

# FORAGE FIRST

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## New Energy for Region

by Kim Schlaepfer and Vicki Moser

My name is Kim Schlaepfer and I am working with Julie Robinson as a co-op student for the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands in Fort St. John. I grew up in Horsefly which is located about an hour north-east of Williams Lake, on my parents resort and ranch. This spring I finished my second year at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, where I continue working towards a degree in Animal Biology. Coming from a ranch, I'm interested in all aspects of agriculture, and am excited to be a part of the composting/manure project, invasive plants program, oil and gas erosion project, wildlife compensation project, as well as the agroforestry project. You may also see me at the local fairs, tours and farmers markets.



My name is Vicki Moser and I am working with Sandra Burton as a summer student for Peace Region Forage Seed Association and Peace Region Forage Association. I grew up in Dawson Creek on my parents' hobby farm near Rolla, and am very glad to be back there this summer. This spring I finished my first year at the University of Lethbridge, where I will continue working towards a degree in Drama/ Drama Education. My minor in Social Studies has sparked a further interest in geography and agriculture, and I am therefore delighted to be able to help with the grass seed yield plots for the Forage Seed Association, the composting/manure project for the Forage Association, the summer tours for both organizations, and other projects.

As well, we're excited to meet Selina McGinnis, another co-op student coming from Courtney, who will be working with Kerry Clark at the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands located in Dawson Creek. (see more about Selina inside this issue.) We look forward to meeting and working with everyone this summer, and feel free to introduce yourselves at the various fairs, tours and farmers markets we will be attending!

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*"Dedicated to putting forage first in the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of livestock producers and other forage enthusiasts"*

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# Musings From My Quarter

by Deryle Griffith

## Let's Slow Down for Better Fuel Mileage

I've noticed in my experience that when I'm in a hurry and grab one more gear on my tractor, trying to make some time, I seem to spend most of the day fixing something I broke. As you get nearer the capacity of anything the cost of operation goes up exponentially, and then we go faster to try to make up for our extra costs which usually makes things worse. I think we may be doing this to the system that provides energy for life on our world.

Of all the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) released to the atmosphere, 97% is released by the normal functions of the earth. This CO<sub>2</sub> is cycled back by the miracle of photosynthesis to provide energy so that life can go on. The three percent that is in excess nearly matches the ancient stored carbon that we use as oil, gas and coal. So a person may think that stopping the use of these ancient carbon sources is all that is needed to stop the global warming. If we stopped using mined carbon now the atmospheric carbon would only drop 40 ppm by the end of this century, this isn't very much. I believe that oil and gas are some of the problem of the CO<sub>2</sub> in our atmosphere. I'm not sure that CO<sub>2</sub> is a large factor in global warming but I truly believe it is a huge indicator of a faltering carbon cycle which fuels life on earth, and this scares me.

If you have read any of my other columns you would know that I believe that the soil is the best carbon sink. Even in its depleted state, there is more carbon stored in our soil than in the atmosphere and trees combined. This I believe is our hope. How I believe oil and gas has raised the CO<sub>2</sub> level is in the power it gave to mankind. There is as much energy in two tablespoons of gasoline as a man expends in a week of labor, a liter is one year of labor for one man. Access to this much power is a huge responsibility, and I'm not sure that we understand that we are able to affect the cycles that support the life on this planet.

In our effort for maximum production we've used this powerful source of energy to mine the world. All of our civilizations have done this; Iraq was once the Golden Triangle, but is now desert, and so Babylon is gone. Greece once had forests and rich productive agriculture, but now their golden era is over. The Sahara Desert once produced golden grain which helped feed the Roman Empire, now gone. These civilizations destroyed their soils with hand tools and human labor; imagine the scope of possible devastation we are capable of with the power we now possess. We've got to start valuing soil, the true wealth of a nation.

The soil is a living thing and because of this it can be healed. Healing the soil, I believe, is our only hope as it's the key to the carbon, water, nitrogen and all the cycles that allow life to exist. I know this sounds pretty pessimistic but it's not. A few simple changes could make all the difference:

- ⇒ Protect the soil, don't have bare earth, the wind and rain will take it away.
- ⇒ Use trees to protect soil from the rain and wind. Hills and waterways should always be treed and trees should be used to protect the soil from forces of the wind.
- ⇒ Have deep rooted plants to increase the depth of the soil and wisely use animals to improve the soil biology and mineral cycles.
- ⇒ Be careful with the chemicals and amendments that are put on the land because above all else soil is a living thing and deserves our respect.

Not just because it is the hope of our children, but because it is part of the cycle of life.

Websites to help measure your carbon footprint.

The Nature Conservancy  
[www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator](http://www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator)

World Wildlife Fund  
[footprint.wwf.org.uk](http://footprint.wwf.org.uk)

# Tribute to Barb Cowger

by Michael Cowger

In Loving Memory Of



Barbara Cowger  
1942 ~ 2008

Barbara Florence Wood was born in Little Falls, New Jersey on October 15, 1942. Her parents loved to see new and exotic places and they passed this curiosity on to Barbara. She began her schooling in Kow Loon Bay, Hong Kong. Her father Jack, a shipwright, worked on the

reconstruction efforts of Hong Kong after the retreat of Japanese forces of WWII. Her mother, Helen, taught school. As her father suffered from TB it was decided that the hot dry climate of Australia would be better suited for his health. So began the Australian segment of her life. Helen continued teaching school while Jack commercially raised broiler chickens. Barb spoke fondly of the new chicks arriving and the discomfort of the broilers leaving, but this helped serve as she would say, to understand the cycle of time. Her mother Helen was very active in the community and school system and was also an avid gardener, dressing in bib overalls while working in her yard. These and many more assets were passed on to Barb, from her seemingly endless acres of lawn and many attempts at heat stroke, to her large garden and flowers continuously being monitored for any signs of weeds.

Barbara took up teaching like her mother and found it to be a suitable challenge as her first class out of college was made up of 60 grade 1's and 2's. The curiosity to see the world was realized in the accepting of a teaching position at the old Upper Pine School in 1964. Upon arrival at the Fort St. John Airport, she inquired as to the departure of the next tram to Upper Pine School. When she learned there was no such service, she made her way to town and spent her first night in the Peace River area, safe and sound in the Condill hotel.

The tradition of the time was for the young bachelors to "Court" the new school teachers in the area. Paul obviously caught her eye, for she returned from a visit to Australia in 1965 to prepare for her marriage in 1966.

Barbara continued to teach with positions in Wonowon, Montney, and the new Upper Pine School, all the while raising her young family and helping Paul to build their farm. With her retirement from teaching, she took up many activities, serving on the B.C. Assessment Authority board for six years traveling to and from many points in the province from her home in Montney to serving as the alternate to the PRRD chair. But possibly the most enjoyment came from her many volunteer activities. She loved to judge at 4-H speech and demonstration competitions, school science fair projects and in fall fair junior booth. Volunteering at the lunch booth at the Fall Fair for the Cattlemen's Association she felt to be a great place to visit with countless friends and acquaintances, while those of us she also volunteered did the work!

It is said, when Barb was phoned for a function of judging or volunteering, she routinely accepted before knowing the date or even the particulars of the request, and she would always fill us in on every detail of her just completed task.

A sharp and quick wit always lurked beneath the surface and no one was immune. A personal favorite of Mike's was Barb's thankfulness when he started wearing glasses as they "filled up that blank spot on his head"! Her biting comments could also serve to encourage us as she would say on occasion, "if you're going to stand there slack jawed, get a cloth and wipe the counter".

More than anything the response from the community to Barb's passing tells the whole story. Calls of condolence and visits from caring friends have all led to reminiscing about what a treasure Barb was. Friends and family will miss the wonderful dinners, BBQ's and gatherings Barb loved to host. She was an accomplished cook and sadly many of her recipes are now gone with her.

Barb was a cherished wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, volunteer and friend to many. We feel our lives were better for having Barb in them. Paul and his family would like to thank everyone for helping them through this difficult time.

Barb is survived by husband Paul, sons Mike (Carla), Dan (Charmayne) and granddaughters Kiana, Miranda & Erica, Sarah, Courtney & Ashley.



# Why I Want to be a Sheep Farmer

by Kari Bondoroff

In order to give you, the reader, more insight as to where this story is coming from, I have to describe my current farm situation. Between my husband, myself, our children, and my husband's parents we have 3 quarter sections: 1 - hay field, 2 - they live on and have fencing and handling systems created (kind-of), and 3 - we live on and are currently creating a blue-print of the farm set-up. Needless to say, we are all new farmers.

I have always loved livestock and animals and enjoy sheep because they are small enough that if needed, I can handle them myself with a dog and a rope. I started my ewe collection with retired 4-H projects that kids did not want slaughtered. My 4 ewes turned into 19 ewes quite quickly as we also decided to purchase purebred polypaes for dual purpose animals, all with name-tags I might add. We are forage producers and will be finishing lambs on grass/grain produced on our farm.

This year's lambing season has and is extended from March 9 – July 10 with 4 scheduled for March 9, 12 scheduled for May 26 and 2 scheduled for July 10. The last ewe lamb is not to be bred until August (yes, I am crazy trying to lamb in January). Of course, this article is not going to be a future predicting read so I will briefly describe the heart-aches of the March lambing season.

With a fully stocked lambing kit, a prepared lambing barn, and scheduled holidays, I started the lambing season with great excitement. By the end of February I realized that one of my ewe lambs had been bred at 6 months of age and that I would be expecting 5 ewes to lamb. My 300 lb mature "Frost" mama gave me three beautiful lambs first. With the large bag that this girl possesses (at times it drags on the ground) and the fact that she had raised 3 last year, I figured she'd do okay. They all had their first drink of colostrum and after a 2 hour period of sitting with her in -15 degrees C in the barn, we all ventured back to bed at 5:30 am. The next night, one of them died. Okay, learn from mistakes I told myself and if I was to have another set of triplets, I would supplement with the bottle for added nutrition and warmth.

We waited a week and then "Snowflake" gave me a set of healthy twins, yes at 2 am again. Not bad, I was at 200%. "Jojo" was next and I found her in distress in the middle of the paddock not wanting to go into the barn. The lamb had broken its water bag and the tongue was hanging out of the lamb's mouth. My first reaction, "oh no, I've lost another one and am going to lose her too, if I don't get this lamb out of her".

So, I sent my daughter to fetch her Grandpa and I roped "Jojo" and dragged her into the lean. After we had her situated I was able to pull one leg out at a time (with the contractions) and then pull the lamb out. A live, 15lb. ram lamb was what she had produced. The next night my ewe lamb, "Star", did the same thing and I had to pull a tiny 4.3 lb lamb for her. I figured she was done and baby was drinking so I went to the house. 10 minutes later I had a feeling that I should drive over again to re-check her and sure enough, there was a second baby there. So not only was this ewe not supposed to lamb so early, but she had given me twins. The girls seemed fine so I went home to bed. At the 2 am check I found "Star's" mother "Betsy" in the lean with her water bag extended. After 45 minutes I had another set of triplets and I was officially finished lambing until May.

At the end of the day, yesterday, I had 6 lambs with their Moms and now they are all doing fine. The following is the list of procedures that had to be completed during the season and the lessons learned for next lambing season.

- 1- Keep ewes and lambs in a separate area for at least 3 months to avoid babies getting lost in the confusion.
- 2- Keep ewes and lambs separate from other species and non-producing ewes until the lambs are at least 20 lbs.
- 3- Needle lambs in the neck to avoid getting sore back legs.
- 4- Learn how to fix inverted eyelids to avoid making a trip to the vet (thank you to Dr. Mike Ross).
- 5- Bottle feed at least one triplet, no matter if the ewe is capable of raising three.
- 6- Have 2 red number 0.6mm feeding tubes in case one gets burned in the dishwasher. (thankfully, baby wanted to suck after this occurred)
- 7- Expect the unexpected to happen even if you are well prepared. Especially if you are not comfortable performing a procedure, you can be sure that that's what you will have to do - so be prepared for everything!

Although my percentage has dropped from 220% to 120% lamb production, I have learned many valuable mistakes early enough that I can make adjustments to my business plan and lambing procedures. There is never a dull moment when it comes to producing any kind of livestock; and there are always bad moments that come with the good. But when I see my children and how much they love the lambs and their mothers it makes the hard work so worth it.

# Raising the Profile of Sheep

by Keith & Marilyn Carroll



One of my favorite *Western Producer* columns (after Shannon or Elaine's "That's funny") is Ryan Taylor's "Cowboy Logic". In his most recent he was thinking "how nice it'd be to load the ration in a feed wagon and drive along a fence line auguring it out for the calves without so much as opening a gate. Then I looked over at my boys... and thought how awful a dad I would be to deny them the opportunity to fill pails with a scoop shovel and carry them to feed the calves... Sheep are a labour intensive piece of livestock. A small flock could teach young folks a lot about hard work, patience, and disappointment."



Carrolls' new crop

Rylie Bondaroff & Friend

There have been a couple articles recently in the farm press about cattle ranchers getting interested in the sheep business. Assuming this interest isn't because they hope to increase their social status, I have a few biased thoughts to pass along to any of you considering the sheep business:

1. Lambing out 100 ewes is as demanding of your time as calving 100 cows (probably more demanding if you have the combination of masochism and sadism to be lambing any time before May 24). But over the last 29 years, our gross income/ewe (depending on lamb price and whether she had a single or twins) would be from roughly 10% to 35% of gross income/cow - 20% is probably not a bad figure to plan for.

2. Feed requirements for 100 ewes are about 20% feed requirements for 100 cows - and because ewes have a longer time each year than cows when they are neither gestating nor lactating, feed quality can be less for part of the year. But a ewe in late gestation carrying twins will need higher quality feed at that time and for lactation than a cow would at similar stages. And she would have been consuming a good energy feed during "flushing" to have conceived twins.

3. Where sheep really shine at feed efficiency is in the growing and finishing stage. Feed efficiencies as good as 4:1 have been reported for grain fed lambs. The last 3 years, we have been selling live lambs in the 90 to 120 lb. range without feeding any grain. They've grazed alfalfa / meadow brome regrowth in the fall until the ground is too frozen to poke electric fence posts into; then been fed reasonable quality first cut legume / grass hay. (This system might not work so well if you're selling them on the rail.)

4. The feed efficiency of lambs and the usually small price "slide" for lambs (at least compared with calves) makes me think if you're going to be in the sheep business, you may as well finish the lambs. We've even bought feeder lambs on occasion. I remember only 2 occasions when I figured we lost money finishing lambs.

5. Electric fence can work with sheep (in fact it's the only pasture fence a sheep producer can afford) but the system must be properly set up and the sheep well trained. Wool is an excellent insulator. To quote Arvo Koppel: "Electric fence doesn't work well for sheep during the 3 S's: starvation, sex, and September."

6. If you have a flock of 25 or so, and enjoy them, I suggest you either keep it that way or go big enough to afford good dogs, some paid help at lambing, some time managing, maybe some decent fence and equipment. 50 to - oh, I don't know - 200 sheep is a lot of work for relatively low return. (See #1 above.)



# Integrated Brush Management

by Dale Gross

Academics, ranchers and other interested parties gathered in Dauphin, Manitoba on March 25 & 26, 2008, for a conference on Integrated Brush Management.

Dauphin, Manitoba is located on the eastern edge of the Aspen Parkland, the tension zone between the Boreal Forest to the north and the prairie grasslands to the south.

The conference launched "A Guide to Integrated Brush Management on the Western Canadian Prairies." The manual provides the most current information on the chemical, mechanical and biological control of brush. It is the first manual of its kind since 1965.

Managing brush can improve rangeland for livestock production in the Aspen Parkland. The restriction of natural processes including fire has led to the expansion of aspen, balsam poplar and willows onto rangelands, reducing the carrying capacity of the range by up to 75%. Current estimates show aspen and other shrub species expanding at a rate of 1 to 5 percent per year in prairie grasslands.

Dr. Art Bailey introduced several issues, including brush expansion and control and the potential for more frequent and long-lasting drought.

He outlined remedies for managing brush using mechanical, chemical, fire and grazing treatments; all of which are provided in detail in the new manual. He concluded by stating that the changing environmental and economic conditions compel ranchers to plan for the long-term but remain flexible.

The concept of using livestock to control brush was presented by Dr. Fred Provenza. He described the results of manipulating livestock preferences to control brush and other agricultural and pasture weeds.

Dr. Barry Irving provided techniques for successful and safe burning in the Aspen Parkland.

The interactions between logging and grazing can often lead to conflict. Gerry Ehlerst suggested several best management practices to mitigate these issues.

Ron Moss and Bill Gardiner outlined several mechanical methods for brush control which are then followed by additional treatments including mechanical, chemical, fire or grazing.

The conference concluded with a producer panel in which they described their experiences controlling brush in the Aspen Parkland.

The conference was an excellent opportunity to meet the authors of the manual, and discuss the myriad of issues surrounding brush management and the livestock industry in Western Canada.





# BC Ministry of Ag Update

by Julie Robinson

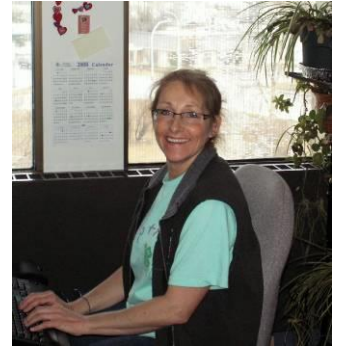
Introducing the current Peace River Ministry of Agriculture team in the Peace, there are 3 branches that include:

**1. Industry Competitiveness Branch** includes Harvey Glacier and Karla Barrie. Harvey, Industry Specialist, spends most of his time these days working with Grains and Oilseeds, dealing primarily with marketing and strategic planning. Karla, Youth and Community Development Co-ordinator, works primarily with all aspects of 4-H.

**2. Business Risk Management Branch** includes our Production Insurance staff. Lee Bowd, Glen Mielke (Dawson Creek), and Gord Ouellette (Ft St John) are product reps and Casey Moser (DC) and Jeanne Walsh (FSJ) are administrative support for production insurance. Lee has recently found his days filled with the Interim Wildlife Compensation Program for Standing Forages.



Glen Mielke



Karla Barrie

**3. Regional Operations** includes three Agrologists, Kerry Clark and Kari Bondaroff in Dawson Creek and Julie Robinson in Ft St John and Shelley Greenwood as admin support. Kerry Clark, Crop Protection Specialist, is currently working with weed management and crop pest diseases. Kari Bondaroff our newest addition finds her days filled with GIS mapping, meetings, emergency preparedness, and livestock and grazing management. Julie Robinson has recently been involved with the wildlife compensation program as well, and works with producers on livestock and grazing management tools. Shelley has also found her days filled with wildlife compensation projects on top of providing admin support to our staff.



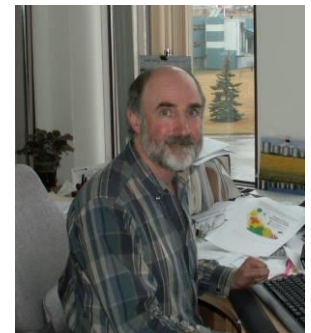
Casey, Shelley, & Lee



Kari Bondaroff

Regional Operations has hired **2 new summer students** for 2008 and has a full work schedule for them. Selina McGinnis comes from Courtenay, BC where her family farm, McGinnis Berry Crops Ltd, is located. Selina is working on a degree in Biology at the University of Victoria and has a lot of on farm experience. She is interested in furthering her knowledge on insects and plant breeding. She will be working with Kerry Clark on projects such as insect monitoring, red clover case bearer monitoring, and invasive plants. You might see her at events such as producer summer tours, farmers market and local fall fairs, so feel free to say hello and introduce yourself.

Our second student, Kim Schlaepfer is from Horsefly, BC, where her family farms at the Cariboo Country Inn & Double C Ranch. Kim is working on an Animal Biology major at the Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops. Kim is also interested in learning more about all aspects of agriculture. She will be spending her summer working with manure and composting trials, invasive plants, wildlife damage assessments, and you might see her at local fairs, tours, and farmers market.



Kerry Clark

We look forward to working with and seeing everyone this summer!



# The Lighter Side of Forage

by Shannon McKinnon

## FEEDING FORAGE TO RABBITS? BE FOREWARNED!

Have any of you seen that documentary about the bear suit guy? It's about a man with a dream. A dream of going toe to toe with a bear and surviving. Now, he's not so daft that he doesn't realize that as a human, he's poorly equipped for such a battle, so he asks the government to fund a hundred thousand dollar experiment to build a human bear suit that will even the odds. The government discusses the matter. They were going to launch a lunch program in a couple dozen schools with the money and maybe help out some ranchers, but then they think . . . Wow! A bear suit! The man gets his money.

He builds this suit and climbs into it. People test it by hitting him with bats, rolling him down a couple mountains and such. It works fabulous. The only glitch is that the suit is made of steel, and it is really, really, heavy. Whenever the guy tips over, it takes three people to get him back on his feet. This is where I see a problem. If the guy goes to fight a bear and tips over, three people are going to have to sacrifice themselves to rush in and get the guy in the suit back on his feet again. Which I suppose is only fair. It is, after all, his dream to go toe to toe with a bear and live, not theirs.

Wrestling a bear, even in a protective suit, is still sort of impressive. A person could even be forgiven for thinking it would be somewhat scarier than say, wrestling a rabbit. They would be wrong, but they could still be forgiven. Especially if they had never actually owned a rabbit.

Where does this notion of harmless rabbits come from? You can't even blame the cartoons. Isn't the rabbit always featured crunching up a carrot? Carrots are hard. Try crunching down a carrot with only your gums and see how far you get. People think rabbits are toothless soft sacks of fur. No-one seems to realize that rabbits come with extremely sharp edges and a set of snappers that would make a beaver blush.

Rabbits chew through three quarter inch plywood. They chew through chicken wire like it's made out of butter. They escape. You chase them around, the poor helpless creatures, frantic that the dog is going to get to them before you do. Then you are unfortunate enough to finally catch the bunny and that's when you discover the truth. Scared bunnies have teeth like a shark and claws like a lion and now you have the scars to prove it.

There is a certain amount of shame in showing up in emergency to get stitches for a bunny attack. Even the guy in the bear suit would get more sympathy

then a person who wrestles rabbits. Fortunately, equipping yourself to go toe to toe with a rabbit is far less expensive. It doesn't even require a government grant. For a mere \$2.99 you can get yourself a decent pair of thick oven mitts; the essential ingredient in any bunny keeper's arsenal. Armed to the elbows in such a fashion it is possible to avoid any repeat trips to emergency by keeping your arms stretched out as far from your body as possible while transporting the rabbit back to his reinforced cage.

Not that it will do any good. Reinforcing the cage is simply giving yourself something to do on a Sunday afternoon. You can add so much wire to the floor and walls of your bunny run that you can't even see inside anymore. Not to worry. If you want to get a glimpse of your bunnies all you have to do is merely turn away from the hutch, and they can easily be spotted hopping across the lawn.



It took me two months before I gave up our bunny catch and release program for good. "That's it!" I finally exclaimed, throwing down my oven mitts in a fit of frustration. "Dogs, coyotes and hawks grab your knife and forks, those rabbits can just run loose."

That was over three years ago. In the evenings we can sit on the deck and watch as our two happy rabbits make their way out of the forest and across the front lawn, while our dogs keep a respectful distance. We watch as they pause in the vegetable garden for a quick bedtime snack before heading off to their burrow beneath the chicken coop for the night. There is a reason why nothing has gone near the fuzzy little creatures in all this time and I bear the scars to explain it.