

BC FORAGE COUNCIL '99'
JANUARY 30, 1999
\$\$KEEP OUR CALVES AT HOME PAST WEANING TIME
AND MAKE MONEY\$\$
COMPLETE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION INFORMATION

TOPIC #1 - ADVANTAGES OF GOOD NUTRITION, FACILITIES AND WATER.

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- bunk management, increase in rate of gain with clean bunks
- clean water, better weight gain
- safe high quality product to the consumer ie: injection sites
- importance of minerals for herd health
- buying cattle - be careful
- good facilities - easier to handle

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- feed test, town water supply, summer stock watering - use dugouts and watering bowls
- always trying to improve facilities
- have good mineral programs, improve facilities, feed test, reducing grazing periods
- use Peace Country One Stop for mineral, use nose pumps
- use snow in winter until calving
- hauling water in summer, trying to adapt old dairy facility into beef - is a problem
- pump and gravity feed watering systems, winter - watering bowls

***What do we need?**

- better handling facilities for cattle processing (operator safety and livestock stress)
- more custom feedlots in the local region
- good facilities drainage, good shelter, space and watering set up
- lower feeder price and higher finished price
- proper mineral mixes, custom operations, bigger custom feedlot in Peace
- visual proof (ie: \$\$) improving these really does make a difference
- an attitude change that what we did last year may not be the best
- calve British cattle on grass - background at lower cost - take advantage of compensatory gains on grass
- more desire by producers to improve
- pollution management - environmental concerns
- market for grass fat cattle

***What are the challenges?**

- to get good water to each field
- to keep a legume in the stand on acid soils
- capital requirements to upgrade facilities
- taking ideas home from meetings and schools and making them work at home
- economic environment and willing investors
- better system of buying calves to reduce stress and pull rate

- staying up with new technology, managing information for our own situation
- money - capital requirements and slow return for a few years as we learn
- lack of good groundwater
- benefit from higher quality forage
- mind set change from an old system to a new system
- environment issues
- new rules - cattle hauling, manure storage, antibiotic levels

***What are the opportunities?**

- forage production is high on land that is quite cheap
- we can grow a fairly good crop of forage most years (droughts usually aren't too severe)
- to covert forages to higher quality feed by harvesting as silage
- the Peace River country has lots of excellent cow/calf people
- we need this cattle knowledge expanded to backgrounding, etc.
- big land base and forage resource
- higher profit per animal
- cheaper fencing costs
- still have low land costs
- we have some advantages - low bedding costs, fescue straw, shavings
- we have the opportunity to background and grass our calves cheaper than most places and increase our profits on our calves, we can direct sell to a feedlot from grass to again cut costs per animal

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) Mind set and continuing education - need a link between learning and applying
- 2) low price of feed - take advantage
- 3) low price of land

TOPIC #2 - BUREAUCRATS, BARRIERS AND OTHER B.S. TO OVERCOME (GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS)

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- irrigation ponds
- focus on things you can change
- soil phosphorus levels
- don't be afraid to share (asset versus waste product)
- terminology - waste versus resource
- be pro-active

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- managing resident wildlife }Committee and
- recognizing private land owners contributions }Forage Association
- Peace River Forage Association + BC Forage Council = more govt. recognition
- promoting good management before regulation

- peer consultation on environmental issues

***What do we need?**

- recognition of the agriculture industry in North Eastern BC by Victoria
- information about the benefits of keeping our calves and how this will benefit the area in general and that information has to be presented forcefully in Victoria
- more government support
- consumer to pay for the product (food)

***What are the challenges?**

- getting government to realize the opportunity of the north Peace
- being recognized by the south
- the importance of forage as the foundation of the beef industry
- forage research
- forages high value

***What are the opportunities?**

- stop looking for the government to fix it, just get at it and do it ourselves
- convince government (Ministry of Ag) to direct resources toward forage
- improve overall feasibility of farms and ranches in this area

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) recognition of the importance of north eastern agriculture
- 2) resolution of resident wildlife issue
- 3) pro-active approach to environmental issues

TOPIC #3 - CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS AND FINANCIAL PAYOFF

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- stage of life maybe not willing to make huge capital investments to change operations
- price of barley will have an impact (ie: barley price up - keep calves)
- keep calves as long as possible, grow gradually
- have to develop an effective feeding system
- cereals for silage versus grain

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- thinking about retiring
- got to be open to change
- learning
- it's worth investing in knowledge
- don't be afraid to
- retain ownership of calves = improved bottom line? - questionable, related to price of barley and value of dollar
- more feedlots in last 10 years

- feeding cattle is a specialized industry

***What do we need?**

- what calf is worth at weaning time and what it's worth at finish - we need to know this but is not predictable at present
- be able to protect the profit
- proper facilities/grass
- determine market for product
- feedlot nearby
- small operations can't afford to feed and keep our calves
- proper promotion of grass finished cattle
- change perception of grass fed calves
- availability of capital for investment
- willingness of investor
- education on marketing, feeding and risk management
- to have a reliable way of buying protection of end price
- Bernie type feedlot in our area

***What are the challenges?**

- financing
- cash flow
- high interest rates
- cost to build up facilities
- access to good feed
- capital to invest in silage equipment
- management and care of animals at weaning

***What are the opportunities?**

- make more \$ than in past
- avoid the middlemen
- to market surplus feed through cattle
- more labour required (employment options)
- better/more thorough utilization of marginal land
- more efficient use of existing labour
- improvement of land

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) cash flow
- 2) instability of price
- 3) post weaning management

TOPIC #4 - MARKETING CHALLENGES

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- theme
- why don't we keep 'em longer

- Paul's talk - marketing grass fed, need to develop market
- need consumer education
- need more control on what's done with product
- long way from customers
- look at Woodward's model - 10 cents/pound cheaper
- more inspected facilities in Alberta
- provincial trade barriers
- defeatist attitudes
- home marketing
- price discovery
- cutbacks at auctions

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- mainly selling calves
- some pre-sorting calves
- price down over 750 pounds (so is upper limit)
- taking easy way out using traditional methods
- hard to change as bills are due
- looking at taking some to slaughter
- want to explore financing for retained ownership
- feedback information from feedlots for genetic improvement

***What do we need?**

- financing
- facilities and feeding systems
- bank financing and banks need to be more reasonable (ie: don't call loans for no reasonable reason, serve the local needs, don't concentrate on large (greater than \$100,000) that profit the banks most)
- take a leaf of USA laws, re: banking activities, refer to Duff Conacher, re: bank mergers -
- - Ottawa
- ability to keep calves
- proper facilities
- quality feed
- feed analysis
- water quality
- manure handling facilities
- reasonable market
- cash flow ie: financing
- greater value created in the product, ie: Angus beef program
- more efficient gathering and transportation
- more access to professionals
- more facilities
- access to high quality feed
- improve knowledge on over wintering calves
- proper wintering facilities
- long term commitment

- backgrounding calves here - need grass
- facilities and feeding systems
- financing that we can afford
- more knowledge
- access to better markets
- old mind sets need education
- financing, facilities and markets

***What are the challenges?**

- lower vet bill
- no money, no skills, no time
- find alternate contacts - buyers, feedlots, etc.
- need knowledge to feeding calves successfully
- need good health program
- convincing the public that forage fed cattle are valuable
- financing is a problem
- education to make product available
- healthy calves
- education, re: troubles keeping small calves back for wintering over

***What are the opportunities?**

- preventative health management program
- more work
- early weaning - less stress and disease
- preventative maintenance is better than fire fighting
- wean earlier on healthy calves
- put calves on pasture, put cows in corral
- less stress
- better average day growth for own profit
- better cow herds
- value adding
- high quality product
- perceived safe food
- pen cows instead of calves to wean
- create new business opportunity - background and feedlot
- promote safe food

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) educate ourselves in investing options
- 2) market signals
- 3) affordable financing

TOPIC #5 - HIGH TECH GRAZING

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- cow size as it relates to forage consumption

- cheapest gain is on forage - grazing
- size of cow - most efficient?
- keep water yard small
- quality of meat on grass
- heifers fatten easier
- a day of grazing is cheaper than a day of feeding - extend grazing period
- timing of calving

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- seeding as many species as possible
- pasture finishing, importance of legumes, nutrient recycling, pasture fertility, carbon sequestration
- seeding more cereals for bag silage
- growth stage of alfalfa - pasture bloat
- get legumes to last longer - nodules, nitrogen fixation
- misusing acres of pasture

***What do we need?**

- a good slaughter/packing house
- good water supply
- additional feed
- additional time to perform tasks
- cooperative producer driven slaughter industry
- have extra feed
- change the mind set of producers, promote "can do" attitude
- retained ownership to slaughter
- change in financial structure so all bills aren't due in the fall
- cash flow
- backgrounding facilities
- high quality pasture
- an open mind to explore new ideas
- calves born within correct time frame
- good animal control - fences
- a system that is able to evolve without a high cost or high disruption to adapt less manually intensive
- extra pens
- local experienced "role models" to learn from
- custom feedlot facilities available
- alternate watering system
- more pasture
- aggressive marketing strategies

***What are the challenges?**

- winter
- convince retail meat buyers that yellow fat is more healthy
- challenge of coordinating a viable industry with practical ability and intuitive foresight

- learning more about grazing
- too long a winter
- water freezes, watering systems
- increase awareness
- to use genetics to convert grass

***What are the opportunities?**

- community pastures
- the public is ready to hear that feeding forages is environmentally friendly
- opportunity of having a large land base able to support high quality forage production
- endless
- reduce cow maintenance costs with extended grazing
- lots of forages
- lots of cattle
- animal welfare
- high quality pastures for stockier cattle
- better environmental impact of forage and pasture finishing
- health benefits of pasture finished beef

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) optimize cow size and maximize grazing period
- 2) maximize - increase use and management of legumes
- 3) training - awareness (show case - mentor)

TOPIC #6 - FINANCIAL ANALYSIS FOLLOWED BY GOOD BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- we could be facing challenges that we were not aware of (lung capacity)
- mud level effects feed intake
- feed bunk scoring - the difference in scores
- financing our own calves (cash flow - retained ownership)
- keep up on current management practices by attending seminar
- difference between livestock vaccine and kill vaccine
- what's new in grazing - are we using the information that is out there?
- calve later to keep weights coming off grass in line
- what would be a reasonable goal for treatment cost?

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- active in producer group (cost comparisons)
- computer programming for feeds
- smaller beef cows and calving on grass (to reduce feed costs in order to compete)
- production records
- good business sense

***What do we need?**

- spring calving
- more local feedlots
- packing plant
- financing for retained ownership of cattle or feed
- keep calves at home
- need feedlot in our local area
- attract feedlot investors
- share the risk
- seminars/workshops/clinics on the subject such as what we are doing now
- seek out investors and interest in a local feedlot
- use the grain and silage that is readily or can be available in this area

***What are the challenges?**

- finances
- feeding interval time
- interim financed (cattle on feed)
- acceptance at producer level (trust)
- organization of initial start up of organization
- finances
- understand the opportunities
- to unite a group of producers that trust each other
- advantage - cheap land / disadvantage - long winter

***What are the opportunities?**

- hay supply, grain supply, cattle supply, bedding supply
- transportation infrastructure
- low land prices
- inexpensive feed
- plenty of cattle
- plenty of bedding
- plenty of water
- cheap land

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) more money to producer by value adding (add to poor quality products)
- 2) for a feedlot (low land price)
- 3) custom silage, etc.

TOPIC #7 - THE ECONOMIC POSITIVES FOR GOOD HERD HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- vaccination program for backgrounding calves
- keep your calves at home keeps them healthy
- measuring value of treating versus non-treating
- opportunity to gain value by feeding low-risk animals

- bovatech in salt

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- good nutrition
- dividing into risk groups
- put cattle with people who know how to do this
- pre-immunize in August
- work with low-risk cattle
- rely on vet for vaccination program and nutrition
- feeding prescription minerals
- use a vet for consultation
- early weaning onto pasture

***What do we need?**

- a willingness to learn
- objective view of our own ability
- objective view of genetic capability
- support industry
- vision
- realism of market potential
- facilities
- time to do proper job
- good equipment for minimum frustrations
- good handling facilities
- good clean water supply
- automatic waterers of some sort
- feed processing equipment
- time and patience
- the availability of a qualified large animal vet
- the opportunity to work with a vet on herd health programs for our herd
- less regulation of veterinary drugs
- availability of more trained vet technicians to assist vets in parts of herd health programs
- high degree of management, re: cattle herd health programs, knowing what is cost effective
- an awareness of the need to include respiratory capacity in animal selection
- more labour power
- powerful organizations
- local customers, slaughter facilities and packing plants
- events like today
- competent vets

***What are the challenges?**

- to get your neighbours to do the same procedures relative to good herd health that are adequate
- to get support from all levels of the government for this segment of the program
- to not lose focus that profit is very directly related to good herd health

- weight gain? with poor quality home grown feed
- dealing with normal calf health and mortality problems (ie: sickness, bloat)
- cold weather equipment operation
- willingness to be tied down to the job at hand in winter months
- retained ownership and herd health and cattle feeding is an art and by retaining cattle we don't necessarily profit
- information is scattered and professionally and individually interpreted
- each operation has it's own set of problems - solutions are not universal
- self education is the greatest challenge in regards to all aspects of production, treatment and disease prevention
- new diseases (Neurospora)
- control and characteristics (costs/gain per head, per worked hour, etc)
- enthusiasm for supporting organization (s)
- picking out which calves need extra attention
- becoming educated, re: health problems and treatment programs and doing prevention and treatment on an economic good basis

***What are the opportunities?**

- good quality cattle are here
- adequate management knowledge is here in this room today if it is shared
- the goal of good herd health can be achieved in the BC Peace as we have the major ingredients
- transfer of herd health information in forums
- perception of industry by public enhanced
- healthy, retained cattle are a form of value adding and if done right, all parties will profit
- enhance fertility which affects profitability ten times more than growth and carcass traits
- do away with all the middlemen, make more money
- area grows abundant forages
- if we can process and store feed stuffs to maximize yields
- our lower costs will give us tremendous opportunity for profit
- limited to those with time and money and willingness to do proper job
- merge two steps in one business
- save transports (=costs)
- get healthier animals (which are used to each others and to local bugs)
- less veterinary risks than with "two-spots-business"

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) good nutrition
 - 2) good support industry - education, consultant, vet, etc.
 - 3) recognize that opportunity does exist
- public perception of industry enhanced

TOPIC #8 - RESOURCES REQUIRED: FORAGE, CREDIT, MANAGEMENT, LAND

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- harvesting of silage, match resources to utilize that silage

- mineral - prescription
- parasitic control - animal
- abundance of relatively cheap land
- selling your commodity (feed), we have plenty of feed here
- heavier weight calves - keeping at home and selling
- information exchange through animal tracking
- look for area advantages - changing management view - look for positive
- grain, forage - keeping it at home
- credit arrangements between feedlot and calf producers

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- people are keeping more grains and feeding more at home
- mediocre forage management (behind)
- shipping rather than keeping calves
- starting to understand what we could do
- more available custom silage operators
- more bagged silage
- letting other people doing our managing (ie: auction market does marketing)
- not utilizing our management skills, need to develop management skills
- forage land under utilized
- credit hard to access
- off farm employment too easy to get (off farm income)

***What do we need?**

- consistent quality forage
- ways to get around the cash flow problem
- market development
- capital
- increased knowledge of feeding/backgrounding cattle
- ability to manage cash flow because of the change in income flow
- a risk management strategy to encourage local cattlemen to invest in feeding facilities
- enhanced business management skills
- knowledge about marketing, how markets are affected by the \$, USA, and increased cattle production
- we need more feed to be able to keep them through winter
- need a good health program
- a good water source
- feed all commodities raised on the farm
- more meetings about feeding discussions, silaging, pasturing, type of forages to grow
- working together with smaller groups
- share the risk
- management
- need to know the opportunities and challenges
- see your banker
- need value chain - to be able to bring the whole community into the process so that all the

people and other resources could be used to their best

***What are the challenges?**

- getting the most out of the land
- increase in production
- improved varieties
- desire to change from cow/calf
- commitment to agriculture - too easy to get off farm income
- co-operative value chain feedlot
- to develop a growth/development strategy that has an acceptable risk/reward ratio
- understanding what have been the reasons for lack of this industry developing in the Peace up until now
- working together, sharing the risks, combine efforts
- access to good machinery to get the job done at a price we can afford
- access to a market that will look after you year to year
- access to more help in line of labour
- to be able to find more information on minerals as it is hard to know if we are feeding the proper minerals
- to inventory the skills and resources and bring them together, then develop trust and communication
- distance to market to maybe sell load lot
- to develop the business management skills required to pull the required resources into a profitable package
- access the equity capital required to minimize the financial risks of developing a feedlot
- develop or hire the specific skills required to hold calves longer
- guts, ambition, willing to take a risk

***What are the opportunities?**

- group financing - share of risk
- group farming (neighbours) cuts expenses through sharing equipment
- good land base for either forage or grain silage
- take advantage of our ability to raise cattle that are heavier and healthier
- calves and forage quantity
- to increase income by keeping calves over
- to use extra grass that is lost because not enough cattle to utilize it
- more credit, too much used up in payments to feeder association, Farm Credit and banks
- to utilize pasture from logging operation by putting into grass (forage)
- opportunities are here for people to do through agriculture courses
- capitalize on our land, forage, and cattle resources (which are this region's comparative advantage) to add \$\$ to every animal leaving this region
- involve community investors

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) recognition of the underutilized nature of our resources
- 2) recognized need for credit/financial working relationships

3) don't need a packing plant to achieve theme

TOPIC #9 - HOW DO WE TAKE THE NEXT STEP? (FROM 900 POUNDS TO FINISHED BEEF IN THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY)

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- silage important
- get to feedlot early enough
- contradiction - feedlot not want more than 850 pounds
- grass finishing
- find out if packers will take grass finished (specialty packer needed?)
- weaning earlier
- the importance of yard and feeding conditions
- establish own feedlots
- packing plants in the area
- Internet information

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- later calving
- education sessions
- spring rather than winter calving
- sell off grass in August
- intensive grazing
- changing feed - more green feed
- backgrounding
- do the opposite of everyone else
- grain cost advantage - could be accessed better
- constant weather is advantage
- use of feeder associations

***What do we need?**

- 2 years feed on hand
- feedlots
- market
- access to \$\$
- young farmers
- education
- need for silage
- paradigm shift - grass management not cattle raising
- need good water supply
- consistent feed supply
- stock pile feed

***What are the challenges?**

- financial
- banks have to change the way they deal with farmers
- proper decision making

- finding information you need
- mentoring
- partnering - establish large enough group to make worthwhile
- more cooperation
- marketing coordinator
- Internet sales advantage
- communication improvements
- challenge of traditional grain fed - break into market as grass fed
- financial - more pens, water and shelter
- niche marketing - play on advantages, organic grass fed, etc.
- publicity - convince the public
- cattle industry being defeated by grain industry
- longer feeding needs
- need to expand working knowledge of the risks
- need for shelter

***What are the opportunities?**

- perfect grass growing area
- cold weather climate
- population
- land mass
- growing cattle numbers now
- silage
- product can be ready at time other than feedlot peak
- cheap feed - local access
- cheap land
- would give us more control of final product
- sunshine
- custom operation - silage/manure spreading, etc.

***The 3 most important points from the discussion.**

- 1) feedlot needs and packing needs
- 2) marketing challenges
- 3) financial needs

TOPIC #10 - ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS - MANURE MANAGEMENT

***What statements from the speakers caught your attention?**

- manure - more attention than it needs - especially "media"
- utilizing runoff from pen for irrigation
- doing something is better than doing nothing
- have a plan in place
- composting concept
- environmental benefits of silage is beneficial
- being aware of environmental concerns
- composting

- stay away from waterways/highways
- grazing naturally
- eliminating chemicals with silage
- extending grazing season eliminating erosion
- utilizing forage to minimize erosion

***What are you (we) doing now?**

- no responses

***What do we need?**

- a banker that will be flexible
- facilities that will allow the health of the calves to flourish past weaning (ie: lots of space, weaning onto pasture if possible and yet still allow sick calves to be handled)
- commitment and cooperation
- cash flow
- feed
- time to take care of the cattle
- keep more of our calves over winter
- have to enlarge corrals
- we sell two thirds of our calves in the fall, keep one third and feed out
- to keep all calves would need larger feeding area and more hay
- knowledge of cattle husbandry
- pens large enough to hold 50-80 head
- shed with roof to protect from elements, especially first 3 to 4 months
- money to buy feed - hay/grain
- graze in summer, sell in August, try to finish on grass to market
- give all inoculations

***What are the challenges?**

- feed - often the cow herd requires all the feed available
- expertise - being able to feed calves to obtain good expression of growth without putting too much condition on as this will lower the sale ability
- availability of quality forage for winter use
- access to markets for over wintered calves
- be able to feed them to get good gain and cheap enough to make worth while
- change in farm practices
- re-management of financing
- feeding for compensatory gain on grass
- considering the genetics of the calf
- time - constant supervision
- grass, water, treating
- market?? - how to?? - pay day!!! - profit/loss???
- on farm sale
- consumer eating pasture finished beef
- cut out most of the middlemen in beef

***What are the opportunities?**

- there are plenty of opportunities to take cattle to grass and sell yearlings
- pen share arrangements can be made to retain ownership in feedlot through to finish
- cheap forage in comparison to central and southern Alberta
- improve land (ie: manure)
- better use of time and machinery (ie: can feed more cattle for little more time)
- provide on ranch vacations (tourists help with moving grazers)
- need for local processing plant
- retained calves use locally produced grain or forages
- maybe more opportunity for markets
- utilization of grain in feed in finished product

The BC Forage Council Convention video is now available. It represents over eight hours of useful information such as; Guest Speakers (5), Trade Fair Exhibits (25), and a Farm and Ranch Tour. The cost of the video is \$25.00, to order a video please contact the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) office in Dawson Creek @ (250) 782-3116.

