



BATTLE  
RIVER  
RESEARCH  
GROUP

# Over the Fenceline

MEMBERS ONLY NEWSLETTER

June 2011

## Cow Size – To Win the Race, You Must Know What Race You Are In

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist, North Dakota State University Extension Service.

When selecting cows for size, the debate can rage on for a long time. In reality, personal perception defines large and small and many questions don't have answers.

However, research data shows that cattle must fit the environment in which they are asked to produce. Small cattle are not bad and large cattle are not bad. Likewise, small cattle may not be good and large cattle may not be good.

Good could best be defined as what fits the production model. Fortunately, there is a tremendous overlap in biological types and various attributes of different cattle tend to fit several environments.

Occasionally, producers can try to stuff a certain type of cattle into a production environment. In reality, that is their choice. As long as they can muster up the energy and dollars to get the cattle to fit, so be it.

The other qualifier is market acceptability. There are several markets, so the cattle that ultimately are marketed need to fit an available market.

It would be nice if the product on the rail would match the product needed in the box. However, just like production, that is not always how it is. An entire industry has evolved in getting the product to fit the box. Just like the production side, what goes in the box is a function of the markets and the economic rewards that produce an incentive for someone to get the product in the box.

The ease of any of the previously mentioned processes never can be assumed. The best that generally evolves is some localized streamlining. A utopian system that goes from conception all the way to the consumer has yet to be developed.

Although the concerns of the industry and larger facets of the world are ever present, seldom at the end of the day can a producer really measure success on a worldwide basis. Localized environments force producers to function

somewhat independently to meet the demands of their local production systems.

History has shown the beef business requires many people. The competitive nature of the beef infrastructure often detracts from what is essential and what is a luxury. The beef business is home to many great people trying to enjoy life, raise a family and stash something away for those golden years.

So here we are back to the fundamental question. What type of cattle really fits the operation and when do the inputs and outputs balance in favor of the producer and the cow? Trying to gather all the knowledge regarding such a massive question soon will become burdensome, which may be why the question lingers.

There are few insights from the industry, but each individual must assess herd data to make the decision. If a group of cows averaged 1,571 pounds and stocked at 2.85 acres per month, a producer would turn out 50 cows on 640 acres for 4 1/2 months. Likewise, if the cows averaged 1,216 pounds, appropriately stocked at 2.35 acres per month, a producer would turn out 60 cows on the same 640 acres. If each group weaned 40 percent of their body weight, the group of heavy cows would wean 31,420 pounds of calf and the set of lighter cows would wean 29,184 pounds of calf. However, just like in a race, when the announcer says start your engines, the skill of the driver and the performance under the hood will determine the race.

Likewise, it is apparent that when the cows are lined up at the starting gate and the announcer says start your cows, the management skills of the producer and the performance under the hide will determine who finishes the race.

The important point is to know what race you are in.

*May you find all your ear tags.*

# Machinery Cost Calculator

Clients calling Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's Ag Info Centre for information on custom rates often ask why there is a range in rates. Custom operators are surveyed annually to determine the rates they charge. These reported rates vary considerably due to economies of scale. Some operators cover more acres than their competitors and thus are able to charge less due to the fact that they are spreading their fixed costs over more acres. There is very little difference in the variable costs with any variation being machinery size dependent. Survey results are typically filtered to allow for a most common reported range that still can show a 20 to 25 percent variation.

Producers are often asked to do some custom work for neighbours. They will use the custom rate survey summary as a guide; however there are times when they would like a rate that reflects their own situation. This is where the Machinery Cost Calculator comes in. The Calculator can be found on Ropin' the Web under Decision Making Tools and then under the Machinery tab at the left of the screen. The Help icon in the top left corner will assist you in getting started. This calculator is a web based tool that is populated with default values that can be customized. Some of the default values are actually calculated values based on the initial price of the equipment. For example, the residual value is set at 50% of the initial value but it can be overridden. The repair rate is set at an industry standard of 3% of initial price for power equipment, 2% for trucks and 2 to 6% for implements but these can be changed to reflect higher repair costs.

The tool is useful in determining the machinery costs involved with a change in acreage or change in equipment size. It does provide data for the development of partial budgets and other management decisions. The calculator can also help in determining the working capacity of various implements. By and large, however, its main use has been for people to determine custom rates.

'What if' scenarios can be developed using the calculator. By changing the value of specific variables different scenarios can be compared. The print function allows you to create a hard copy for comparison purposes and thus lets you develop strategies to better manage your farm. One note of caution, if you are using a zero value in any of your comparisons, do not leave the cell blank. Put the zero (0) character in the cell. The reason is that the calculator uses a Java script and Java does not like blanks. An example would be where you might want to develop a dry rate (no fuel included) for custom combine work. Use the zero character in the fuel cost cell to calculate this.

If you have any questions about the Machinery Cost Calculator, give me a call at the Ag-Info Centre. Our phone number is 310-FARM (3276).

Ted Nibourg, B.Sc.Ag, MDE  
Farm Business Management Specialist  
Ag-Info Centre

**Growing Forward** 

**The Growing Forward Stewardship Program is still accepting applications for Manure Management and Grazing and Winter Feeding Management projects. For**

**more information or to receive assistance in developing a work plan and funding application contact Kimberly at the BRRG office,**

## Agroforestry Development Centre Celebrates 110th Anniversary

The AAFC Agroforestry Development Centre promotes and supports the environmental and economic benefits of planting trees on Canada's agricultural lands. For 110 years, the Centre has recognized and addressed the challenges of modern farming operations - first on the Prairies, now across the country - through the advancement of new methods and designs for establishing trees on agricultural lands. Agroforestry research and development by the Centre in tree genetics, landscape impacts, agroforestry designs, and tree health and biology is providing the foundation for the next generation of tree planting.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Since it was founded in 1901 the Prairie Shelterbelt Program has shipped over 610 million seedlings

**The Prairie Shelterbelt Program is now accepting applications for May 2012 trees deliveries. Applications are available at the BRRG Office or on the Prairie Shelterbelt Program Website**

## Changes to the Prairie Shelterbelt Program Will Increase Diversity

Changes to the Prairie Shelterbelt Program include the grouping of several minor species into mixtures.

For example, trembling aspen and cottonwood poplar, which are used for riparian zone protection and wildlife habitat enhancement, will now be added to balsam poplar in a Native Poplar mix.

Similarly for the native willow species in development, each new selection will be added to the peachleaf willow we now grow as a mixture.

The larger non-native tree willows (acute, silverleaf, laurel) all serve a similar purpose of windbreak protection. These will be distributed in the same way as our hybrid poplars, where we develop a mix based on what clones are available and are best suited.

These changes focus on the function of "working trees", not the form or aesthetics. The mixture approach will allow the addition of new and improved selections as they become available and will serve to improve the resilience of tree plantings through diversity.



# High Grain Costs

## Change the Feeding Rules

*By Ken Ziegler*

In years when grain was cheap it was logical to make up for any nutrient shortfalls with a bit of extra grain. A pound or two extra barley covered up any nutrient deficiencies from the hay and the back grounded calves did fine. Today, the quest to control the cost per pound of gain is more challenging because of the rising cost of grain. The challenge this fall will be to achieve adequate animal growth with minimal grain. This new dynamic in the feeding industry drives the need for quality forage to do the job. So what steps are necessary to achieve quality forage for back grounded calves this coming fall and winter?

Consider these suggestions:

- ◆ Harvest the hay crop with a quality goal in mind. Consider that Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN) of 65% or more will provide back grounded calves with enough energy to grow at least 1.75 Average Daily Gain (ADG) or more when fed hay alone. Using implants and ionophores, or raising the feed TDN improves the calf performance to 2lbs ADG.
- ◆ Stage of maturity at harvest is the most important factor in forage quality. As plants mature, forage quality declines. This is because the proportion of fibrous stems increases while leaf content decreases. Managing the cutting date is one practice that does not cost more but has incredible implications for forage quality. Cutting grasses at the early bloom stage or legumes during the bud to early flower stage will help ensure high quality hay. This may mean cutting anywhere from 7 days to 14 days earlier than another year.
- ◆ Many losses are visible such as leaf shatter; however other losses such as respiration are invisible. Aim to reduce field losses by cutting early in the morning. Use as wide a swath as possible to increase solar drying. Speed dry down by raking the windrows when the moisture content is between 40 to 50%. Bale when the moisture content is near 18% or higher if using forage preservatives.
- ◆ Nearly all harvesting losses are due to leaf shatter. Leaves dry down three to five times faster than stems and become very brittle at moisture levels below 30%. The risk of nutrient losses and weather damage can be reduced by harvesting the forage crop at 40-55% moisture. Chopped silage, plastic wrapping or tubing bales are all options for harvesting high moisture forage crops.
- ◆ If you do decide to dry the feed down to conventional hay, consider using bale wrap instead of twine. Bale wrap sheds rainfall better than twine. The majority of the hay within a hay bale is in the first four inches. Reducing storage losses of the quality feed increases the amount of feed available this fall.
- ◆ Ramp up your storage strategy. As quality feed becomes more valuable, the economics of storing it well changes. Consider placing the bales on high well drained ground with a layer of straw underneath. The cost of tarps becomes incidental when storing quality feed compared to average feed. Hay sheds offer excellent value in storing high quality feed.
- ◆ Once baled, haul the feed off of the field immediately and get it under cover. Early harvesting may provide the opportunity for a second harvest. In grass based forage stands, second cut growth often has a high leaf:stem ratio resulting in high quality forage for use as hay, silage or pasture.
- ◆ Feed test the forage early in the year, preferably after 20 days from hay baling or immediately during silage. The results will tell you whether you have met your goal for quality feed this winter or if you need to adjust your plans. Remember that high quality forage can always be mixed off with straw for your cows if it turns out to be inadequate for your calves.

Happy feeding your calves this coming fall. May they be tall, thick and slick by spring with a minimum of grain consumed over the winter.

To discuss any of these thoughts call the Ag Info Centre by dialing 310-FARM.

## Pasture Resource Management

The Growing Forward Grazing and Winter Feeding Management program is designed to help producers manage water and grass resources. “We have a limited land base and we need to make the best use of what we have,” says Diana Bingham of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.

Jake Burlet runs an 8,000 acre ranch west of Edmonton. With 3,400 head of cattle and a rotational grazing program, Burlet knows the importance of managing pasture resources, especially when conditions are dry. “We appreciate the support of programs like Growing Forward. It’s been very, very tough for four or five years. Subsoil moisture is depleted,” says Burlet. He adds that the program allowed him to offset some of the capital costs associated with reducing environmental risks on his ranch.

Burlet created water pens at the end of his dugouts to keep the livestock out, and to allow him to move cattle from one pasture to the next by simply opening a gate. The end results included better quality water, better pasture and grass management, and less labour associated with moving mobile water troughs and pumping systems.

Burlet also fenced many of his dugouts, revived a dormant well, added a pipeline to move water from the well to his pasture, and set up additional solar-powered water systems that can be moved from pasture to pasture.

“When livestock have a readily-available, clean water supply, they don’t pound out other environmental areas,” says Burlet. This increases the lifespan of dugouts and provides a nesting and landing place for waterfowl. Robert Purdie has also seen environmental benefits since completing his Growing Forward Stewardship project. Purdie and his wife run a 2000-acre custom-grazing operation near Red Deer. They recently installed an above-ground pipeline to pump water to eight water stations over approximately 600 acres of pasture. The pasture had been cultivated several years ago, and the existing water bodies were drained.

“By putting in water stations, we’ve actually made the natural water bodies better. The cattle don’t use them now because they come for fresh

water,” Purdie says. Along with speeding the recovery of the wetlands, the water stations allow for better grazing management and manure distribution. With few permanent fences, Purdie’s grazing system and the watering system are designed to be flexible. Each water station is at the end of a 100-foot feeder line, and can be moved as needed. Since the cattle aren’t always drinking from the same spot, there is less impact on the area around the stations.

The Grazing and Winter Feeding Management program is one of three programs under Growing Forward’s Stewardship Plans. The Stewardship Plan programs also include the Integrated Crop Management program, and the Manure Management program. All the programs are designed to promote environmental stewardship and protect the food chain.

To be eligible for any of the programs, producers must have completed an Environmental Farm Plan. Currently, producers can apply to both the Manure Management program and the Grazing and Winter Feeding Management program, however the Integrated Crop Management program will not be accepting applications until early summer.

Contact the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276) to connect with extension staff. Extension staff will work with producers to complete a work plan that provides more information on environmental risks on their operation.

Once the work plan has been approved, producers can start planning specific projects that will reduce the environmental risks identified in the work plan. The Grazing and Winter Feeding Management program will cover 50 per cent of approved costs, up to \$15,000. The Manure Management program covers 50 per cent of approved costs, up to \$50,000.

For more information, contact the Ag-Info Centre at 310 -FARM (3276) or visit the Growing Forward website at [www.GrowingForward.alberta.ca](http://www.GrowingForward.alberta.ca)

Contact:  
Diana Bingham  
780 632-5487



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Early Bird Registration: \$70 before May 27th, \$85 after May 27th  
Registrations will be accepted until June 6th

**For more information or to register contact**  
**Lindsey @ 780-384-4129 or [lcatherwood@flagstaff.ab.ca](mailto:lcatherwood@flagstaff.ab.ca)**





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For more information  
on anything you have  
seen in this newsletter  
or about Battle River  
Research Group itself,  
please contact us at  
1-866-828-6774

## Battle River Research Group Summer Tours and Field Days

### **Crop Walk**

June 16th 9am-Noon  
Forestburg and area  
Featuring winter wheat, sod seeding  
and Canola stand establishment  
Projects

### **Grow with Canola**

June 16th @ 2pm  
6 miles north of Killam  
Canola stand establishment and  
diagnostic plot tour

### **Offsite Watering Field Day**

July 13th 10am-2pm  
Halkirk  
Lunch Included

### **Castor Plot Tour**

July 19th 11am-1:30 pm  
Lunch Included

### **Stettler Plot Tour**

July 20th 11am-1:30 pm  
Lunch Included

### **Viking Plot Tour**

July 26th 11am-1:30 pm  
Lunch Included

### **Pasture Walk w/ Charlie Orchard**

July 27th (TBC)  
Stettler County

### **Killam Plot Tour**

August 3rd 11am-1:30 pm  
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PLAN TO ATTEND THE 2011  
Capturing Feed Grains and  
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