

FORAGE FIRST

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Life Is Full!

by Sandra Burton



NPARA farmers travel from Manning for workshop



Jill shares her passion for soil life

I am not sure which has been more fun: 1) talking about my favourite topic soil health, with a full and varied crowd at the Tower Lake Hall recently or 2) facilitating 3 groups to collaborate for our summer tour or 3) compiling this issue, with so many people enthused about writing.

First of all, we definitely had delightful discussions from the beginning to the end of our time with Jill Clapperton, from the small group microscope workshop in the morning to the larger group discussions in the afternoon/ evening to the planning for "A Day in the Field with Jill Clapperton" in the future.

Second, we have a wonderful tour coming together to Central Alberta with interesting topics/ stops planned and innovative hosts to meet. But the best part will be the journey there and back with folks from North Peace Applied Research Association, Peace Region Forage Seed Association and our Forage Association.

But I have to say, that discussions over this issue of the Forage First have been incredibly inspiring too. I hope you enjoy the range of topics that your Forage membership stepped forward with. (see below)

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2010 Membership Form, & Forage Facts

www.peaceforage.bc.ca

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Clapperton Draws Crowd

by Assorted Authors

Sandra Burton: "Jill Clapperton originally grew up in central Alberta and for many years was a Rhizosphere Ecologist with Agriculture Canada in Lethbridge. She became legendary for her energetic work with zero till systems and soil biological processes. Jill married a rancher from the Bitterroot Valley south of Missoula, Montana, where they raised 3 boys. She now has her own business Earth Spirit Land Resource Consulting, and works with Shepherds Grain, a group of 33 grain farmers from Idaho, Oregon and Washington, who are seeking sustainable systems and a fair price for their costs of production. They are successfully marketing grain at premium prices for their labeling with nutrients, vitamins and minerals and transparent costs of production. Jill is a world-renowned and facilitates projects in Europe and Africa as well as across North America. Several ranchers and farmers heard Jill speak at past Western Canadian Grazing or Canadian Forage Seed Conferences and urged us to bring her to the Peace again. Thank you to our sponsors who helped make this possible (see pg 15)"

John & Patt Kendrew: "What we gleaned is that dirt is really soil, and hosts many microscopic but important critters. These critters make a huge difference in the composition of the soil in that they break down plant life in a series of steps creating richer soil that retains more moisture and provides nutrients for plant growth. These critters are extremely active under the right conditions. Our understanding is that the right conditions depend on lots of litter available to them on the surface of the soil and a variety of root growth in the subsoil. It would appear that one of the most important plants for improving the soil are the legumes such as alfalfa which can grow deep roots and fix nitrogen. According to Jill, there are a number of companion plants that work very well together or in rotation (for example wheat and canola). Jill was very emphatic that any seeding should be done without tillage and by using no-till seeding equipment. We understand from her talk that there are a number of practices that are detrimental to the soil critters including: over-grazing, commercial fertilizers, tillage, top soil stripping without additional seed in place.

Jill's talk brings us to another paradigm shift which always causes additional stress. Having originally joined the Peace River Forage Association as cattle ranchers looking for ways to improve feed for the cattle, we have been re-organized into grass ranchers. Just as we are becoming comfortable with rotational grazing, heavy impact hoof actions, etc. it now appears that we have to become microbe ranchers and nematode supporters."

Brian Haddow: "Jill Clapperton is the only scientist I have listened to in the last 10 years, who has related the soil and its organisms to overall plant, livestock health and even landscape health. The rhizosphere is like the main cog in the agricultural machine, it is the biodiversity wheel; if it isn't functioning well, nothing else that depends on the soil or plant life is either. I guess that this is kind of the same as the whole is worth way more than the sum of its parts. She lives up to her billing and is one of the best speaker that I have listened to in a long time, meaningful, down to earth, valuable and we need to encourage her to come up again."



Ernie Nimitz: "I think the full hall was a testament to the quality of speaker and to some good footwork done behind the scenes. Jill Clapperton was very interesting. I hadn't heard some of the information before, and I like the way she presented it. A researcher that can express their ideas effectively is rare; and I think people got a lot out of her talks and definitely understood how important the microorganisms are to our whole systems.

It got me thinking about holistic management, and wondering how these principles were being applied at their ranch in Montana. I think what we are doing here at the Kiskatinaw Ranch is on the right track. We are taking care of it organically and looking after the soil life."

Bill Gaugler, who travelled 4 1/2 hr from Hawk Hills, AB to hear Jill, says "I had heard her speak in Grande Prairie 4 years ago at the Forage Seed Conference, so we wanted to support your Forage Association to bring her up again. I was very impressed! She obviously believes strongly in zero till and no fall tillage, and so do I. Other take home messages were thinking about micorrrhizal health when we plan our rotations, and including deep rooted crops. The work with cover crops and growing our own nitrogen that NPARRA is doing fits in well with her messages. I look forward to collaborating with your group on our next event, the tour to Central Alberta."

Keeping the Peace

by Arthur Hadland



Part 1: Sloughing on Williston Reservoir

The two photos above show an endangered recreational cabin beside the Williston Reservoir on the Peace River Reach. (The WAC Bennett Dam produces 30% of BC's power). This cabin is at the mouth of the Yacht Club Bay on the Williston Reservoir. Look at the difference between the June 2008 (left) and December 2008 (right)

photos – those banks are disappearing fast. This cabin was located well within the BC Hydro safe line. Now it is doubtful that the erosion will cease until the shoreline reaches bed rock. There is also a cabin at Schooler Creek that is falling into the reservoir. This shoreline instability is typical of all the river lands on the lower Peace where Site C is proposed.



Part 2: 1973 Slide on the Peace River

This land slide (above both pictures) occurred during a wet spring in 1973, near the junction of the Halfway River and the Peace River and lying within the proposed reservoir. These photos illustrate the extreme instability of the banks of the Peace River Valley. The 1st picture overlooks Tompkins Flat on Highway #29 (about 40 km west of Fort St. John). The 2nd picture shows the Peace River just beginning to break through the 1973 mud dam some 12 hours after the slide.

It takes little imagination to see how easily and quickly the pondage of the proposed reservoir could be plugged up with the clay soils and be rendered ineffective. As noted in my previous writing showing the sloughing on the Williston Reservoir, the Williston Reservoir has exceeded the boundaries of its safe line. It takes a small step of logic to see that there is probably **no safe zone** within the proposed Site C reservoir.

Valuable farmland estimated at 4600 hectares would be destroyed by the proposed Site C Reservoir. A portion of the river valley farmland that would be destroyed is Class 1. This is some of the best farmland in British Columbia, meaning there is no restriction on the range of crops that may be grown. We should all be concerned about losing the best farmland in BC lying north of Quesnel. With growing concerns over local food security, it does not make sense to destroy some of the best agricultural land in BC.

A Provincial ecological and environmental disaster is assured if the proposed Site C proceeds. Energy from the proposed Site C would be neither green nor clean...

These articles are 2 parts of a 5 part series compiled by Arthur Hadland, Citizen of the Peace, Baldonnel, BC. For further discussion, he can be reached at (250) 789-3566

President's Paragraph

by Rick Kantz

Well I don't know if it will be spring when you get this, but it sure is now. Temps in the 20's and green grass in the middle of April makes for a happy grazer. I think Sandra is finally getting the hang of deadlines for me, she called Monday to tell me it was due Tuesday and your reading it today. Sandra suggested that I give an update on NEEMAC seeing that I have spent a lot of time on it.

It all started on a Thursday afternoon, the department that looked after NEEMAC was honoured with a prestigious Premier Award, and by Monday afternoon they were all canned. The whole Marketing and Community Relations branch was deemed not necessary. As well we lost people that were working on water issues, planning, and land use.

Not that NEEMAC was perfect but it was one forum for landowners to have a say and effect some change. Just when we start to get some people down south educ d their back on us and the problems we face. They ated to our problems, our current government has turne continue to show us that they don't care about our safety or concerns we have around fair use of our land.

Where are we now? Don't have a clue, nobody has told us a word yet. Likely the OGC will take over and organize some get together to share information with landowners and industry. Judging the OGC by past performance would lead one to question the value in this. I think it's time for our MLA's to remember the needs of the people that put them there.

SCCC Update

by Bill Wilson



**Soil Conservation
Council of Canada
AGM and
Directors Meeting
Ottawa,
March 24 & 25, 2010**

I recently had the opportunity to represent the BC Taking Charge Team (with reps from Abbotsford Soil Conservation Association and the Peace River Forage Association) at the AGM of the Soil Conservation Council of Canada.

Participants at the meeting included 1 or 2 people from each province plus 3 or 4 government people that work in the area of soil conservation. It was interesting meeting members of other producer groups with similar interests and similar problems. Funding is a challenge for everyone. On the good news side, SCCC in cooperation with the Canadian Cattlemen Association have applied to AgriFlex for funding to assist with soil conservation projects in each province.

SCCC is also involved many national and international issues. Besides soil conservation issues, another big issue is water quality, and in many areas water quantity. See an excerpt from a larger article in the next column about their activities and accomplishments.

For a Peace Country cowboy it was very interesting getting the inside story from the President, Don McCabe, on things like climate change conferences and a national food policy.

SCCC Activities and Accomplishments

✓ Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC) is a national, non-government, independent organization formed in 1987 to provide a non-partisan public forum at the national level for soil and water conservation. It is face and voice of soil conservation in Canada.

✓ In 1990 SCCC established the Canadian Conservation Hall of Fame, which recognizes Canadians who have made a significant contribution through their dedication to promoting soil conservation in Canada. On a yearly basis SCCC accepts nominations of outstanding candidates to be inducted into the Conservation Hall of Fame. Since 1990 SCCC has inducted 24 conservation leaders into the Hall. A complete list is available on the SCCC website – www.soilcc.ca/about-us3.htm

✓ SCCC delivered the soils and nutrient components of the Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Program for Canadian Agriculture (GHGMP) from 2001 to 2006. Under the program over 500 BMP demonstrations were established, over 41,000 producers attended events and over 500,000 people received information on GHGs and BMPs through climate change factsheets and news articles.

✓ In 2009-2010 SCCC and the Taking Charge Teams tested a greenhouse gas calculator (Holos) developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The objective of the testing with producers across Canada was to determine the ease of use and the value of the calculator to farms considering implementation of mitigation strategies to reduce GHGs.

Economics of Grazing

A discussion sparked by Peggy Strankman

Peggy Strankman is the Environment Manager with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association in Calgary.

(Email: Strankmanp@cattle.ca)

Hubert McClelland is a Grazing Specialist based in Cantley, Quebec. (Email: hubert.mcclelland@sympatico.ca)

Leanne Thompson is Project Coordinator for the Saskatchewan Forage Council. (Email: office@saskforage.ca)

Peggy: "I have been asked for the economics behind good grazing management. Can any of you help me answer this? Yes, I'm looking for a simple answer to a complicated cost of production question."

Hubert: "My experience in Québec with improved grazing management has increased the number of animal unit (an animal unit = 1000 lbs of live animal) days from 60- 70 days to as much as 150 days per acre. In addition, the intensive grazing management allows the producer to maintain the grass production indefinitely over time without recourse to inputs such as fertilizer, ploughing and reseeding, and herbicides on our tillable acres in pasture."

Good grazing management or management intensive grazing includes: providing water on the pasture to control grazing patterns, the equitable recycling of animal manures on the grazing area, a rest period between grazings allowing for adequate regrowth of the forage, restoration of root reserves, maintaining plant leaf residue which improves solar energy capture & soil organic matter (carbon capture), helping to conserve soil moisture and improving the recycling of soil minerals. Good grazing management practised over a period of years will also improve the biodiversity of the pasture sward.

The practice of good grazing management is a long term investment that allow costs to be spread over a producers lifetime, as compared to spending on annual crops which require yearly inputs costs.

Economically, extending the grazing season by one or two months can save a cow calf producer 1 to 2 \$ per day. A 60 days extended season @ 2\$/per day is the equivalent of 0.24\$/lb on a 500 calf. Good grazing management applied to dairy production allows the dairy producer to reduce the feed cost per 100 liters of milk by 50% from 16\$ to 20\$ per 100 liters under conventional dairy production in Canada to as low as 10\$ per 100 liters feed cost during the grazing season.

Basically if a unit of energy from pasture cost 1 unit, the same unit of energy from mechanically harvested forage costs 2 to 3 times the cost from pasture. The same energy unit from grain cost 4 to 5 times the cost of the unit of energy from pasture. Good grazing management improves on conservation in many ways.

In beef stocker production, the feed cost of gain can be as cheap as \$0.35 - \$0.45\$/lb on grass. This surpasses the feed cost per pound in feedlot to quote Feb 2010 issue of The Canadian Cattlemen at 0.62\$ to 0.66\$ /lb of gain. I hope others will critique my response."



Leanne: "This is a great question; one that we are willing to take a stab at to help you out! The Forage Industry Analysis project that the Saskatchewan Forage Council is working on has actually helped in providing information to answer these types of questions. The final report resulting from this project will be available in April 2010. The example provided below is based on the pasture valuation section of this report."

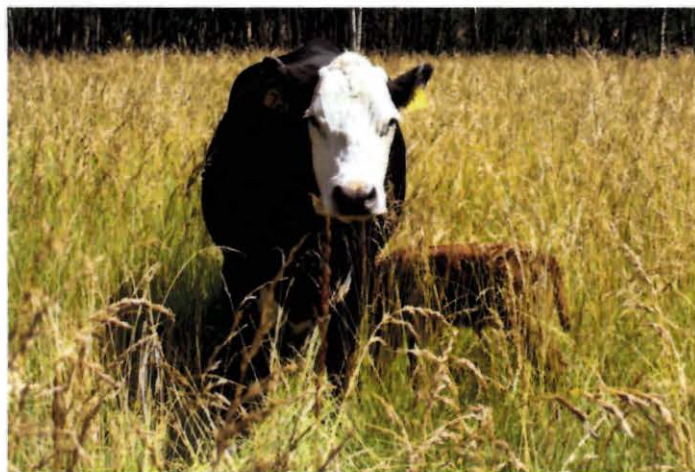
Good grazing management is all about maintaining productivity of your grass stands at the best possible level. If you are able to maintain grass stands in excellent condition, the carrying capacity of the stand is at its highest. On the other hand, grass stands in poor or fair condition have a reduced carrying capacity. Carrying capacity of the stand will have a direct effect on the number of livestock you can graze and the performance of animals grazing on the forage.

To demonstrate the economics of this idea, you can apply recommended stocking rates and custom grazing rates to look at the effect on economic returns. Recommended stocking rates are set based on the pasture condition as follows (% of good condition pasture): Excellent – 133%, Good – 100%, Fair – 66%, and Poor – 33%.

In a recent survey of grazing rates, it was determined that custom grazing rates in Saskatchewan were in the \$0.75 per pair per day range (approximately \$22.50/AUM) for forage only (i.e. no other services included). This means that if the recommended stocking rate for your pasture in good condition is 1.3 AUM/acre, the stocking rate can be increased to 1.7 AUM/acre if it is in excellent condition. This will translate into another \$9/acre (based on the \$22.50 AUM rate) for the pasture in excellent condition.

On the flip side, pasture in poor condition will have a reduced stocking rate of 0.4 AUM/acre and pasture in fair condition a stocking rate of 0.9 AUM/acre. These stocking rates will translate into a loss of \$20.25/acre for poor pasture and \$9/acre for fair pasture (compared to good condition).

Good grazing management that aims to maintain or improve pasture condition will clearly translate into economic returns for the grazer."



Peggy: "I still am searching out more answers. I read a paper recently that indicated that producers maximize their production at levels below excellent condition. (Published in March issue of Rangeland Ecology at www.srmjournals.org) Is there any similar work done in Canada?" Peggy can be reached by email at: Strankmanp@cattle.ca

Did You Know...

by Sandra Burton

ARDCORP has agreed to partner with our Forage Association and will contribute \$23,500 over 2 years to set up demonstrations of **3-D Wildlife Fencing**. Thank you to Chris Thomson who prepared the application proposal after consultation with the Board of Directors. Bill Wilson helped us set up a mini demo in March in Farmington and there will be 3 to 4 more demos set up in the North and South Peace.

Steve and Sarah of Rainey Ranch are expecting their 2nd child any day now: another new forage member! Steve is taking a paternal leave from Talisman and they are looking forward to their summer.

The first signs of spring are there! First sightings of robins and the **Kendrews back** in the Peace.

Dr. Vern Baron and the researchers at Lacombe Research Station are working with new varieties of triticale in **swath grazing trials** (that are showing promise). Triticale has the largest window of opportunity for later planting dates. Triticale seems to exceed the yields of corn for the lower input costs of barley or oats; therefore lowers the daily costs of keeping cows in the winter. For more information, contact Albert Kuipers of the Grey Wooded Forage Association at gwfa1@telus.net or phone (403) 844- 2645.

By the time readers receive this, **Ben and Wilma Hansen** will have had their farm auction on May 1.

The **Grazing Mentorship continues in Alberta** with alternate funding with 16 active grazing mentors spread throughout the province. To find out more contact ARECA office at (780) 416 6046 or visit the website at www.areca.ab.ca

Dr. Tom Pittman is now a Senior Instructor in Production Animal Health with the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Calgary. Many forage members remember and respect Tom's service to Peace ranchers while he was in veterinary practise with Dr. Barry Ross, and then while he was a Livestock Agrologist with the BC Ministry of Agriculture in Fort St. John for over 10 years. In 2001, he left the Peace to become provide feedlot consultation services to feedlots across Western Canada and U.S. with Feedlot Health Management Services (FHMS) in Okotoks. He brings a wealth of practical experience to his current academic role. He can be reached at tjpittma@ucalgary.ca

Darrell and Nancy Peterson are so excited that the Forage tour is coming to them this year, they are hosting us in their new backyard in Olds upon arrival on the evening of June 28. Join us if you can for an entertaining and informative tour. (See back page for more details.)

Special Spring Sheep Section History of the Peace Country Sheep Sale

by Nancy Peterson

There have been sheep in the Peace River area for many years starting with the first settlers. Many of them had mixed farms including a few sheep for meat and wool for family use. Often there was a community ram that was passed around in the appropriate season so that they would all get a lamb crop. Some good sized flocks developed, but a common problem was that the Peace Country was a long ways from markets.

Markets were "where producers could find them" and at times they worried about even getting their lambs sold. Forty-five years ago producers shipped lambs out by rail to the Edmonton stockyards or Vancouver. A local butcher shop took a few; and once Patterson's Auction Mart started, some were shipped from there.

In the early 1970's Peace River Lamb Association was organized and served both the Alberta and BC Peace by coordinating lamb shipments, shearing, etc. A few shipments of slaughter lambs were air freighted to Safeway and Woodward's stores in Vancouver.

In the late 1960's of early 1970's one of our local farmers, Ray Turner, worked for the Alberta sheep and Wool Commission. He was instrumental in doing preliminary work for a lamb processing plant at Innisfail, Alberta. A government loan was secured and producers bought shares to build the Lamb Processors Co-Op. Regular group shipments of Peace country fat lambs were shipped there, but financial problems prevailed at the plant. The government ended up taking it over; all of the share values dropped to zero so producers lost money they had invested. The government ran the plant (then known as Lambco) processing lamb and veal for 10 - 15 years until it was sold and became known as Canada West.

In about 1980 a number of Dawson Creek producers organized a couple of truckloads of feeder and fat lambs to the auction in Kamloops. A couple of producers went down to sort out the paint brands and sort the lambs for auction sale lots by ownership and size. The lambs were sold through the sale ring the day after they got there. Shrink was heavy, and it was not successful enough to continue.

Shortly after the Kamloops auction episodes, Peace River Lamb went through revitalization, and the fat lamb trucks got rolling again. Dawson Creek producers had to take lambs to Whitelaw or Rycroft, Alberta to get on the trucks to Innisfail. It was a long way to travel every other Sunday to meet a lamb truck.

I entered the picture as a sheep producer in the mid-1980s and got to gain some of this frustrating market experience first hand. There were a number of examples of hard won markets. There was one shipment to Vancouver where the producers got paid for the lambs, but then the buyer didn't have enough money to pay the trucking. Producers had to pay the trucker and fight a lengthy battle with the bonding company to get reimbursed. There was a feeder lamb shipment to a feedlot in Alberta who after a certain amount of time and hassle did manage to get producers paid for the lambs. However, he had deducted \$5/lamb for freight when the deal was FOB Dawson Creek. He admitted that he owed the \$5/head, but went bankrupt before he paid it.

For the most part, our market was for fat lambs shipped out about every two weeks in the fall. This was actually quite a job if a person had very many sheep. The window of opportunity for the lamb that graded well at Lambco (Canada West) was about 90 to 110 pounds. Under finished lambs were discounted heavily as well as overweight carcasses were discounted.

It was quite a coordinating effort to see that trucks were as full as possible, but not overfull. Trucks started out in northern Alberta, came down through Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, Rycroft, Valleyview, and south to Innisfail picking up lambs all along the way. Producers had to reserve their space a week ahead; so it meant dedicating a day a week to lamb shipping during the season when lambs were finishing. No flock had all of its lambs finish at one time; so it meant weighing lambs one Saturday or Sunday to reserve space on the truck. Then the next Sunday, the marked fat lambs had to be sorted out and hauled to the truck. Some of the truck stopping points had loading chutes; others were just a wide spot in the road so lambs had to be lifted into the truck. It was hard to know just exactly what time the truck would arrive at each pickup point; so it wasn't hard to spend half a day meeting the lamb truck. Sometimes there were too many lambs called in for the truck; so everyone had to take a proportional cut back. This meant another last minute sort of the lambs to decide which ones could maybe wait two weeks.

Sometimes when there was room on the trucks, we could send cull ewes or rams. Unless we got them on a truck, about the only other option was the local auction where the common price was about \$5.00 per head less auction fees

History of the Peace Country Sheep Sale- con't

In 1991 and 1992 we had a couple of lamb and cull ewe sales at Patterson's Auction Mart in conjunction with the yearly ram sale put on by the Dawson Creek Sheep Breeders Assoc. They were mildly successful, but didn't seem to attract the buyers needed. I do remember taking a number of pretty good looking cull ewes to the second sale, but there were no buyers. By the time I had paid trucking and commission, I had netted 20 cents per ewe.

The idea that we needed an all inclusive sheep sale for the area came up over coffee with a couple of our producers. It was about the same time that Fort Macleod Auction Mart was holding successful field sales for cattle in the Peace Country; a few producers would bring their stock to one ranch in the community, sort them into pens, and then auctioneers, buyers, and a crowd of onlookers would travel from ranch to ranch for a couple of days selling the pens of cattle. It was working well. I remember seeing Peter Tschetter, boss of the local Hutterite colony, at the sales and a couple of times he mentioned that we should be selling sheep that way.

1994 was a year that we had a very heavy hay crop that had gotten rained down flat, and I had way too much time to think while I was cutting hay. I got to thinking about an on farm sheep sale, and whether it could work. My husband was manager of South Peace Farms, a large ranch along the Alaska Highway with a number of cattle pens, loading chutes, and a certified scale. It might be a place where we could try a sale; and when I asked him, he agreed on a super reasonable rental rate for us to give it a try.

We called a meeting of the North Peace Sheep Producers and the Dawson Creek Sheep Breeders, and found that there was interest. The local Hutterite Colony consigned 300 lambs on the spot to get it rolling. We were able to get a \$2660 grant from a government program, PRASP, to help pay for advertising and our first set up expenses. We enlisted a local auctioneer to sell the sale. Everything else would be done with volunteer labour. With an advertising budget to work with, we advertised far and wide about our Peace Country Sheep Sale. Consignments started rolling in; volunteers worked and planned. Penning material and panels were borrowed from wherever we could get them. Sheep were weighed before penning and then sold traveling from pen to pen with all of the sale information listed on a card attached to the front of the pen. Once they were weighed and penned, sheep were fed and watered; they were never moved or stressed again until loading on the truck. Buyers liked it, sellers liked it, and the public liked it.

Our advertising and hard work paid off. We ended up selling 1775 sheep and 13 dogs (sheep handling or guard dogs). We were able to attract several buyers and all of our average prices for day beat the quoted Alberta price for the day by several cents. Because of a shortage of room to have a lot of little cull ewe pens, we decided to weigh them individually and then sell them in one large common pen. They were sold by the pound with one buyer taking the whole pen and the contributors being paid on the number of pounds he had in the pen. That was something we started as a matter of necessity, and it continued through the life of the sale. Except for in later years when we were getting over 1000 cull ewes and would split them into two pens for penning ease, it seemed to be the best way to get the best price and keep the sale moving. Sometimes we started a thin cull ewe pen on the side if necessary to keep quality even. By doing this at our first sale, cull ewes brought an average of \$42.12 per head; a market we had never even imagined.

We had stretched our horizons into the US market with the buyers who came. No longer would a fat lamb have to weigh less than 120 pounds to grade. We were dealing with buyers who in turn dealt with the US market, and they could use those 140-pound lambs. There seemed to be a market for whatever we had on offer. Because everything was done with volunteer labour except for the auctioneer and his staff, we were able to keep our selling prices very low; and because our selling prices were low, we seemed to have a good supply of volunteers.

With that first successful sale in our pocket, it appeared that a 2nd Annual Peace Country Sheep Sale in 1995 could be even larger. We needed to organize more panels for penning. PRASP agreed to give us another \$1000 for advertising, and another government program called Partners in Progress awarded us \$2122 to build panels. Again volunteers stepped up and hauled lumber to set up a work day. In that one work day, volunteers built 8000 board feet of lumber into 400 panels. It was a great group effort.

That year we added a purebred section to the sale, a 4-H lamb section, and a cottage industry table section, which added to the fair-like atmosphere. We doubled the number of contributors to 114 and the number of sheep to 3450. Gross sales topped ¼ of a million dollars. Lamb prices were up, and cull ewe prices rose to an average of \$58.59 per head. New buyers came. I remember John Dunn, who had brought 100 ewes from Vanderhoof to the sale, coming up to me at the end of the sale and saying, "Well, this sale is going to put the sheep industry in the Peace on the map." Also, I remember looking up at the end of the sale to see 9 tri-axle trucks lined up from the farm office to the highway, to pick up 3500 head of sheep.

History of the Peace Country Sheep Sale- con't

Sale #3 in 1996 was much the same. We built another 150 panels. Prices were up as were the number of contributors. Gross sales went over \$289,000. We added a buyer from Canada West to the team and another feedlot buyer from the Vancouver area who was in the market for very small lambs. We remember 1996 as the last year we sold goats. There had been a few each year, but that year 103 goats showed up; and we could not keep them contained. We tried putting plastic snow fence over their pens, but they still managed to jump out and run all over eating pen cards. The television station had come out to do some news about the sale, but what they found most interesting were the goats running around. To our dismay, that is what aired on the news that night.

Sale #4 in 1997 was off about 1000 head in numbers but prices were up again. Cull ewes brought an unprecedented 50 cent per pound or an average of \$78.30/head. Roy Leitch from Brandon, Manitoba came to our sale personally for the first time that year, rather than sending a buyer; and he never missed one after that. He and John Bolay of Elim Lamb Feeders in Westlock took thousands of sheep home from our sales over the years.

Sale #5 in 1998 brought great changes. We were outgrowing the ranch facility plus the ranch was being leased to a branch of Nilsson Bros. Livestock from Alberta. This was the year that we moved the Peace Country Sheep Sale to the auction yard in Dawson Creek. Because we had had such good success putting on the sale ourselves as producers, we made a deal with them to rent the auction facility and hire them as auctioneers and money handlers. We volunteers would continue to do the rest. It was an excellent cattle facility, but it took a tremendous effort of volunteers to turn it into a sheep sale facility incorporating our smaller pens and "lamb proofing" every fence. We also weighed in, sorted, and penned the sheep doing all of the preliminary bookwork so that auctioneer could walk in and just sell the pens of sheep. The clerk recorded prices and pen numbers; most of the rest was already in their computers. 4-H sheep and llama club members fed and watered sheep. After the sale, sheep producers loaded out the sheep and cleaned up the yard ready for cattle. Turn around time was short on both the beginning and the end. Volunteers were tremendous and worked very hard. They brought in campers and motor homes to stay for the duration of the sale, and some stayed in hotels. Trudy Korfmann from Montney came with a trailer of groceries, and kept bringing wonderful home cooked meals to volunteers who just kept working.

We added competition pens with cash prizes for pens of 5 breeding ewes and ewe lambs, which were then sold. Also Canadian Co-operative Woolgrowers from Lethbridge started coming to the sale to fill the auction

mart lobby with sheep supplies for sale. This was the year that we became the biggest one day sheep sale in Canada, selling 5124 head of sheep and 15 dogs with gross sales of \$360,205. With our method of selling sheep from pen to pen in the auction yard, the actual sale had taken only about four hours. Buyers loved it. With the huge numbers, that really filled the auction yard in 1998, we stretched our imagination in 1999 to add a video sale to the mix. Although, all grade sheep were always sold from pen to pen out in the yard, we did sell the 4-H and purebred sheep through the ring. In 1999, we had a screen and projector installed in the ring, and sold one truckload lot of lambs from Trevor Jones of Fairview by video. The lambs stayed at home during the sale and were offered via video that Trevor provided. He had a right of refusal on price if it did not go well; but they did sell to John Bolay, and he was very happy with the lambs.

Sales continued with numbers ranging between 4000 and 5000 head. Purebred sheep came from as far east as Saskatchewan and as far south as Vancouver Island. Commercial sheep came regularly from all of the BC and Alberta Peace plus some from as far south as Vanderhoof and as far north as Ft. Nelson. We celebrated our 10th sale anniversary in 2003 after having sold 39,059 sheep in 10 years.

Plans for the 2004 Peace Country Sheep Sale were well underway and consignments were in when a tragedy struck that would be its demise. About 3 weeks before sale date, there was an electrical caused fire that destroyed the auction barn in Dawson Creek where we held the sale. The building, scales, and water system were destroyed. The sale committee tried furiously to figure out a way to continue with the sale. The outside pens and loading chutes were in tact. There was a fairgrounds barn not far away from the outside pens that we considered trying to use, but we had no scale and much of our lamb penning material that had been stored in the auction barn was lost. As well, the water system was inoperable. Ultimately it was the insurance company that made the final decision for us. They didn't have the burnt barn cleaned up, and we just weren't allowed to be there.

We tried to think of an alternative location, but just could not come up with one that would lend itself to our needs. The local Hutterite Colony, South Peace Colony stepped up to the plate. They put in a lamb feedlot and bought a large number of lambs. They still do. Some shipped on loads going to Ontario and a local trucker started mixing loads to the Fraser Valley. Some went to auctions at Camrose and Toffield. It has been sad to see a lot of area producers go out of the sheep business after the collapse of the sale. It was an easy market and a good market for the 10 years that we had it. Area producers can be proud of the way that they found a way to help themselves when a market was needed.

History of the Peace Country Sheep Sale- con't

On March 9, 2007 producers who had been such a big part of the sale and worked so hard to make it happen, got together for one last dinner together and a meeting to decide how to direct the funds that were left in the sale bank account. The auction market has never been rebuilt. The land is for sale; so it appears that it won't. Many producers have gone out of the sheep business.

After suggestions from the group in attendance, it was decided to give a portion of the funds left in the sheep sale account to each of the North and South Peace Sheep clubs and then \$10,000 to something to benefit the community at large. \$5,000 was given to the South Peace Stockmen's Foundation who award annual scholarships to students with an agricultural background. An additional \$5,000 was donated to the Darren Almond Foundation medical travel fund.

Sheep Sale Statistics Over The Years

Year	# sheep & goats	# dogs	Gross sales
1994	1776	13	\$136,114
1995	3474	17	\$265,509
1996	3456	10	\$289,443
1997	2580	17	\$231,550
1998	5124	15	\$360,205
1999	4459	6	\$368,289
2000	4272	17	\$381,991
2001	4469	10	\$271,014
2002	4829	17	\$230,239
2003	4621	8	\$222,702



Thoughts on the Sheep Industry

by Walter Fritsche

While having a conversation with Sandra Burton about the success of the Forage Association fund raiser and auction at Tower Lake, Sandra suggested that I write a short article for the newsletter.

Between the 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. night checks of our pregnant ewes, I can't get back to sleep so I wrote down a few thoughts about our local agriculture. Getting these thoughts down on paper is a lot more difficult than assisting a ewe to deliver her 'cargo' at minus 15 C.

I remember a conversation I had years ago with my friend from Kamloops. He was a cattle rancher at the time and every time the word 'sheep' came up he would always refer to it as 'the poor man's livestock'. It is, in part, the reason the Ag department encouraged diversification on the farm. And so we did... elk, fallow deer, emu, ostrich, llama, reindeer, etc. Perhaps this is why sheep started to take a back seat in the food chain. However, at the present time, sheep are on the increase due to the increasing population of cultures from all over the world now living in Canada. According to the B.C. Sheep Federation newsletter, B.C. is the only province where sheep numbers declined in the past two years. Everywhere else the numbers are going up.

Perhaps the new meat regulations would have something to do with that. Producers have to have their animals slaughtered at government approved facilities and they are few and far between. And not all are interested in handling sheep.

In spite of all the hassles, we continue on. Lamb prices have been pretty good for the past two years. Last fall, our farm sold 44 lambs cut and wrapped to local residents who appreciate a good, local product.

Laurie Read, from Silver Valley, got the annual Fall Sheep sale started again with good success. The past two sales have seen some very good returns. In addition to operating a sheep business (Sheepo), and a fencing business, Laurie does a lot of shearing and conducts shearing courses in Alberta and B.C. He says he likes shearing small flocks of 30-40 head, which are a good size flock of grass mowers on most small farms.

I wish everyone **Good Luck** with your calves and lambs and that they hit the ground safe and sound. And **Good Luck** to the new sheep farmers ... should you want to give it a try.

Why I Still Want To Be A Sheep Farmer

By Kari Bondaroff

Might I remind you, the reader, that it has been two years now since I wrote the last article for the Forage First newsletter. In saying this, I thought it might be fun to examine what I learned in my first year of production and how my operation has changed since that time. Currently, I am in my 4th lambing season; and the following list is my suggested changes for my second year of production:

- 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 eye-lids to avoid having to make a trip to the vet.*
- 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 will happen to you so be prepared for everything.*

After a slight chuckle at point number one, I still have to agree with keeping the ewes and lambs separate for the first little while. However, I have recently added a small lambing barn with 6 lambing jugs inside, 4 small outside separating pens, and a sorting alleyway to give me the opportunity to separate groups of sheep. After having used the barn for 2010 January lambing and having turned the mammas and babies out with the herd after only 2 weeks in the barn, I think it is safe to say that 3 months is a little long to have them separated. This is especially true because I am separating my ewes from their lambs at 2 to 3 months of age so that I can have each ewe lambing every 8 to 9 months. The second point ties back to the "olden days" when my sheep, goats, llamas, cows, and horses all wintered together and therefore lambed/calved together. This situation was resolved by selling the cows and goats, separating the horses, and moving the sheep into the new facilities. So far, this has led to fewer accidents and less confusion when the babies are introduced to the rest of the herd.

Points 3 and 4 both relate to maintenance of the herd. In order to reduce the number of times the babies need needles I have implemented a program that vaccinates the ewes a month prior to lambing. In doing this, the lambs are born having been exposed to one vaccination and need only a booster at 6 weeks of age. The addition of the selenium and vitamins A, D, and E to this program, I feel, has also improved my lambing success rates. It has been two seasons since I have lost a lamb at lambing (not including predator loss) and I tend to attribute that to the improved health program of the herd. I too, have followed through with point 4 and learned how to fix inverted eyelids. This has not been a common ailment of my lambs but I was fortunate enough to use my new found skill and fix an eye last spring.



Kari's polypae lambs for 2010

Point 5 is a fairly important piece to raising a prolific breed of sheep. As I maintain a polypae herd, triplets tend to be a common phenomenon. I would have to say that by taking one lamb (usually the second born) away from Mamma and raising it on a bottle, the ewe is able to raise two large lambs instead of three moderate lambs, and enables me to be in control of the feeding and survival of the third. I did try again last spring to leave one of my larger ewes with all three of her lambs and found that one lamb did not advance as the other two did. After 3 days, I took that lamb away and raised it on the bottle. With new and improved bottle feeding techniques, I feel that I have mastered the art of raising bottle lambs and am proud to boast 100% survival rates for the last 2 years of production with my bottle lambs (I am knocking on wood as I type this). I have also chosen to take on extra bottle babies from other farms throughout lambing season as they are a lot of fun and my kids enjoy naming and caring for them.

Point 6: I had forgotten about the burned feeding tube and again, had a laugh because after that episode, those feeding tubes were back ordered for my next lambing season. I am extremely grateful that I did not actually need a feeding tube that 2008 year. 2009 though, I purchased 4 of them as I figured I could only be so lucky once.

Fortunately for me, I again did not even have to open a package. January 2010 brought me a different story. January 14th delivered me a premature lamb that could



barely stand; well he really couldn't stand without help. As he was too little to actually suck and he sounded like his respiratory system was full of fluid, I initiated a milking, tubing, and antibiotic program for this little guy. I must mention here, that I have never milked anything before but after some neighbourly consultation I felt confident in my

abilities to give it a try. I had luckily purchased a head-gate and finally got to give it some use. Needless to say, every two hours I ventured down to the barn (yes, even through the night), placed "Elma's" head in the gate, milked her, and tube fed the baby. Five days later, 4 hours after I had given the last dose of antibiotics, and tube fed "Trooper", the little one got up on his own and fed from his mamma. For all the little ones I could not save, this experience made up for it and it is a pleasure to watch him outgrow the other lambs around him.

Point 7, the last and final point still rings true. I have learned to expect the unexpected goof up with general unintelligent behaviour from sheep. I have not, however, learned how to expect casualties due to predator loss. Being a producer is a very rewarding experience. I get to see life in many different forms and love the joys that come with watching animals and their interactions. My most frustrating part of raising sheep is losing animals when you have done everything you know can to protect them. Our farm has tried llamas, dogs, page wire, and 7-strand barbed wire fences and we have still endured predator losses. In the last year alone I have lost 7 market lambs and 2 ewes to coyotes, 1 ewe lamb to foxes, 2 ewe lambs to dogs, and 1 lamb to an eagle. It's like the predators have a meeting and have worked out a schedule to take turns catching us off guard when we least expect it. Do you think ACME delivers?

I have added more words of advice to my list and aim to have a lot more by the next article. Some of my new suggestions I have already accomplished, but that does not mean that they should not always remain on the top 10 list.

8- Obtain a fully functional, trained herding dog to aid in the movement of sheep, regardless of the distance that they may need to be moved.

9- Grow your herd as you expand your facilities. If facilities are lacking, cut back the herd to help pay for the needed improvements and then try to expand.

10- Obtain a proven guard dog to guard your sheep instead of trying out numerous pups and giving them to your friends as pets when they don't work out. (If any readers know of a seasoned guard dog that may be able to help with this point, please do not hesitate to contact me).

As my sheep producer life flows forward, I find myself undulating with the waves of ups and downs in many different ways. In the end, or at least for now, I don't think I'd have chosen any other animal to raise or any other lifestyle to lead.



The ewes in this photograph above are Frost in the back and Jojo in the front. They were mentioned in my previous newsletter article and are 2 of my initial 4 sheep.

Bondaroff Nomination

by Larry Plett



From left to right of photo: Shelley Greenwood, Kari Bondaroff, Gary Falk, Todd Bondaroff, Larry Plett, Harvev Sasaki, Lee Bowd, Ellen Nielsen & Jillian Stables

On April 8, 2010 Todd Bondaroff was recognized as the Northern Region Finalist for the Leadership category of the Premier Awards. Leadership Nomination recognizes a supervisory employee who is a role model and agent of positive change who continually fosters superior performance and results.

Todd Bondaroff is the Program Manager of the Agriculture Wildlife Program, (AWP) which is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. Todd Bondaroff embodies great leadership. Todd is a catalyst for transformation; a visionary leader; and champion for change. He focuses on empowerment, accountabilities, outcomes, team building, and risk taking in process and on people. These were key drivers in the successful development and implementation of a provincial Agriculture Wildlife Program.

Some programs developed and offered provincially are; Wildlife Damage to Standing Forage, Wildlife Damage to Standing Grain, Separation of Wildlife Excreta, and Predator Compensation Program.

Todd focused efforts of management and staff to work collaboratively across government, throughout the province, with professional, scientific and clerical staff, in a new fiscal reality; a new hiring freeze made it imperative to reallocate existing ministry staff to this program and the co divisional model would prove to be tremendously successful.

Todd provided clear direction to the lead team members located in Fort St John, Dawson Creek, Kelowna and Vernon in their the effort to build a data system, develop scientific methodology to assess damage, develop a training manual and train field staff in the adjusting procedures. Delivering on the vision required delicate timing, an effective communication strategy, systems development, staff training, policy development, program details, contracting resources etc. and collaboration with stakeholders which included; EKAWP, CAWP, DFCP, CVWCP, BCCA PLP, BCAC, BCGP, BCCA & PRFA.

In 2009 Todd led the team to successfully implement the AWP across the province to all qualifying producers who chose to participate in the program. The co-divisional team effort will save administration dollars and put more money in the hands of producers who are facing severe economic challenges. The Co-Divisional and cross government model has allowed the team to develop a comprehensive, financially viable, responsive and methodological sound program that will stand up to any scrutiny. The AWP has proven to meet the needs of affected growers and will continue to expand as more producers become aware of the benefits of the program.

Congratulations to Todd on the well deserved recognition and for your efforts on behalf of the agriculture community.

First Nature Farms News

By Jerry Kitt

When the time comes to give birth, we offer our sows the best. Private accommodation, an 8x8 foot insulated shelter filled with straw. No furrowing crates or confinement. So when the brown polka dotted sow decided to have her babies where the big boars lived, I was concerned. 11 piglets were born. One was so small it could fit in the palm of your hand (runt). The big boars have no nurturing skills so I was concerned they would crush the pigs. The sow, however, had her own solution to the problem. She kicked the boars out. 5 days later, the boars were still sleeping outside.

The Nature Conservancy (our next door neighbours) say "yes" to mile long pipeline. Conoco Phillips say they need the pipeline to "relieve the pressure". Slowing down the rate of flow would also relieve the pressure.

Jerry Kitt and his family own and manage First Nature Farms. They raise certified organic bison, pork, turkeys and chickens for Farmers' Markets in Edmonton and Vancouver. He writes a delightful newsletter for his customers once a month with glimpses of life on the farm and the issues facing the industry. This is an excerpt from one of his newsletters.

Lighter Side of Forage

by Shannon McKinnon



You would think that going for a walk along a secluded country road would be the very definition of serene. How could it be anything but? There you are surrounded by forest and fields, nary a building in sight. horns honking, sirens wailing or having to pause for walk signals.

I am a run walker, meaning I like to run the first few hundred meters to get all those cardio things happening and then I like to walk the rest of the way so I can appreciate nature without wheezing along like a cat trapped inside an accordion during a polka.

Unfortunately it's hard to sneak out of our yard on the run, even if I wasn't wheezing. When it comes to animals anything that's running is a real attention grabber. Movement catches the eye and all that. Everyone knows not to run from a bear or a tiger since their natural instinct is to chase and chew on anything that appears to be in a hurry. What you might not have guessed is that the same rule applies to goats.

I learned this lesson the hard way a couple summers ago. Normally our goats were content to stay inside their pasture but if properly motivated they could sail over the confines of their fence with the greatest of ease. Our driveway goes along one length of the summer goat and sheep pasture. One fine spring afternoon shortly after moving the animals into their summer digs, I set out for my run and walk.

As I huffed along my interesting gamboling movements caused the goats to yank their heads up out of the grass and come capering over to the fence. They then proceeded to run along beside me. This would have been rather alarming had they been a trio of grizzly bears, as it were, I was quite entertained by the spectacle. Forget dancing with wolves, I was running with goats! When I hit the end of the driveway I hung a left, waved a good bye to the goats over my shoulder and jogged up onto the main road, expecting this would be where the goats and I would part company. Sadly, this was not the case.

Unfortunately I didn't realize the fence had failed to deter the trio until I had run a good few hundred meters and happened to glance back over my shoulder. To my horror there was Pancake, Alaska and Zippy all galloping happily along right behind me.

And that's when I heard a vehicle approaching from around the bend. Of course I did. My heart dropped to the bottom of my ratty running shoes. Even if you're sporting the latest jogging gear, sunglasses and a sweat band on your wrist – which I wasn't – there's no way to look cool when your jogging companions are goats.

It's not unusual to come upon local folk out walking in the country. Sometimes they have their kids along on bicycles, or toddlers in a stroller. Sometimes they are even accompanied by a dog. But goats? Alas, I'm afraid that distinction has been reserved solely for me to the immense entertainment of my neighbours.

If I was a quick thinker, perhaps I could have grabbed a stick and pretended to be industriously herding the goats along to take advantage of the new grass that always grows taller along the roadside. But if I was a quick thinker I wouldn't have a goat, let alone three of them. As the vehicle came around the bend the best I could hope for was a city slicker who would mistake the goats for baby deer and be amazed. Maybe the driver would think I was some kind of deer whisperer.

But no such luck. As the pickup came into view I could see by the expression on the driver's face that his Christmas had come early. Spread out on the road before him was an unexpected gift; a story that would earn him a second cup of coffee from all the neighbours for the rest of the summer and probably a plate of homemade cookies to go with it. Rolling down his window the driver leaned on his elbow, poked his head out and casually said, "When you're finished here I've got a couple cows you can take out for a run." It's been two whole years and I still haven't come up with a witty reply.

Shannon McKinnon is a humour columnist from the Peace River country. When she's not rescuing kittens in a single bound, she can be reached at peacecountry@msn.com

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