



The Grazing Mentor

The Newsletter for the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program
Enhancing Profits and the Environment through Grazing Management

Volume 2, Issue 2
February 2009

Inside this issue:

Profile of Walter & Helen Last	2
Profile of Perry Koss	3
Profile of Leam Craig	3
Upcoming Events	4
About The Program	5
Group Plans	5
Contact List	5

From the Editor

With this issue I have had the opportunity to complete an interview with at least one mentor from each of the grazing mentorship areas in Canada. I have come off every phone call feeling impressed with the thoughtful integrity of those with whom I have spoken. Learning about the regional challenges of working for Mother Nature, differences in provincial support (both the human and financial kind) and varied marketing options has left me with a better sense of the grazing industry in this land.

One overarching commonality is that grazing and grass finishing are making a comeback in a significant way. We can be proud of the many professional graziers in Canada who can attest to the benefits and successes of improved and sustainable grazing methods. There are many different philoso-

phies and learning systems that have brought them this success and the folks that I refer to when I say professional graziers are the first to admit that there is still so much to learn. They eagerly make plans in the winter based on what they experienced last year, and many have grazing records that go back 10 years and more. The perfect mix of sun and rain over the grazing season is very seldom experienced, but always hoped for. Excitement builds as spring approaches and last winter's thoughts become this year's reality. Plans are created, monitored, controlled and re-planned.

Many of the grazing mentors are committed to life long learning and attend workshops and conferences throughout the year to network with other graziers, learn new strategies and explore unique opportunities

within the world of grazing. Each grazing mentor I have spoken to has been upfront about challenges they have had and how they overcame them, and most importantly offer to help others avoid some of those pitfalls.

If you think you, some folks in your community or in your grazing/forage club would benefit by spending some time with one of our grazing mentors, please get in touch with your provincial coordinator. With the 2008/2009 funding year coming to a close on March 31st, it's important to get your application in as soon as possible.

(Provincial Coordinator Contact information found later in this newsletter.)

Happy Trails,
Lee Pengilly



Canadian Cattlemen's
Association



Funds for this project provided
by Agriculture and Agri-Food
Canada's Greencover Canada
Program.

From the Mentor-in-Chief - Jim Stone

There sure is a special feeling when a year of custom grazing comes to an end and the cattle you send home to their owner are in good shape, with super gains on calves and no animal losses throughout the year.

Due to a couple of years of

low rainfall we had to cut back our livestock numbers. We spent more time in the pastures in order to improve their production by providing longer recovery times. This year, with our previous management and more rain, we have increased our animal numbers close to

the original and increased the grazing season by one month. Sustainable Grazing Management practices always work when they are applied. Sometimes the results are quick and other times it will take longer as it did this go around. Flexibility is the key to keeping productiv-

cont'd on page 2

The Grazing Mentor

From the Mentor-in-Chief cont'd from page 1

ity and sustainability within your reach as a producer.

The past weeks have proven that it's not only the cattlemen who have no control over their output volume or price. Everyone from stock markets to oil companies, manufacturers around the world have felt the impact of markets. The misfortunes of others is certainly no consolation to us, but it did show that there is nowhere in the world where you are guaranteed a profit. The thing that keeps successful companies afloat in these times has everything to do with production costs and less to do with market prices.

As a mentor I see a producer on one side of the

road wintering his cows for about \$.50 per day on swath grazing or \$.90 a day on bale grazing, and on the other side of the road I see a producer spending about \$2 per day using conventional feeding systems. In both cases this could be for a 200 day winter season. Or I see a producer using SGM (sustainable grazing management) practices with regard to grass management able to support 45 cows for 12 months of the year, including hay production, on a quarter section. Across the road on a similar quarter where cattle are grazed conventionally there are 30 to 40 cows on the quarter for five months. I would ask what it is that keeps the conventional producer

from making the change? It will only cost a producer \$100 and a phone call to your provincial partner in the Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program to have a mentor explain how this can be accomplished on your farm. A mentor will provide you with many options that would work specifically on your land base with regard to anything pertaining to sustainable livestock production.

If you are unable to contact someone please call me at 1-403-438-0172 or e-mail me at jstone05@telus.net.

I would be glad to put you in touch with a mentor in your area.

"The Mentorship Program is transformational. We moved our cows and calves daily onto new grass by limiting the size of our existing paddocks. This has resulted in quieter cattle. Our cattle went out on grass earlier and stayed later. The cows spent most of their time in the pasture and not lounging by the water tank as before. My pastures showed great recovery. The manure was spread to perfection. I am delighted with our results and think your Grazing Mentorship Program is outstanding.

Sincere thanks Walter, Hubert, and Brian for their field days and farm coaching."

*- Grazing Mentee
Jamie Laidlaw*

Profile of Québec Mentors – Walter and Helen Last

Mentor's Name: Walter and Helen Last

Closest Town: Poltimore (approximately 25 miles north of Ottawa)

Region: Outaouais

Province: Province of Québec

Quotable Quote: "We're so far behind, we're ahead of everyone else."

When Walter and his wife, Helen took over the family dairy farm in 1988, they, according to Walter, "had barely enough money to rent a movie on Saturday night let alone invest in free-stall barns and shiny new

machinery as everyone else was doing." So they looked at ways to increase revenue without debt, and with some encouragement from their agronomer, Hubert McClelland, they started down the rotational grazing road.

That was 20 years ago. Today Lastholme Farm is an intricately managed mixed farming operation with all of the production marketed between direct sales on the farm or sold locally at a farmer's market.

The beef herd is of primarily Angus stock and Lasts grass-finish their own farm-raised

calves. When market ready, beeves are taken to a local processing facility where they are government inspected and cut according to customer preference. About one half of Lastholme's sales are carcasses and the other half sold as cuts. A large refrigerated trailer has provided the flexibility to have processed and then store up to 10 carcasses at once.

As I was speaking to Walter, he indicated they were just beginning their lambing season. They raise a Heritage flock of Cotswold sheep known primarily for their fiber production. *After shear-*

cont'd on page 3

Profile of Québec Mentors cont'd from page 2

ing, fleeces are sent to a mill in P.E.I. where they are transformed into woolen blankets in a variety of sizes from twin to king. The blankets provide another source of income. As soon as the grass is ready, the flock is turned out to graze. When the lambs are of market weight they are sent for processing and direct marketed – a market they cannot keep up with. Their Tamworth pigs (another Heritage breed) spend most of the year outside with the sows coming in towards the

end of February to farrow. The demand for their pork also surpasses their current production.

To round out their operation, Lasts have a maple syrup operation, the production of which, according to Walter, “is a science unto itself.” Preparations start in March with the sap beginning to run around the first of April. With approximately 1000 taps to attend to, the season is both busy and demanding. In all, the entire process

takes about six weeks of actual hard work. They finish just in time to begin spring calving!

In Walter’s words, “Doing a few different things well, allows us both to live off the profits generated from our farm. With 20 years of experience under our belts (and a few things learned the hard way) we are now happy to help anyone willing to learn some grazing techniques.”

“The Grazing Mentorship Program is a great program. Perry and I went through all the pastures and he made suggestions on how to split them better. I found I wasn’t moving the cattle through fast enough. The program helped me a great deal and left me feeling a little more confident. I’d encourage anyone to try it!”

*- Grazing Mentee
Glen Campbell*

Profile of Manitoba Mentor – Perry Koss

Mentor’s Name: Perry Koss

Closest Town: Inglis
Region: Western Parkland
Province: Manitoba

Quotable Quote: “As grazing mentors, we see lots of pasture where a golf ball couldn’t hide.”

Perry and his wife, Karen, began grain farming soon after they were married. According to Perry, “It very quickly became obvious that we would have to ‘get big or get out’ – we chose to get out.”

In 1995/96 they seeded all of their grain-land into forage - 50% alfalfa and the rest a blend of orchard, meadow brome and timothy grasses. They had a good catch from the first seeding and since then have been grazing their

own cows during the summer.

For the past 12 years they have taken in additional cows for the winter feeding period. The winter-feeding strategy is based on bale grazing which Perry claims, “I wish I had done it 20 years ago!” In the fall, the bales are set up, the strings removed and an electric wire allows for 3 days of grazing at a time. Through the course of the winter the cows are moved from one set of bales to the next until the grazing season begins once again.

The Koss family is all very involved in their agricultural operation. According to Perry, “The kids, (daughters Rhandi, 19 and Morgan, 15 and sons Regan, 17 and Brett, 11) keep me on track. They are just as informed

as I am and know how to ask good questions. On this place there is no such thing as ‘because I said.’ They have lots of good ideas and think of things we should try. Lots of times their ideas are better than mine! They are enthusiastic about the managed grazing we do on our place and are eager to be looking at reduced pasture sizes and more frequent moves.”

The grazing mentorship program is a good fit for Perry. This is his second year of mentoring and he strongly recommends the program to anyone who is looking at improved grazing management. Most of the calls he receives are from folks wanting more information on fencing, inquiries about grass growth and details on how to make a sustainable grazing system work.

Profile of Saskatchewan Mentor – Leam Craig

Name: Leam Craig

Closest Town: Biggar
Region: West Central
Province: Saskatchewan

Quotable Quote:

“Nobody has to reinvent the wheel. Through the Grazing Mentorship Program you don’t need to go through the same wrecks; or at least there will be less of them.”

In the late 1980s the Craig’s (Leam, his wife Crystal and son Nathan) operation was primarily grain based and had been making the switch from conventional seeding to direct. But even with those positive changes it was seemingly impossible to turn a profit in the beleaguered grain industry. As with most folks, it takes a disaster to bring about change. A few years of significant droughts and the Craig family realized there needed to be some big changes if they were going to stay involved in agriculture. With some major financial losses they determined they would begin seeding a portion of their lighter land to

grass and diversify their income to include a livestock component.

When Mother Nature dealt them another disaster in 2002 with a drought so significant they didn’t even have to take the combine out of the shed, they made the decision to convert the balance of their land base to grass. At first it was more of a “shot gun” approach to seeding mixes but gradually they moved to specific blends of grasses and legumes and their last sowings were primarily blends of tame and native grasses. With the continued challenges of drought, they found the grasshoppers to be aggressive competitors for the fragile seedlings with some areas seeded three to four times.

Along with the conversion to a grassland base, their livestock numbers continued to increase as did the infrastructure associated with managing livestock – primarily fences, cross fences and the development of water sources. The conversion to

a grassland based operation also created major changes in their operation’s cash flow. Through ongoing off-farm training they learned the power of big picture thinking and meaningful financial and grazing plans.

The Craigs belong to an active management club and are advocates of the benefits of such. In addition, they have seen tremendous benefits of the Environmental Farm Plan and strongly recommend having one.

Leam finds the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program a natural extension of his profession. In his words, “It provides a wonderful opportunity to share and learn. Sometimes you get too close to your own operation and it’s helpful for someone else to spend time with you in seeing the big picture. Sometimes it takes a fresh set of eyes to see what’s working. Often folks are doing things right and all they need is some reassurance and a pat on the back.”

“Leam and I share similar management training backgrounds, so his visit served more to reaffirm our direction than to provide a lot of advice. It was good to have some positive feedback and get a second opinion on what we are doing.”

- Grazing Mentee
Renald Grimard

Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

Group	Conference	Dates	Location	Contact
Manitoba Forage Council	Manitoba Forage Symposium	February 18, 2009	Morris, MB	Dwayne Summach 204-268-6014 www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca
Saskatchewan Forage Council	Saskatchewan Pasture School	June 17-18, 2009	Saskatoon, SK	Saskatchewan Forage Council 306-541-0911 www.saskforage.ca

Although we won’t have space for a full listing of upcoming conferences and workshops going on across Canada, we would like to feature a few every month. If you’d like your event listed contact Lee Pengilly @ walksfar@sasktel.net.

About The Grazing Mentorship Program

What Is It?

The Grazing Mentorship Program is a unique opportunity for producers to receive individual input and suggestions on how to improve their profits, efficiency, forage productivity as well as land and water resources through improved grazing management. The folks selected as grazing mentors are respected fellow producers with extensive grazing management, knowledge and experience. Extra training has been made available to them to better assist with the mentoring process.

What's In It For Me?

As a mentee, a grazing mentor from your region will contact you by telephone and make arrangements to come to your

farm/ranch, no matter how large or small your land base is. He/she will discuss with you and help you to assess your grazing resources, as well as the opportunities and the challenges. He/she will work with you in making suggestions and providing input about fencing, watering systems, grazing systems, plant growth, forage species selections, dormant season grazing, winter feeding strategies...or just about anything you have questions about.

Your grazing mentor can spend a total of about 16 hours with you and that may be in the form of in-person visits or telephone follow-ups to guide you through any additional questions or decisions you may be making.

Please Note: A person who is being mentored is referred to as a mentee.

How Do I Find A Grazing Mentor?

When you want to be put in contact with a grazing mentor, contact the appropriate provincial partner organization listed below and he/she will find someone who meets your needs and location. In the event you already know one of our grazing mentors and would like to be working with that person, you can make direct arrangements with him or her.

How Much Does It Cost?

Your investment as a producer is only \$100, which you pay to your provincial partner in the program

(see listing). The program will pay the balance of your mentor's time up to a maximum of 16 hours as well as his/her travel expenses to a budget maximum.

How Soon Do I Have to Decide?

We urge you to get the process rolling as soon as possible. Your mentorship will move along more quickly if you have access to maps or aerial photos of the land you are managing. If you have completed maps with your Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), those will usually be fine to get started with. Extra photocopies of them would be helpful.

Please note: It is not necessary to have completed an EFP prior to working with a Grazing Mentor.

Group Plans - An Option to Explore

With requests coming in from both grazing mentors and folks interested in the concept of group plans, it is important to know that this is a totally acceptable and encouraged concept. Whether it's around a kitchen table with a couple of neighbours or in a local facility drawing from a larger area and lots of people, a grazing mentor (or perhaps two depending on the size of the group) could come to you. For further information contact your provincial coordinator (see listings in this newsletter) or Jim Stone at 1-403-438-0172 or e-mail at jstone05@telus.net.

Provincial Partner Organizations and Contact List

Province	Partner Organization	Contact	Telephone	Email Address
British Columbia	B.C. Cattlemen's Association	Sandy Burton	877-630-2198	sburton@xplornet.com
Alberta	ARECA	Grant Lastiwka	403-227-6392	lastiwka@areca.ab.ca
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Forage Council	Leanne Thompson	306-454-2777	thompsonleanne@sasktel.net
Manitoba	Manitoba Forage Council	Pam Iwanchysko	204-648-3965	pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca
Ontario	Ontario Cattlemen's Association	Jack Kyle	705-324-5855	jack.kyle@ontario.ca
Québec	Gatineau-Outaouais Beef Improvement Club (GOBIC)	Hubert McClelland	819-827-1793	hubert.mcclelland@sympatico.ca
Atlantic Canada	AgraPoint International, Inc.	Jonathan Wort	902-896-0277	j.wort@agrapoint.ca
National Sustainable Mentorship Program	Mentor-in-Chief Newsletter Editor	Jim Stone Lee Pengilly	403-438-0172 306-728-5484	jstone05@telus.net walksfar@sasktel.net

For program information, questions or comments, please contact your provincial partner organization.