

# Promoting Permanent Pasture for the Peace

## Managing Our Pastures Better Can Lead to:

- \* Better utilization
- \* Longer stand life
- \* Less bloat or toxicity



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*“the essence of the message here is we need to rethink our assumption that pastures need to be plowed every 5 to 10 years.”*  
**Keith Carroll**

## References:

*Rejuvenation of Tame Forages: Parklands*  
- available through Agriculture Canada (PFRA).

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## The Challenge – Keeping Pasture Productive with Longevity

Plowing and reseeding pasture costs big bucks, leaves the soil open to erosion until the new stand is established, and leaves you open to the risk of not getting a catch. Any improvements in pasture yield or quality seem to last for only 6 or 7 years at most. If pasture is part of your crop rotation, read no further. But for land that is used only for pasture here's some guidelines on how to keep it that way without always starting over.



Reed Canarygrass Sep 15, 2000 18 yrs later

## 8 Steps to Pasture Longevity

- 1. Choose long-lived species and varieties.** Yes, it's true that how you manage the stand is more important than variety selection. But it may be worth choosing a variety like Anik that is slower regrowing because it is building extra reserves are built in the roots or crown for winter.
- 2. Follow the rules for successful forage stand establishment.** You know what they are. But they're probably even more important if you're trying to establish long-lived species (like birds-foot trefoil) which may require extra attention.
- 3. Short-lived types can work too, if you let them go to seed.** Slender wheatgrass is short lived but it's been part of the stand for thousands of years on native grasslands on the crests of the Peace Beaton breaks. A custom grazer near Manning had a red clover stand that he didn't turn cattle into until full bloom (to prevent bloat) A side benefit was that the stand lasted over 8 years.
- 4. If you have good native grassland on dry slopes, trying to improve it with tame species is probably a waste of time and money.**



Algonquin & Rambler 5 yrs after seeding (Farrell Cr) & Anik 13 yrs after seeding (Cecil Lake).

**Peace River Forage Association  
of British Columbia**



**Pasture Knowledge**

- \* Anik alfalfa is a little slower regrowing, but it's building up winter reserves in root & crown.
- \* Short lived types can work too e.g. slender wheatgrass.
- \* Red clover and creeping red fescue are very tolerant to acidic soils.

Chart below: summary by BCMAFF based on trials (Odden, Colewell, Pedersen, Bickfod & Bovee locations).

(Continued from page 1)

5. **If you must graze in the establishment year, do it for only a few days at a time.** Maybe once to graze down the nurse crop (if you must use one) before the perennial crop has started growing, and again in late September – early October after it's put some reserves away for winter.
6. We know that taking a second cut of alfalfa in August increases the risk of winterkill. We can't shut down our grazing machines for the month of August. But maybe we should **make sure the fields that will be grazed in August have been rested since at least mid-June.**
7. Let's leave the term "sod-bound fescue" in the jargon of the seed growers where it belongs. **If the stand is deteriorating, try to figure out why.** Don't blame creeping red fescue for taking over your pasture. It's just done a good job of surviving the conditions (maybe including overgrazing) that didn't allow the other plants to survive.
8. **Consider alternatives to plowing and reseeded:** controlled grazing, burning, mowing, fertilizing, spraying with herbicides, aerating, sod seeding, or over seeding of legumes.

Pasture Mixes for the Peace	Seeding Rate (lb/acre)	Comments
Alfalfa	2	All areas except extremely wet locations
Bomegrass	6	
Creeping red fescue	2	
Alfalfa	3-4	Semi-dry areas
Brome grass	8	
Alfalfa	3-4	Dry areas
Crested wheatgrass	8	
Alsike clover	4-5	High water tables or wet locations subject to flooding
Reed Canarygrass	4-5	
Timothy	2	
Alfalfa	2	Shotgun mixture adapted to varying conditions; long season pasture
Alsike clover	1	
White clover	1	
Brome grass	3	
Creeping red fescue	2	
Timothy	3	
Crested wheatgrass	2	



Birdsfoot trefoil thriving, 18 years after seeding at Farrell Creek.

**Farrell Creek Plots**

In Farrell Creek Pasture near Hudson Hope forage grass and legumes plots were established in 1982. Plots were grazed nearly every year since then and were burned a couple of the early years. Some varieties and mixtures were still thriving 18 years after establishment:

- ⇒ **Reed canarygrass was extremely healthy** and green in Sept 2000, 18 years after establishment (photo page 1).
- ⇒ **Brome & alfalfa mixture** showed the impact of nitrogen fixation from the alfalfa. Brome mixed with alfalfa (photo to the left on left side) was much healthier than the plot with brome only (right side of photo).
- ⇒ **Birdsfoot trefoil was healthy** and thriving after 18 years.
- ⇒ Some **alfalfa varieties** (see photos page 1) were better able to compete with encroaching grass and weeds throughout the 18 years.



**Compiled by:** Keith Carroll, Kim Strasky & Julie Robinson

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