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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS

November 2024

Director's Note — Jerry Baerg

Greetings FFGA Members

Greetings to all you grazers out there. Fall is here and it's getting pretty frosty. We are all trying to get as much fall grazing as we can before some water sources freeze up. It has been a great year for grazing crop regrowth in my area near Linden. It has been another interesting year for us all. The year started out with some much needed moisture. We were all very thankful for that. Here we grew more grass than we had seen for several years. July came with heat and no moisture and the annual crops suffered from that. Thankfully we had enough growth to grow our winter feed. We put some up into bales and laid down some swath grazing. Thankfully we got some rain in August and September and things got green again. Every year is a new adventure for planning grazing and winter feed.

It is a great year with the high cattle markets. It helps to offset the high cost of inputs that we face. The question is do we sell our calves? Or do we background them? Do we raise our own replacements? Or do we buy in? The answer is not the same for everyone. We all have different opportunities or unfair advantages that will affect what is the right decision for us.

FFGA has a Ranching for Profit School coming up on November 17 in Okotoks. How many of you are going? I took the time last winter and went to a

Ranching For Profit School in Abilene Texas. It was a great experience. Lots of info at the school with many aspects of ranching from economics, grazing, ecology, and business structure. Those don't complete list of what we all learned but it all comes together to make ranching profitable.

FFGA also has an evening meeting in Rockyford on Nov 14 with Annessa Good-Hassard. She will be talking about succession planning. One more event you don't want to miss is the Western Canada Conference on Soil health and Grazing in December. There is a lot to take in on those three days that could help shape the way you view things on your ranch. It is almost full, so don't wait to long to register!

Take care all of you!

Jerry Baerg

(Winter Feed. Photo: Jerry Baerg)



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On the Cover: Cattle Drone School with Landview Drones on Sept 25 & 26. Photo: FFGA

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Livestock producers: Prep for winter now



Photo: FFGA

Getting caught in the middle of winter with no supplies, frozen water and livestock to feed is a scary place to be. However, it is one that can be easily avoided with some preparations now.

Securing hay to ensure you have a steady supply throughout the cold months is No. 1 on the winter preparation checklist, says Ron Lemenager, a beef cattle specialist and professor of animal sciences at Purdue University. He says you should check your inventory now and figure out how long that supply will last.

Here are some additional items to put on your winter prep to-do list:

Prevent frozen water. If you have automatic waterers with heating elements, test them to see if they're working. Or, if you plan to use tanks, ensure you have tank heaters on hand.

"Making sure that your water supply is frost proof, or not freezable, is an important piece," Lemenager says.

Check equipment. Pull aside equipment that you plan to use over the winter for your livestock — like your hay-feeding tractor or the one that runs the feed-mixing wagon or your skid steer — to perform maintenance before the cold months. Lemenager says to ensure those primary vehicles and machinery have adequate levels of anti-freeze for cold protection, and he adds that you should check batteries.

"When it gets cold, that's when stuff is going to start to fail," Lemenager says. "Now is the time to look over your equipment, including your waterers, to make sure it's ready for cold weather."

Build a windbreak. Wind chill can affect nutritional requirements for your livestock and cause their body condition score to drop if those requirements are

not adjusted. To avoid that scenario, Lemenager recommends constructing a windbreak if there is not already a tree line or natural windbreak present.

"Just try to reduce the wind speed," Lemenager says. "Cattle can handle the cold weather, but the wind chill is what really changes nutritional requirements."

When the wind chill drops below 30 degrees F, nutritional requirements go up by 13% for each 10-degree drop in temperature. For cattle with poor body condition or a wet coat, that number is closer to 30% for every 10-degree drop. Simply building a windbreak could significantly reduce that wind chill component.

Track condition. Starting now, pick a handful of individuals from your herd or flock to track throughout the winter — like a livestock barometer, Lemenager says. He encourages producers to write down their current body condition and check on them monthly. This will allow you to make nutritional adjustments if you notice some of those body condition scores dropping. You need to start tracking now to ensure you have an accurate starting point going into cold months.

Prevent mud. If you have drainage issues causing muddy conditions, Lemenager advises moving some dirt or rebuilding a mound to help drainage.

"Mud is always a potential problem, particularly in a dry lot or semi-dry lot," Lemenager says. He adds that you also could add heavy-use pads to those areas. Additionally, there is Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service to install those pads.

Make the most of hay supply

Pasture time will be cut short in some areas of the state, with droughty conditions affecting growth. Without many rainfall events, producers could be pulling their livestock off pasture sooner than normal.

"Pasture growth has really slowed down, and it's because we didn't get enough rain," Lemenager says. "Local hay could be in short supply."

Producers should inventory their hay supply now, Lemenager

says. A good rule of thumb for cattle is to multiply the average weight of one of your cows by 3% to account for consumption and waste. For a 1,300-pound cow, that number would come to about 39 pounds of hay dry matter disappearance from inventory per day per cow. Adjusting for moisture, this works out to be about 46 pounds. This can give you an idea of how much hay you'll go through this winter.

Although it may be tempting to graze pasture longer to save hay, Lemenager stresses the importance of avoiding overgrazing. With dry conditions this year, pastures are even more susceptible to damage from overgrazing, and it will affect not only winter plant survival but also next year's forage yield.

More hay feeding could lead to a shortage, Lemenager says, which will lead to higher hay prices. However, those prices likely won't appear until late winter, when producers discover they don't have enough hay. For that reason, Lemenager recommends evaluating your inventory and purchasing additional hay when prices are cheaper.

Another option would be forward contracting and storing byproducts such as soybean hulls, corn gluten or distiller's grains if you have the space. Commodity prices for those byproducts are lower now, so Lemenager says now is the time to buy before everyone else is in the market.

"If you have the potential to store several tons of soybean hulls or corn gluten or distiller's grains, you need to be thinking about how to lock in some prices," Lemenager says. These byproducts could be a part of your supplementation strategy to ultimately help meet animal nutritional requirements and stretch your hay supply. A gravity wagon makes for a great place to store these dry products.

Author: Allison Lynch

Original Article: <https://www.farmprogress.com/farm-business-planning/livestock-producers-prep-for-winter-now>

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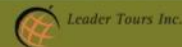
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Backgrounding basics – easing the transition from weaning to feeding



Photo: Kayla Minor

Adding weight to calves through backgrounding can be an effective way to increase the worth of both lower-value cattle and feeds. However, beef producers have to do their homework to make sure cattle transition successfully from weaning to feeding.

“If you have a good source of cheap feed, you can put a lot of pounds on in a short amount of time,” says Karin Schmid, research and production manager with Alberta Beef Producers. “There are some management things that are standard across systems, whether you’re feeding your own calves or whether you’re buying them,” she says. For example, producers will need to decide on what type of parasite control to use and determine whether implanting pencils out.

Schmid suggests that producers discuss health protocols with their vet to determine if they have adequate vaccine coverage, particularly for respiratory illness. It’s also important to work with a nutritionist to avoid problems related to ergot or other toxins.

“Until we can get a handle on how ergot can impact gains on feeder cattle, avoid it entirely,” she recommends.

There are different challenges depending on whether you outsource calves or retain your own, she adds.

“If it’s my calves at home, I’m thinking about low-stress weaning, whether that is nose flaps or whether that is fenceline weaning,” Schmid says.

Producers should also assess their facilities. “Unless you are going to

make this your job, it doesn’t make a ton a sense to build infrastructure for one year,” Schmid says.

Homegrown advantage

Trevor and Melissa Atchison background home-raised calves on their family operation, Poplar View Stock Farm, near Pipestone, Man. Years ago, they shifted their calving season back from early spring into May and June, and now wean calves in mid-November. They background their steers, targeting them for market at around 700 pounds in March. The heifers are backgrounded, then bred or pastured and sold the following season as yearlings.

Trevor Atchison credits low-stress weaning as a key factor to advancing their backgrounding program. “The biggest thing we do is use the Quiet Wean nose tags,” he says. “The calves hardly know they are weaned and once they come off the cows, they just start eating.

“They don’t pace the pen. They might bawl occasionally but they literally have their mouths full of hay,” he adds. When they run calves through the chute to insert nose paddles five to seven days prior to weaning, they also administer vaccinations. This reduces sickness and helps calves quickly adjust to life without mom.

Another practice Atchison uses to help smooth the transition is to introduce a feed ration to calves while they are still on the cow. A few days before separation, Atchison will start feeding calves a mix of silage or hay. He also puts creep feeders out with first-calf pairs in September to provide pellets to the calves. After weaning, he sorts lighter-weight calves off, and leaves them on a creep feeder.

“Light-weight calves do quite well on it as opposed to training to a bunk,” he says, adding that it also helps to keep them in a separate pen away from bigger animals, preventing them from having to compete for feed.

As they grow, they are sorted into other pens or left as a group, depending on the year.

Atchison works with a nutritionist to regulate rations as the winter progresses. “If it’s a prolonged cold spell, we need to adjust for that,” he says.

A long stretch of warm weather also requires them to cut their ration back to allow cattle to achieve gains without becoming too fleshy. They also pay close attention to stormy weather.

“If there is a bit of snow in the bunks or it’s cold or windy, they don’t want to come to eat,” Atchison explains, adding that their rumen slows down. “We try to feed them little bits several times a day to encourage them to eat. Even driving by or chasing them to the bunk to get out and move around helps.”

While the Atchisons have recently invested in feed bunks, for years they kept infrastructure minimal and relied on what they had on hand.

“We used existing corrals and added water bowls and changed some simple designs,” says Atchison. They have used portable windbreaks, bale rings and a small grain cart to supplement grain and pellets.

Mixing calves and meeting market targets

Producers interested in backgrounding outside cattle need to manage them carefully. “There’s more risk with death loss, bringing in disease and biosecurity issues,” Schmid says.

Mingling cattle from a variety of sources can result in more stress and higher treatment rates. Just-weaned calves sometimes struggle to find water so shrinking the pen size or removing the water bowl float to show running water can help, she adds.

Larry Schweitzer, manager of Hamiota Feedlot in Manitoba, backgrounds and feeds thousands of cattle assembled from across Canada. When

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information on incoming arrivals is limited, he says it's important to work quickly.

"Lots of times the trucks will arrive late at night, so giving those cattle a chance to rest and get long hay and get them processed and settled into their home pens is best," Schweitzer says. Having a dry pen with the finest quality hay available eases their arrival.

A lot of Schweitzer's custom backgrounding clients are other feedlots looking to manage inventory.

"They need cattle to come in at a certain time and a certain weight to target a certain market," he says. "We work with the nutritionist to get on the right path going forward," Schweitzer adds, in order to produce calves that meet specific windows.

"Having a marketing plan makes a big difference," Schmid agrees.

She adds that buying price insurance is something that backgrounders should consider. "Use it in a way that

covers your expenses and if you can secure a better price in the marketplace, that's gravy," she says.

Schweitzer suggests that protecting your market risk is especially important since the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some uncertainty.

Anticipating and averting challenges

For Atchison, staying on top of sickness is a number one concern. "Trying to keep tabs on illness if you're short on labour and it's cold and multiple things are happening on the same day can be a challenge," he says.

He adds that ailments can get out of hand in a hurry, and become costly in terms of reduced performance or even death loss. He also says it's important to have a backup plan for breakdowns.

"Feeding a (total mixed ration) is great, but when your wagon breaks down, what do you do?" he asks.

Finding and retaining employees is a priority for both Atchison and

Schweitzer. Schweitzer also says that keeping his employees healthy and preventing an outbreak of COVID-19 is a new challenge to mitigate.

"The people we have at our lot have a very specialized skillset," Schweitzer says. "We don't want to lose those people," he says, adding they would be hard to replace.

Backgrounding calves can be a value-added opportunity; however, managing calves during the post-weaning phase does come with added risk. Planning ahead, leaning on nutritionists and veterinarians and being aware of market risks are top factors that can help producers achieve a successful outcome.

Author: Tara Mulhern Davidson

Original Article: [https://](https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/features/backgrounding-basics-easing-the-transition-from-weaning-to-feeding/)

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Managing risk when marketing beef cattle



Photo: FFGA

For the past year, cattle prices have remained strong in Canada and look to stay that way in 2024.

However, this isn't set in stone and the market can be quick to change, as producers saw in March 2024 as avian influenza was first detected in dairy cattle in the U.S., introducing risk into a red-hot market. As a result, prices and price insurance were affected.

Now the markets have settled, but the memory of avian influenza has left people wondering: what is the best way to manage market risk?

The market

Brian Perillat is an agribusiness specialist and agricultural economist with Bullseye Feeds.

Perillat expects to see cattle numbers tighten over the long term.

"Cattle-on-feed numbers really haven't dropped versus last year, and historically are still relatively high. So, short term, we continue to see heifers go on feed and come to market," Perillat says in an interview.

He says right now, cow-calf producers are in the driver's seat because of the high demand from feedlots and processors as calf crops shrink, which provides opportunities to producers.

However, with these opportunities to capitalize on the market, there are challenges, as well.

"The challenge is to gain as much as you can for as long as you can," Perillat says. One challenge is that no one knows when this market will peak, he says. "So, you want to have a look at some risk management options."

That's why he says it's so important for producers to manage their risk.

Brenda Hagen, Livestock Price Insurance product owner at Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC), says cattle risk management can be a complex issue and producers should be aware of their options.

"We suggest producers make a risk management plan so they understand their breakeven point and risk tolerances," she says in an email.

Price insurance, put, call?

Many things affect the cattle markets, such as weather, feed availability, disease and trade barriers. Because the market is so volatile, it's important for producers to be aware of what their options are when it comes to managing market risk.

Jodie Griffin is the Livestock Price Insurance Program co-ordinator with Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation. As a rancher herself and a professional in the beef industry, Griffin knows exactly how volatile the markets can be — and how important it is for producers to know their risk management options.

Beef producers don't have as many tools to manage risk as other sectors, so it's important for them to have access to price insurance, Griffin says. Saskatchewan offers policy lengths as short as 12 to 16 weeks, or as long as 36 weeks.

"This is all about preparing for something that could happen in the future," Griffin says. "It's about getting them to the finish line, in a futures state to the market, and the risks that can happen between now and then."

Perillat says a call option shares some characteristics with price insurance. A call option takes advantage of a rising market — in this case, rising cattle futures. Producers can also protect themselves from rising costs — such as higher feed prices — or a rising Canadian dollar. Perillat says you can also buy a call option on the cattle futures if you're planning to buy cattle in the future but aren't prepared to do that yet.

"If the futures go up, then your

option value goes up and the gains you make there can offset the rising cost of the cattle. If the market goes down, you can buy the cattle cheaper, and then you are just out the value of the premium you paid for the cattle options," Perillat says.

Purchasing a put option establishes a floor price, Perillat says.

"Price insurance, it's a Canadian put option," he adds. "You're protected from futures basis, the dollar, all of our main risk factors, even rising feed costs, which can factor into cow prices. You are kind of protected from that with price insurance."

Hagen and Griffin say the way price insurance protects from all three sources of market risk — futures, basis and currency — set it apart from other options.

Price insurance options

The Livestock Price Insurance Program came on the heels of the BSE crisis hitting in the early 2000s. Now, there are three types of insurance available for beef producers — a calf program, a feeder program and a fed program.

The fed program is for beef heifers and steers and is specific to producers who are finishing their cattle. The feeder program is for producers backgrounding steers and heifers. The calf program is primarily for cow-calf producers.

Griffin says the calf program is the only risk management tool available that will protect Canadian ranchers from risks related to the futures market, currency and basis.

Hagen says price insurance coverage is market-driven, and so ebbs and flows with the fluctuations in the livestock and currency markets. The deadline for the calf price insurance options is in June. The other two can be purchased year-round.

Opportunities

Perillat says the grain industry has a better understanding of managing market risk, and there are some things the grain industry does that the cattle

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industry can watch for, as well.

“I think the grain industry was maybe first to do more of these — locking in profits, forward contracting, selling your crop before you’ve even seeded it. It’s just being aware all those options are available to cow-calf producers,” he says.

He says cattle producers have more market volatility at these price levels and so there is more risk.

“On the other side, the cow-calf

producer has to be willing to live with his choices if the market continues to go up and he sold early. You have got to understand what’s best for your business at the time you made that decision.”

Perillat says the low-hanging fruit is simple planning. He says there is a lot of opportunity for producers if they stay plugged in with the markets and plan accordingly.

“Follow market trends, know your cost of production and take advantage

of protecting good profit levels or negative market shocks, either through price insurance, or forward selling, put options, etc.”

Author: Melissa Jeffers-Bezan

Original Article: <https://www.canadiancattlemen.ca/marketing/managing-risk-when-marketing-beef-cattle/>

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