!



Increase energy in feed for cold cows



Photo: FFGA

Cold temperatures, snow and ice can stress cattle, but focusing on animal health and nutrition can protect them against the harsh elements.

Winter arrived with a vengeance across much of the Midwest in January as temperatures dropped below zero. Extreme cold, ice and snow put Missouri cattle at risk, says Eric Bailey, University of Missouri Extension state beef cattle nutrition specialist.

“When the temperature is below the lower critical temperature, a cow in adequate body condition with a heavy winter coat will use energy to maintain body temperature,” he says. “When windchill dips below 19 degrees F, cattle need extra energy to keep warm. They will eat more and need higher-quality feed to compensate for the cold.”

Identifying cold stress in the herd is as simple as looking at a cow’s back. While cows grow a thick winter coat, MU Extension dairy specialist Chloe Collins notes that a lack of snow on their backs is a clear indicator of cold stress.

She urges farmers, whether a pasture-based operation or beef producer running cow-calf pairs, to recognize the signs of cold stress and know how to mitigate it in the coming months. And it comes down to nutrition and basic animal husbandry.

Give cattle more energy

During extreme cold events, cattle tend to elevate their metabolic

rate, which then increases their heat production, Collins explains. This process helps to raise the body temperature, but it also increases appetite and feed intake.

Bailey recommends cattle producers still grazing stockpiled tall fescue feed 0.5% of their body weight per day in supplement to provide extra energy during the extreme cold. “For a 1,200-pound beef cow,” he explains, “that’s 6 pounds of supplement each day.”

For those feeding hay, he suggests offering higher-quality hay during cold snaps, along with supplements.

Protection from the cold

Cattle are more susceptible to the cold than producers may sometimes see, so there is a need to offer extra animal protection during these times.

MU Extension livestock specialist Elizabeth Picking shares tips on preparing your herd:

Windbreaks. Minimize cold stress with windbreaks like lean-tos, barns, trees, stacked bales, hollows or brushy fencerows. Feeding in sheltered areas encourages cattle to gather there.

Cover. Wet cattle struggle to stay warm. Provide shelter — such as lean-tos, barns or trees — during rain, sleet or low temperatures.

Bedding. Use straw, hay, wood shavings, rubber mats or mulch to keep cattle warm, especially calves. Bedding prevents heat loss and reduces frostbite risk. Bailey adds that proper bedding in winter protects bull fertility. “Bulls can sustain long-term damage to fertility if forced to lie on frozen ground,” he says.

Water. Ensure cattle have access to unfrozen water. Mature beef cattle require up to 30 gallons of water per day. Heated or frost-free waterers are ideal. Electrolytes or salt mixes can boost water intake.

Bailey says these guidelines for nutrition and health can

help keep cattle safe and ensure they continue producing high-quality beef.

Other signs of cold stress

Collins offers two other changes in cattle that producers should note in determining cold stress.

1. **Behavior.** When it is cold, cattle will start to form tight huddles and look generally uncomfortable. If you’re seeing this in your herd, it may be time to find a location with more shelter or wind blocks. The more time they spend huddled up, the less time they’re spending eating.
2. **Breathing.** These signs may not be as easy to observe from across the pasture. If you’re able to get close to your cattle, look at their breathing rates and see if they are shivering. Cattle that are cold will take deeper breaths and overall have decreased respiration. They will also shiver to generate more body heat.

Author: Mindy Ward

Original Article: <https://www.beefmagazine.com/feed/increase-energy-in-feed-for-cold-cows>



ROOTS SO DEEP

COMMUNITY VIEWING

JOIN STRATHMORE HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY GREENHOUSE, WHEATLAND COUNTY AND FOOTHILLS FORAGE & GRAZING ASSOCIATION FOR AN EVENING SOCIAL WHERE COMMUNITY MEMBERS WILL VIEW THE FIRST OF A 4-PART DOCUMENTARY SERIES CALLED: ROOTS SO DEEP (YOU CAN SEE THE DEVIL DOWN THERE). THESE VIDEOS FOLLOW INVENTIVE FARMERS AND MAVERICK SCIENTISTS BUILDING A PATH TO SOLVING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH HOOVES, HEART AND SOIL. ATTENDEES WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS WHAT THEY LEARN FROM THE VIDEO WITH LOCAL RANCHERS & FARMERS. FREE TO ATTEND. REGISTRATION IS PREFERRED BUT NOT REQUIRED: WWW.FOOTHILLSFORAGE.COM/EVENTS

FEBRUARY 13, 2025

5:30 PM

STRATHMORE HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE

Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Workshop



February 18, 2025
Mountain View County Office
9:00am - 3:00pm

Workshop Details:

- Workshop will begin at 9:00am and wrap-up around 3:00pm
- Lunch will be provided
- Please bring laptop or tablet
- Please bring information on your water sources & water bodies if you have them
- If you are renewing your EFP and you have your old binder, please bring it as this can be helpful

Please register before February 11, 2025
www.foothillsforage.com/efp2025



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Badgers in Alberta – More than Just Big Holes.



Photo: SALTs & NCC

Why Badgers??

Badgers are often thought of as a seemingly larger equivalent to the prolific Richardson's ground squirrel, just with bigger holes. What may be lesser known is how these big holes, or badger burrows, play an important role in grassland ecosystems. Networks of badger burrows, or "burrow webs", provide a host of benefits and their presence can be a good indicator of rangeland health. But for many, the beneficial role badgers play may be as cryptic as the animal itself.

Status and Threats

Badgers spend most of their lives underground. When above ground, badgers move relatively quickly and low to the ground with a seemingly camouflaged pelage, often making them hard to spot. Badgers are mem-

bers of the weasel, or Mustelidae, family. There are four subspecies of badgers found across North America. The subspecies of North American badger found in Alberta, and across the Prairie Provinces, is referred to by their latin name as *Taxidea taxus taxus*. This subspecies of "prairie badger" are considered a species of Special Concern (Federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, COSEWIC) however very little is known about their current distributions or abundance. Where badgers are known to occur include parkland, prairie and cold desert habitats with availability of preferred prey and silty or loamy soils that when tunneled are less likely to collapse. Key threats to badgers across Canada include road mortality, habitat loss from land conversion and degradation, and removal of primary prey (i.e. ground squirrels) via poison or shooting. Removal of badgers directly to reduce potential risk to livestock and machinery is another common source of mortality, often via secondary poisoning or shooting.

Life History

Badgers live up to 6 years in the wild, mate between July and August and are most sensitive from human

disturbance in the spring when rearing their young, typically between March and April. Badgers give birth to an average of 2 – 3 young, or kits, and disperse from their mothers within about six months or as early as late May or June. Juvenile dispersal distances vary from 52 – 110 km for females and males, respectively. Similarly, home range sizes for individual badgers vary substantially by sex, ranging anywhere from 2 – 300 km squared, and depending upon prey availability. Often mistaken to be a true hibernator, badgers are active throughout the year and during the coldest months may go through periods of torpor, or resting state.

Digging is their specialty. They dig not only to create their burrowed dwellings, places to rest, feed and rear their young, but as an effective hunting strategy of fossorial prey. To support their evolutionary strategy, badgers have flat, oblong bodies, short legs and ears, and lose skin around their necks allowing them to squeeze into narrow burrow holes and tunnels with little trouble. They are known for their distinct striped facial markings and weigh up to about 8.16 kg (19 pounds) for females and 13.6 kg

(Continued on page 7)



Photo: SALTs & NCC

(continued from page 6)

(30 pounds) for males. As voracious diggers, badgers have long, round, robust claws that can make quick work of a road cut, open meadow, or pasture, and is no slouch when it comes to moving rock and ripping through tree roots. Badgers also have very sharp teeth, though mainly used for hunting and consuming prey rather than for defense.

Benefits of Badgers

Badgers are generalist predators that hunt everything from bird eggs to reptiles to slightly larger mammals such as muskrats but small mammals the majority of their diet is made up of small mammals, mainly rodents such as ground squirrels and prairie dogs. Badgers are estimated to consume 2-3 ground squirrels per day and can knock a population of squirrels down by up to 50% while in the area. The disproportionate impacts by just a few badgers on a foraging small mammals place them in the running as a keystone predator in

grassland systems, limiting ground squirrel numbers and improving rangeland vegetative availability and health. For example, a few badgers are capable of preying on over 300 ground squirrels in a summer season equating to 1 AUM (Animal Unit Month) or feed for 1 cow calf pair. And interestingly, a badger's hunting success can be further enhanced when paired alongside a cooperative coyote.

Badgers also promote grassland biodiversity. Vacant burrows created by badgers become habitat for a wide range of secondary users, such as Western rattlesnake, Great Basin Spadefoot toad, and Western Tiger Salamander as well as Endangered Swift fox and Burrowing owls. In addition to other co-occurring burrowing mammals, their extensive excavations can function as a natural disturbance, enhancing soil structure and composition, increasing water infiltration, soil aeration, nutrient cycling and organic decomposition

rates, and supporting vascular plant and soil invertebrate diversity.

Living with badgers...

All in all, the presence of these prairie weasels can be considered a good indicator of grassland health and ecosystem resilience. Not always easy to do so, but exploring ways to coexist with badgers can offer vital and beneficial contributions for prairie species and systems. Existing considerations to mitigate the impacts of badgers, limit disturbance to badgers during sensitive periods, and to provide new ideas and fill knowledge gaps about badgers in Alberta and across the prairies can be found online at: <https://www.prairiebadger.ca/>

Author: Nikki Heim
M.Sc., RPBio
Wildlife Ecologist



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Calving and Cow Nutrition in Extreme Cold



Photo: FFGA

Calving during the winter months can present some unique challenges. Cold and/or wet weather, higher birth weights, fewer hours of daylight and in most herds this is the time of year when we, as producers, are the primary source of nutrition provided in the form of harvested forage and supplemental feeds. What can we do to make calving in the late winter months as problem-free as possible? GET PREPARED!

Calving Kit and Facilities

Prior to calving Season it is important to take inventory of our facilities. Our working pens, chutes and alley ways need to be in good working order. If we have a calving barn or indoor facility remember to check cameras, batteries and light bulbs. We want all facilities ready BEFORE we find ourselves assisting that first heifer in the calving process.

To be fully prepared, have the following list of supplies in a cooler, bucket or tool box:

- Colostrum, teat cannula and feeding bottle
- Flashlight and batteries
- OB Sleeves
- Non-detergent lubricant
- Antiseptic
- OB chains and calf puller
- Paper towels
- Rope halter
- Large cloth towel

Also, understand the three stages of bovine parturition. It's important to know what to expect when a cow or heifer goes into labor in order to know when and how to provide assistance.

In regard to colostrum, sooner is better. If you come upon a newborn calf and are not certain it has adequately nursed. Administer colostrum via tube feeder as soon as possible. Insuring an adequate amount of colostrum is ingested by new-

borns is cost effective.

Cold Weather Impacts Nutritional Requirements

Cold, wet weather drives up cow nutritional requirements and cows should be fed accordingly. The Mesonet Cattle Comfort Advisor is an excellent tool for monitoring weather conditions and the impact they have on cattle.

According to the Mesonet Cattle Comfort Advisor, cow energy requirements increase 1% for each degree the cattle comfort index is below 32 degrees F. This energy need will double to 2% if the animal is wet to the skin. In regard to new born calves, consider that in the birth process they are leaving the cozy environment of their mother's womb at a temperature of 101-102 degrees F and hitting the ground at temperatures as much as 100 degrees colder. Add in rain, snow, muddy ground or high winds and the situation can be catastrophic for newborns. While nature equips calves with a limited amount of brown adipose tissue which is burned internally to create heat for survival. Ex-

treme cold can overwhelm the ability to create enough internal heat and hypothermia can occur. Calves suffering from hypothermia are more susceptible to naval infections, pneumonia and scours.

Best management practices for cold weather calving include:

- Provide adequate wind breaks, shelter and bedding so cows can separate and calve in a warmer, dryer, protected environment.
- Plan ahead to provide the additional protein and energy needs of cows during the final trimester of pregnancy and the beginning of lactation.
- Sort first calf heifer from cows and manage accordingly. Heifers are inexperienced and more likely to need a higher level of attention during calving and the initial stages of claiming and raising a calf.

Author: Mark Johnson

Original Article: <https://www.drovers.com/news/beef-production/calving-and-cow-nutrition-extreme-cold>

SOUTHERN ALBERTA
GRAZING SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

SAVE
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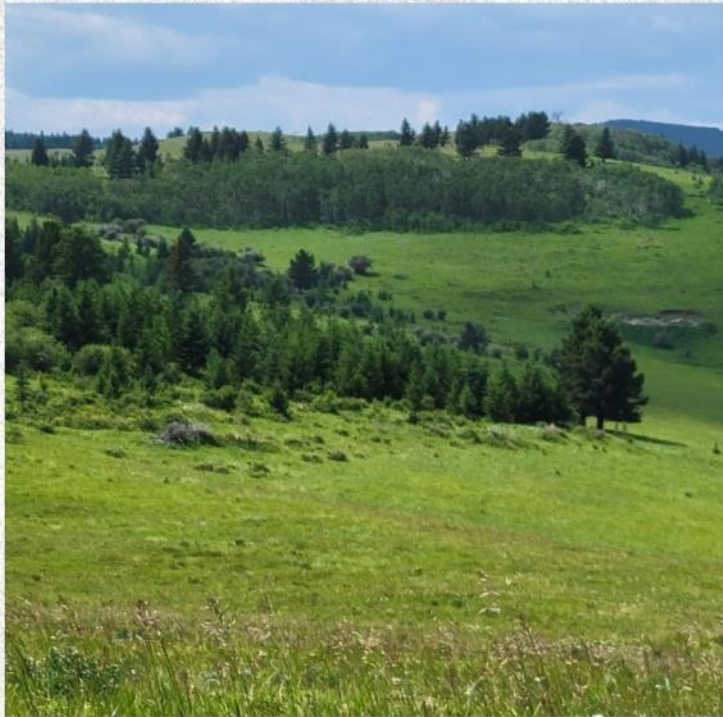
TWIN BUTTE, ALBERTA
JULY 16 & 17, 2025

Details to come

f Grazing Schools For Women



FOOTHILLS FORAGE &
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Presents:

2025 Annual General Meeting

Featuring:

Our Own Device

March 14, 2025
Heritage Inn Hotel, High River

Registration: 4:30pm
AGM Business Meeting: 5:00pm
Supper: 6:00pm
Live Band and Dance: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

Please note, you must be a member in good standing to vote during the Business Meeting. Memberships can be purchased online at:
www.foothillsforage.com/membership
or at the door (Cash or Cheque only)

We currently do not have any Director seats available on the Board this year.



COST:

FFGA Member: \$40/ Non-Member: \$50

Please register before: March 7, 2025

www.foothillsforage.com/agm2025

FARM TO FORK

DIRECT MARKETING WORKSHOP

February 24, 2025 - 9:30am - 3:30pm

Goldenrod Community Hall, AB - 772, Airdrie, AB T0M 0E0



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

INGRID JOHNSON- 2022 NUFIELD SCHOLAR

Ingrid is the co-owner of Onward Ranch, a cow/calf operation. Through their website, grass-finished beef is shipped across BC to doorsteps, first in BC to do so. During Ingrid's Nuffield experience, she studied 'How primary producers can direct market their farm products from farm to consumer door through urban-rural connections'.



PRODUCER PANEL

BRANDON TOEWS - ROUTE 304 CATTLE CO

As third-generation farmers and ranchers, Brandon and Danielle have been immersed in rural life. The couples upbringing on nutritious pasture-raised beef has fueled their passion to bring that same quality to individuals seeking farm-to-table meats.



CASEY TOEWS - FISHBURN RANCH

Fishburn Ranch is a family operation in Southwestern Alberta. They are passionate about how working in harmony with nature can maximize the potential of our grasslands, provide nutrient-dense food for our communities, and chart a sustainable path forward for the future of agriculture.



BARRY DOERKSEN - GEMSTONE GRASSFED BEEF

Gemstone is a fourth-generation farming and ranching family from Gem, Alberta. Gemstone Grassfed Beef prides themselves in producing high quality grass finished beef that is tender, nutrient-dense, and well marbled! They believe the combination of soils, pastures, crops, cattle genetics and management are unique to their farm.



Register at: <https://www.foothillsforage.com/farmtofork>

COST:
FFGA or CAFLA Member: \$25
Non-Member: \$35



Plan now for spring pasture management



Photo: FFGA

Some level of drought in the Dakotas has been sticking around for the past several years, according to U.S. Drought Monitor reports. With these dry conditions in the fall, effects on grazing systems and pastures could include compromised root reserves, depleted forage supplies, and strain on soil and water resources.

All of this could add up to challenging spring conditions, but taking proactive steps now can help prepare pastures for recovery.

Assess conditions

The South Dakota State University Extension says to start assessing by conducting a forage inventory to evaluate feed supplies. This should include hay, silage and other stored feed to determine whether your reserves can carry your operation through to early spring or if additional feed is needed.

Check out your pastures to gauge the health. Less soil moisture is a result of reduced rainfall, which can lead to weakened plant roots and bare patches in the pasture. Overgrazed or bare areas are more susceptible to erosion and slow recovery come spring.

Consider prioritizing these most vulnerable areas in your grazing and recovery plans.

Develop a plan

Creating a strategic grazing plan this winter can help minimize stress on pastures while preserving forage for spring. SDSU says to rotate livestock carefully to avoid overgrazing areas already stressed from a dry fall. As cattle need adequate nutrition to sustain them through the winter, reducing stock density and providing supplemental feed may be necessary depending on drought severity on

your operation.

Winter grazing, when done correctly, has little to no influence on the coming year's production. Although dormant grasses can be hardier, with carbohydrate reserves stored underground, overgrazing still is a concern that can affect pasture health come spring.

Focus on grazing pastures that received slightly more moisture, and temporary fencing can be a useful tool to control livestock movement while protecting areas that need more recovery.

Monitor stocking rates

Your stocking rates should not be greater than the carry capacity of the pasture, ensuring resource management and optimal forage production. Adjusting the stocking rate early and assessing often will help prevent loss of forage production.

Evaluate your herd size, and consider selling cull animals or leading additional grazing land to reduce pressure on rangelands. Reducing stocking rates can be a difficult decision, but it is often necessary to protect the long-term health of your land.

SDSU says another strategy is to designate reserve pasture for spring grazing. These will be areas that are not heavily grazed in the fall and may be able to recover faster as winter and spring precipitation improves. This will ensure that you have high-quality forage available at the start of the grazing season.

Plan ahead for feeding

Winter grazing doesn't eliminate the need to feed hay, but it can be used as a strategy to reduce the amount of hay required. Dormant grasses contain less than 6% crude protein, and cows should be provided with adequate supplementation to meet nutritional requirements.

Hay, silage and grain-based rations all can be used to stretch forage supplies, but it's vital to balance feeds properly with the nutritional needs of your livestock. Don't discount corn-


stalks or soybean stubble as an affordable and effective option while managing carefully to maintain soil health for next year's crop.

Plenty of challenges come from a dry fall, but within that challenge is an opportunity to implement adaptive management strategies. With careful timing and proper management, ranchers can reduce the influence of drought stress while setting the stage for a successful spring grazing season.

Author: Sarah McNaughton-Preston

Original Article: <https://www.farmprogress.com/pasture/plan-now-for-spring-pasture-management>

PODCAST CORNER



What is FFGA listening to?


Monthly Podcast recommendations given by FFGA Directors

PODCAST CHANNEL

WORKING COWS

TITLE

INVESTING HERD HEALTH WITH DR. TOM ROSKOS



SCAN ME

LINK

<https://workingcows.net/ep-389-dr-tom-roskos-investing-herd-health/>



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FFGA 2025 Bursary

Calling all post secondary students

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For all qualifications & to apply visit:

www.foothillsforage.com/bursary2025



SCAN ME

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(403) 363-4923

Ben Campbell
(403) 803-9190

Staff

Manager:

Laura Gibney
manager@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 998-4687

Communications Coordinator:

Kayla Minor
comm@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 682-7116

Environmental Coordinator:

Sonja Bloom
enviro@foothillsforage.com
Cell: (403) 612-7204

Mission: Assisting producers in profitably improving their forages and regenerating their soils through innovation and education.

Vision: We envision a global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

This Publication is made possible by our major funder - Results Driven Agriculture Research



FFGA is a proud member of



CRSB
Canadian Roundtable
for Sustainable Beef