



**FOOTHILLS FORAGE  
AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION**

*Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture*

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# GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS January 2025

## Director's Note — Daniel Doerksen

### Greetings FFGA Members

I trust everyone had a great Christmas break and I hope everyone was able to get some down time to spend with family and friends over the holiday season. January is always a great time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the new year ahead. I always enjoy the Christmas break when things slow down a bit and we can take a bit of time to spend with family and friends and eat copious amount of food day after day.

Things have been busy on the ranch this fall we got an early snow fall and a good amount which was welcomed but it was followed by a chinook a few weeks later and the cold weather again so it has trapped amount of our early winter grazing which now has us feeding earlier than normal. The good thing is the grazing is still there, and we can still utilize it at some point.

Looking back at 2024 there was a lot to be grateful for and some exciting events that took place.

Most of Alberta was able to get enough spring rain to get grass started and that was a welcomed in our part of the world as we were getting short on grass and feed was running low. While we did not get an abundance of rain it was timely and that at times can have more benefit than the amount. Fall brought some much-needed moisture as the summer here was pretty hot and dry. While moisture in fall is not growing anymore grass its nice to know it can still rain

and maybe bank a bit of moisture to start the next year. It was also another great year in the cattle markets, and it seems like every week gets a little bit better. At some point it will hit its peak and start to correct itself, but when that is and how hard the correction happens is anyone's guess. Until then lets just enjoy these markets.

It was another great year for FFGA, and I really enjoy the board and staff that we get the privilege to work with. There were a lot of great events this last year but probably the highlight for many was the Western Canadian Conference on Soil and Grazing. It was another sold out event this year. I always enjoy this conference and all of the networking and people you meet who are out of the box thinkers and implementing their new and crazy ideas on there operations.

Looking into 2025 there is a lot to be excited about. Good cattle markets and we have some banked up moisture to get the grass started in spring. FFGA also has a great lineup of events coming in 2025 and I look forward to seeing many of you at these different events. Keep checking our website throughout the year for a list of what is coming.

Happy New Year everyone!

**Daniel Doerksen**



*(Photo: Daniel Doerksen)*

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28  
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*On the Cover: Moving cattle. Photo: Daniel Doerksen*

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# Three steps to prepare for winter feeding of livestock



Photo: FFGA

Now is a good time to review winter feeding plans, according to University of Missouri Extension livestock specialist Eric Meusch.

“Forage growth has come to an end, so making sure producers have what they need to feed their livestock through the winter is important,” Meusch said. “These three basic steps and a sharp pencil can help them determine if they are ready for winter.”

## 1. Determine animal needs

Knowing how much feed you will need to get to spring green-up is the first step. Cows will eat about 3% of their body weight in dry matter each day. Dry cows will consume a little less. Lactating cows, growing calves, sheep, goats and horses will eat a little more. This means that a 1,000-pound cow would need about 30 pounds of dry matter intake a day.

If hay being fed is 85% dry matter, the cow would need 35 pounds of the hay to meet the 30-pound dry matter intake requirement. In this scenario, 50 cows would need 1,750 pounds of hay a day. If those 50 cows average 1,300 pounds, rather than 1,000 pounds, they will need about 2,300 pounds of hay a day.

“If we are going to feed those 50 1,300-pound cows hay from Jan. 1 until April 10 (99 days), they would consume almost 114 tons of hay. The key word being ‘consume,’” said Meusch. Handling, storing and feeding hay can lead to considerable

waste. “If we assume a total rate of waste to be 20%, we need to have 137 tons of hay on hand to meet our needs.”

With some minor adjustments, these calculations can be made for any type, class, size or number of livestock, he said. Whether it is one horse, 50 cows or 150 sheep, it is important to think through what your animals will need to consume over the winter to make sure there is enough feed on hand.

## 2. Assess forage inventory

When you have a good estimate of your animals’ needs, the next step is to take stock of how much forage (pasture, hay, etc.) you have. Evaluate your pastures and determine how much grazing you can do before you will need to feed hay. The more days you can spend grazing, the fewer days you will need to feed hay.

Hay bales don’t come in standard weights, so it is important to determine how much the hay bales weigh. Bale weights vary even if they are the same size. Depending on the density, a 4-by-5-foot round bale might weigh anywhere from 750 to 950 pounds, which is a difference of more than 20%. In our example, 137 tons would require 365 750-pound bales but only 288 950-pound bales.

## 3. Project needs for supplements

In this part of the country, stockpiled fescue pasture can make excellent winter feed, Meusch said. If cattle on pasture can meet their daily intake requirements (the pasture is not less than 4 inches in height), the nutritional quality will usually meet their needs. But hay can vary greatly in nutritional quality, and it’s important to supplement any nutrients the hay is lacking.

This can be done by testing the hay and developing a supplemental ration to fill in the gaps. Mixed grass hay in Missouri often tests sufficient for crude protein but in-

sufficient in total digestible nutrients (TDN, the measure for energy). If the cows in our example are fall-calving cows with young calves, they need a diet that is more than 60% TDN. If our hay is 55% TDN, we would need to provide a higher-energy supplement to make up for what the hay is lacking.

“Hopefully, following these basic steps can help you determine how well you have planned for feeding your livestock this winter,” said Meusch.

Livestock prices have been high, but it’s still important for producers to control their winter feed. If you find you don’t have enough hay on hand to get through the winter, it’s much cheaper and easier to buy now than it will be in late winter. Another option is to sell livestock so your animal needs better match your feeding budget.

In the end, one of the best ways to control winter feeding costs is through better pasture and grazing management, Meusch said. The more days animals graze, the more producers can reduce the need for hay and supplements.

Author: University of Missouri Extension

Original Article: <https://www.beefmagazine.com/livestock-management/three-steps-to-prepare-for-winter-feeding-of-livestock>

Happy New Year  
2025



# 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](http://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](http://www.foothillsforage.com/efp2025)



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# Tips to help cows, calves recover from difficult birth



Photo: Kayla Minor

A difficult calving is called dystocia. Providing the right care following dystocia makes a huge difference for both the dam and her calf.

A newborn calf actively shakes its head, snorts, shivers, takes deep breaths and tries to stand.

Weak calf syndrome occurs after a long labor — more than 30 minutes for cows and 60 minutes for heifers — when carbon dioxide builds up in the calf. This leads to poor breathing, slow heart rate and low internal body temperature. Weak calves are slow to stand and nurse, often becoming depressed. Many of these calves scour and die within their first week.

## Stimulate the calf

Good mothering stimulates calves. However, exhausted dams may show little interest in their calves. Hydrating the dam reduces her exhaustion and boosts her interest. Offer the dam warm water to drink right after the birth, and make it more interesting by mixing in electrolytes or milk replacer. Cows do not like to put their head into deep narrow buckets, so refill a short, shallow bucket until she is satisfied.

Pen the dam and calf together until their bond is established.

Sometimes, you need to act like the mom: Vigorously towel-dry the calf, tickle its nostrils with a firm piece of straw, pour cold water in its ear and turn it from side to side. Salting the calf or sprinkling sweet feed over it will stimulate the dam to lick the calf.

Giving caffeine orally perks up dull calves within 15 to 30 minutes. You can use caffeinated energy drinks — just read the label and give the ap-

propriate dose (100 to 200 milligrams of caffeine). Use a needleless syringe to gently deliver the dose to the back and left side of the calf's mouth.

The Madigan Squeeze Technique helps a newborn calf anytime in its first two days. This technique involves squeezing the calf's chest for 20 minutes by gently pulling on the trailing end of a soft rope that is looped three times around the calf. A rope halter works well for this. This mimics the squeeze through the birth canal, which helps the calf transition from a sleeplike state in the womb to being active outside.

Consult your veterinarian to determine if pain medication for the cow or calf following dystocia is warranted. A University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension research review of flunixin meglumine, meloxicam and acetylsalicylic acid found only acetylsalicylic acid to have the potential for reducing inflammation and pain following dystocia in dairy cattle.

## Provide colostrum

The calf must nurse several times in the first six hours to get colostrum. Hand-milk the cow, or feed good-quality refrigerated or frozen colostrum or colostrum replacer (containing 100 to 150 IgG per dose) when the nursing quantity or quality is suspect. Milk-based colostrum replacers are preferred over serum-based ones. Mix and feed colostrum replacers exactly as their label indicates. If the calf can't or won't nurse, use a bottle or an esophageal tube.


Whenever possible, and especially after assisted births, soak the newborn's navel in 7% iodine or another disinfectant recommended by your veterinarian. The navel is attached to the liver, and it will wick pathogens from the environment. Keep the calf's environment clean and dry before the navel dries and falls off.

Keep stressed calves following a difficult birth dry and warm by providing deep, fluffy bedding that covers their legs and belly when resting.

After dystocia, both cows and calves need hydration, time to bond and a well-bedded area in which to recover. Talk with your veterinarian about providing caffeine or a Madigan squeeze to the calf, or pain relief for the cow or calf following a difficult calving.

Author: Sandy Stuttgen

Original Article: <https://www.farmprogress.com/cattle-news/tips-to-help-cows-calves-recover-from-difficult-birth>


**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**



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

# SAVE THE DATE



# Ladies Livestock Lessons

*January 17th, 2025*

*Acme Hall, Acme AB*

For more details, visit: [www.RedBowAg.com](http://www.RedBowAg.com)



# Cameras make a difference in winter calving



Photo: Kayla Minor

Winter is here in full force, and freezing temperatures, large dumps of snow and short days can make winter calving a challenge for seed stock producers.

However, technologies such as calving cameras can help make it much easier by saving time and labour. For many, it has become a necessary tool on their operations.

## Winter calving in the north

Kevin Wirsta runs his operation, K-Cow Ranch, near Elk Point, Alta., where he raises purebred Herefords, Charolais and Black Angus. Currently, they calve out around 300 head and are slowly working to expand their herd. Wirsta focuses on moderate frame, thickness and milk production.

Ninety per cent of the Canadian population lives within 150 miles of the U.S. border. Because Wirsta lives north of Edmonton, he ranches farther north than many people.

That means things that affect all Canadian producers who winter calve, like the weather and the cold, are big considerations for Wirsta.

K-Cow's main herd calves between January and March. Because they have been doing this for around 30 years, Wirsta has settled into a routine. In the fall, he starts to bring his cattle from pasture closer to home so it is easier to monitor them. The cattle stay out in the field until they show signs of labour.

Wirsta sorts cattle once a week. He moves those that look close to giving birth into one of three pens, depending how close they are to labour.

Once the calves are born, they will stay in those pens with their mothers for

three days. If the weather holds up, Wirsta will turn them out to a bigger pen with shelter for three more days.

"If they're good from there, then they head for the fields, back out to the paddocks," he says.

He says the biggest challenge with their location is their cattle are usually on feed for longer, which is why he tries to keep them on pasture for as long as possible.

"A lot of times, birth weights can increase as you go north. Being on feed longer, the more you can keep your cows out on pasture, grazing and supplementing them out there, by far you're going to have way easier calving."

He says they make sure to have a good barn for the livestock and try to keep a close eye on them — especially at night.

"If there's something that's calving then certainly, we do go and we put her in (the barn). When it's -30 C, we do check hourly. And if it's warmer than that, generally it's every few hours."

## Helpful tech

Beef Cattle Research Council's website says producers who are winter calving must ensure they have the proper resources available to prevent hypothermia. Technology can help with this — particularly, calving cameras. Wirsta says without calving cameras, he doesn't know how they would get through winter calving.

On not-too-cold nights, they can just check their cattle on the cameras instead of getting up to check every hour. When they are checking hourly, they still use their cameras first, then go out to make sure they didn't miss anything. Calving cameras are also helpful because sometimes cows do not want to calve in front of a person. Cameras allow you to monitor their progress without disturbing them.

Not only do the cameras save them time, but they also save them sleep — something that is important for producers during those long calving months. It also helps to give peace of mind when Wirsta must leave the farm for something.

"When I was going to meetings, I phoned my neighbour to come over and

check cows every hour or every two hours," he says. "Now I just call them to come and put the cow in the barn because she's calving. So it makes a big difference. They know they're coming over for a reason."

Wirsta says they started using cameras 20 years ago and the upgrades to the technology have been very helpful.

The biggest challenge for Wirsta was learning how to use the cameras. He says if you can have a thorough understanding of the technology, it helps when you are trying to implement it.

"I truly believe there should be schooling on them so that we can understand how to use them... most times, everybody says, 'Oh, they're just a plug and play.' Well, yes, I agree, but there's some technology to it that if you have a better understanding of it, it certainly works better."

There are different brands Canadian producers can look into, depending on what they want their cameras to do and what their budgets are. For example, OneCup AI has a couple of packages, ranging from \$2,400 to \$2,500, that come with cameras, a WiFi package and subscriptions to a couple of their programs. Cameras from Precision Cam can range from \$200 to over \$2,000.

Wirsta says the cameras aren't just beneficial in the winter — they are useful year-round on the ranch.

"I think once you have a camera, you'll think, 'Why didn't I get it 10 years ago?' They are certainly a lifesaver. As far as even checking your water bowls to see if they're thawed, you can zoom right in and see the water."

He adds they also use them during breeding season, when they do artificial insemination.

For winter calving, Wirsta doesn't need any more technology than his righthand man — the camera system.

"They're the biggest asset to the whole operation."

Author: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

Original Article: <https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/livestock/beef-cattle/cow-calf/cameras-make-a-difference-in-winter-calving/>



# RANCHING OPPORTUNITIES

February 5, 2025  
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January 30, 2025 - High River, AB  
10:00am - 3:30pm

This workshop will cover the Gopher Lifecycle and Control Methods, Managing and Preventing Ungulate Damage, Strategies for Predation Management, and Understanding Landowner Protection: The Legal Framework Surrounding Gophers.

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[www.foothillsforage.com/gophers](http://www.foothillsforage.com/gophers)



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# Annual forages can extend the grazing season



Photo: FFGA

Can extended grazing be gained by integrating annual forages into a perennial pasture rotational grazing system?

Kim Schneider, an assistant professor in the plant science department at the University of Guelph hopes to answer that question through a two-year study that incorporates annual forages into 48 acres of a perennial rotational grazing system at the Elora Beef Research Centre.

“We have limited Canadian data from actual grazing trials,” Schneider told attendees of the Canadian Forage and Grassland Association’s annual conference last month. “So, the project objective is to quantify the agronomic and economic impacts of integrating annual forages as a component of a perennial pasture rotational grazing system.”

The study uses a two-year rotation of summer annuals planted in the first year, followed by a winter cereal such as fall rye or winter triticale, to mimic winter wheat within a cash crop rotation aimed at grazing, not harvesting.

The study consists of half a dozen eight-acre fields divided into one-acre paddocks planted with four different mixtures per field, replicated three times, and grazed mid-July and mid-August.

The four mixes used were: sorghum-Sudan grass planted at a rate of 30 lb./acre; pearl millet at 25 lb./acre; an eight-species diverse mix of oats, annual ryegrass, pearl millet, sorghum-Sudan grass, peas, berseem clover, Winfred brassica and chicory, at 51 lb./acre, plus a Master Graze grazing corn at 28,000 kernels/acre on 30-inch rows.

“Three of the fields would be in each phase of the rotation in a given year,” Schneider said. “(The one-acre paddocks) give us the opportunity to

experiment with some of the different mixtures and different species.”

Forage composition, quality and yield were measured.

“The grazing corn ... didn’t do well in these conditions. We had a lot of weed pressure,” Schneider said. “The sorghum-Sudan grass, pearl millet, was OK but also had a fair bit of weed pressure in that July timing.”

In the first round of grazing, the eight-species mix produced the best dry matter yield at more than 1,500 kilograms per hectare and had the lowest weed pressure, followed by sorghum-Sudan grass, pearl millet and grazing corn. There was no statistical difference in weed pressure outside of the diverse mix, which had half the weed pressure of the others, said Schneider.

The regrowth leading up to August grazing saw sorghum-Sudan grass and pearl millet make substantial yield gains with fewer weeds. The diverse mix performed well but yield dropped.

“Our warm seasons (varieties) did start to come out more, as expected, but they were still competing,” Schneider said, adding the sorghum-Sudan grass and pearl millet, while not statistically yielding better than the diverse mix, were slightly better numerically.

The total dry matter yield, including weeds, from mid-July to mid-August showed a tight race between sorghum-Sudan grass at 3,080 kg/ha, diverse mix at 2,930 kg/ha and pearl millet at 2,730 kg/ha.

The grazing corn logged a dismal 1,470 kg/ha, but Schneider said a grazing corn side trial showed it performed better with weed control or inter-seeding with a base mix.

Schneider ran a secondary trial comparing C4 annual forages planted alone or at a half rate with a base mix of oats, annual ryegrass, peas and berseem clover on a smaller scale.

In addition, she wanted to test which combinations the cattle preferred; a C3 species like oats, or Sudan grass, Japanese millet, pearl millet, grazing sorghum, sorghum-Sudan grass and teff grass.

Her team planted the varieties with and without a base. The mid-July yields

showed the base mix combinations produced, on average, 3,510 kg of dry matter per hectare and those without a base yielded 1,750 kg/ha. Schneider said the base mix recorded eight per cent weed pressure compared to 36 per cent for the monoculture.

Pearl millet with the base recorded the highest yields with the lowest weed pressure for first grazing.

The mid-August grazing monoculture yields were better, with 1,282 kg/ha compared to 772 kg/ha compared to the C4 in a base mix, said Schneider.

“The total yield (4,282 kg DM/ha) was still better when you had that base mix,” she said. “One thing we’d like to try is planting the base mix with a little higher seeding rate on the C4s so by mid-August, you still have some of the benefits of weed control and the greater yields from that earlier round.”

There wasn’t a significant difference between the monoculture species’ performance, except for teff grass. However, the data suggest Sudan grass, pearl millet, grazing sorghum and sorghum-Sudan grass would have easily supported a third round of grazing.

Schneider said the early data indicates warm season annuals hold promise in helping negotiate the summer slump but more data is needed before drawing conclusions.

“All of the warm seasons we tested showed promising results with the exception of teff grass and all of them were also eaten teff again with the exception of turf grass,” said Schneider.

She said that the cows would have eaten the teff grass if necessary but they preferred the other C4 annuals.

While the study showed planting into a base mix may decrease weed pressure for mid-July grazing, it can potentially reduce yields by mid-August due to competition. However, Schneider hypothesized that adjusting the seeding rate to a higher C4 to C3 ratio could mitigate the issue. She plans to test new rates this season.

Author: Diana Martin

Original Article: [https://](https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/crops/annual-forages-can-extend-the-grazing-season/)

[www.canadiancattlemen.ca/crops/annual-forages-can-extend-the-grazing-season/](https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/crops/annual-forages-can-extend-the-grazing-season/)



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**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.

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