



PRODUCER EXPERIENCES

implementing beneficial management practices

By the
Cornerstone Agri-Environmental Group Plan

INTRODUCTION

Cornerstone Agri-Environmental Group Plan Inc. (AEGP) delivers. That is, they deliver results. Cornerstone promotes sustainable agriculture practices that protect and enhance water resources. Through voluntary one-on-one consultation, they are working with agriculture producers to plan on-farm projects that reduce negative impacts to surface and ground water. Since the group formed in 2007, they have worked with 150 producers to implement over 425 projects, with a total value of \$2.45 million in projects. On-farm projects involve implementing beneficial management practices like improving wintering site areas, converting marginal land to forage, cross fencing pastures and installing remote watering systems for livestock.

Throughout the project, the key focus has been delivering education and awareness. Ensuring producers are aware of their impact on surface water quality and the watershed as a whole is a fundamental goal. Cornerstone is located within the Upper Souris Watershed and encompasses the southern portion of the Moose Mountain Creek, and the Souris River downstream of Rafferty Reservoir. The

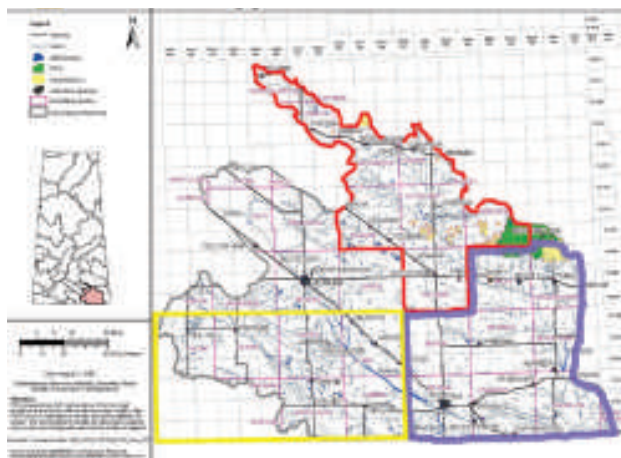
Souris River and Moose Mountain Creek are important economically, ecologically and socially. The creek is the source for the Alameda Reservoir, which is not only one of the best walleye fishing spots in the province, a very popular recreation area, as well as drinking water source for nearby communities. Agriculture is also prominent within our watershed along with other industries including oil and gas, energy and power.

Cornerstone has gathered stories about local producers who have worked through the AEGP process and made real changes to their operations that benefit surface water, overall watershed health and individual profitability.

Change is never easy, but as you read this book you will see that there are many beneficial things that can be done both big and small to protect and enhance watershed health - and in the end, produce great results.

Cornerstone AEGP is funded through Growing Forward, a federal/provincial/territorial initiative.

UPPER SOURIS WATERSHED



AEGP boundaries in USWA: Cornerstone Agri-Environmental Group Plan Inc. encompasses the south-east portion of the Upper Souris Watershed as outlined in purple. Adjacent AEGPs include North Moose Mountain Creek, Long Creek, and the Lower Souris River Watershed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Cornerstone AEGP Encourages Extensive



Winter Feeding Practices Why Bale Graze?



Paul & Dione Weber



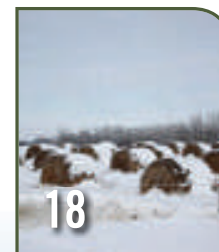
Paul & Anita Delalleau



Producer Profile: Jim VanDeWoestyne



Neil & Barbara Dennis



Trent & Carolyn Walls

CORNERSTONE AEGP ENCOURAGES EXTENSIVE WINTER FEEDING PRACTICES

Promoting beneficial management practices is a main focus for the AEGP. Through tours and workshops, the AEGP communicates the use of these practices to agriculture producers. Summer tours often focus on grazing management planning, and winter feeding practices that reduce risks to both ground and surface water.

In January 2011, producers gathered at a tour put on by the AEGP and partners, to swap stories and learn new ideas on water systems, annual forages, and winter grazing/feeding options. In efforts to reduce winter feeding costs, and manage nutrients while simultaneously benefitting the environment, livestock producers are constantly looking for new ideas, and this workshop provided just that. The field tour first went to Diamond M Ranch, where Jordan Mantei has a solar powered drain-back water

system which draws from a wet well fed from a dugout. As cattle walk up to the system, the motion detector triggers the pump and the bowl fills with fresh water. These systems are working great for Jordan, as this is the second one he has set up. They allow him to keep cattle out of the corrals and watering bowls in the yard, significantly reducing nutrient build up.

Next we traveled south where Chad & Crystal Ross' cattle winter by corn grazing, swath grazing annuals, and bale grazing. They worked with Lorne Klein, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture to evaluate the economics of warm season (corn & millet) and cool season (oats & barley) annual cereals for forage. Chad & Crystal have been growing and grazing corn for 6 years, and are well aware that to be successful they have to follow the best agronomic practices. Warm season annuals, corn especially,

require warm soils, a corn planter, high fertility and superior weed control prior to corn bolting. They were very happy with the corn crop this year, and plan to continue planting it for winter grazing.

Brian & Rosalie Ross (L7 Ranch) bale grazing site was the last tour stop. With some fencing, portable windbreaks, and water development, Ross' were able to winter their cow herd on a section of tame pasture. Brian sets out enough bales for the herd for a month at a time, reducing chore

workload to checking water and cattle. Last spring, they also worked on a project with Lorne Klein to evaluate establishment success of cicer milk-vetch into existing forage stands. In spring 2010, cicer milk-vetch was broadcast where the cattle had been bale grazing all winter. The milk-vetch did not appear to establish here, however on the other sites across the province the first year establishment looked encouraging and will continue to be monitored. Generally, milk-vetch is slow to establish and often takes 2-3 years to become well established.

Work done at the Western Beef Development Centre indicated that by feeding directly on the land, we can recover 34% of the original nitrogen in bales as compared to only 1% when spreading manure from corrals. Recovering these nutrients benefits both the producer and the environment, which is why Cornerstone AEGP supports extensive feeding practices, and helps producers apply for funding to offset the initial capital costs. 50% cost-share incentives are



Chad Ross explains his winter water system: A drilled well, submersible pump, arcing hose into a mine tire trough with rubber drinking tubes.

available for remote water systems, portable windbreaks, cross fencing, planting forages and developing new agriculture water sources (dugouts, wells, and waterlines).



Solar/Wind powered "Drain-Back Bowl" winter water system at Diamond M Ranch. Holes in the bowl drain water back down into wet well to prevent



Bale Grazing site, where Brian Ross explains how well it works for him, and that the "waste isn't wasted" because it grows more grass in these areas.

Producer Experiences
Beneficial Management Practices

By the
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WHY BALE GRAZE?

Don Lees has better things to do than feed cows all day long. Don and his wife Gayle would much rather be with family and friends – spending time with their grandchildren and maintaining an active lifestyle volunteering for the community. But to reduce the time spent doing chores, they've had to overcome some of the unique challenges presented by their location.

Along with their son Russell, they farm in the Arcola area and are situated on the south slopes of the Moose Mountains. While they enjoy the benefits of an abundance of pasture land and an early spring – those south-facing slopes are hot and dry in the summer, meaning pastures “brown off” early. As a result, fall and winter grazing is limited. However, the hills do provide shelter and Don used to winter the cattle there. But feeding away from the yard meant chores revolved around the daily task of hauling out bales. In 2007, Don decided to try something new – bale grazing.



“It just made sense,” stated Don. By moving the winter feeding site out onto the flats, feed could be set out in advance and maintain the cattle for longer periods of time.

To control the number of bales available to the cattle at one time, they simply started out with an electric wire that was moved on a weekly basis. The hay bales, set up 20-25 feet apart on old tame pasture, also last longer when some straw bales are included. Don has found that although the open land provides little shelter, portable windbreaks are working well. And since they've moved from feeding the cattle in the hills – they haven't had any feed deprivation from elk.

In the third winter of bale grazing, the establishment of a permanent paddock system helped to further reduce labor and inputs. Instead of walking through the deep snow to move an electric wire, Don simply opens a gate to the next set of bales. And by setting out a good majority of the bales before the snow flies, he also saves on starting the tractor when it's -40 C.

Every year is a learning experience and this year they have gone to a more open method – placing two weeks or more of feed out at once. Don said they also remove twine before grazing. However, talking to other producers who are also bale grazing, it appears net wrap is proving to work well too.

In terms of sustainable land use, bale grazing can provide benefits beyond the winter season. Don said by using large paddocks, bales can always be set on new ground. It will take four years or more before he will have to feed on the same spot. This way the land will not get over-fertilized because it has a chance to utilize all the nutrients fully before being fed on again. For the AEGP, this is a favorable practice because the forage plants use the nutrients fully, rather than having excess

nutrients being washed into surface waters.

From a production standpoint, Don noted that each bale that is fed on the land is estimated to be worth \$5 of fertilizer. As a result, old forage stands are continuing to produce and he doesn't have to worry about breaking and re-seeding the forage. Don estimates that feed not cleaned up probably is in the 10 per cent range, but he doesn't consider this waste by any means. It is litter – but the good kind. In a moisture limited area, where so much soil moisture is lost to evaporation, this litter is priceless. The litter keeps the soil temperature cool in the summer, reducing soil moisture evaporation. As it breaks down, it increases the organic matter and productivity of the soil. The results on the grass have been dramatic! Blowout spots are now producing three fold to previous and saline areas are coming into top production. By feeding in some areas that were being overtaken by brush, the brush has been set back. In some cases, it has even been replaced with grass.

Producers often make comments like: “It will take way more feed to bale graze.” Don's response to that is: “It depends on how hard you make the cows work to clean it up.” With that said, a person can't wait too long to move them to the next set of bales, as some cows will not maintain their condition.

Don said, “You need to watch your cows and they will tell you.” His rule of thumb is when there's about 10 per cent left, he moves them. His cows have adapted well and stay



Clean-up crew. These cows are picking through the loose hay from where a bale was standing.

out feeding on some pretty cold days. The water system has been trouble free and pumping water is free now, although at -25 C and colder, he may need to break the ice in the drinking tubes.



Winter Water System. Between the trailer and trough is the wet well with a submersible pump, which is powered by solar panels. The water level is regulated by a float located inside the insulated trough. This water system has been trouble free, the only maintenance is when temperatures are below -25 C they may need to tap through the ice in the drinking tubes. The ground around the well has been built up and slanted away from the well to protect the water source from contamination.

WHY BALE GRAZE? (CONT)

There was some initial infrastructure required to set up this site. To help finance the transition to bale grazing, Don applied for funding from the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program and recouped 50 per cent of the costs for wet well development, a solar winter water system and portable windbreaks. Before the AEGP was formed, he had applied individually through his environmental farm plan. It was a lot of paperwork to get the funding incentives. That's where the AEGP is so beneficial. The AEGP technician will sit down with a producer to help them plan out the project and then take care of the paperwork. This can be a big time saver since the technician will know what types of activities qualify. Don wants to set up an alternative wintering area - and this time he is working with the AEGP to complete his new project.

Pleased with the changes he's already made, Don said, "It's a no brainer for us." The cattle are practically feeding themselves from mid-December until mid-March when they come home to calve and before the soil starts to

soften so willows and native grass don't get tramped into the mud. The fact that tractor hours have been cut over 75 per cent is also reason enough for Don to continue bale grazing. Most days, he has little to do in the way of chores. And when he does have to move bales, he can pick out the nice days.

"Every year it gets easier, as your imagination is the limit to the number of different ways to bale graze," said Don, adding that he is constantly picking up ideas from other producers as well. The Cornerstone AEGP hosts summer and winter tours, where producers can see other people's places and interact and learn from one another. The events have been very valuable to him and he encourages anyone considering bale grazing to take advantage of these learning opportunities.

Don concluded, "If you don't think you can do bale grazing, you will be right...However, if you think you can do it, you will also be right. So why not bale graze?"



Height of grass in an area not baled grazed on yet in summertime, where the majority of this temporary post is visible.



More forage is produced in areas that were baled grazed on in the past. Height of grass in an area that was baled grazed on 2 years ago, where only half of the post is showing. This photo was taken approximately 10 ft. away from the previous photo.

PAUL & DIONE WEBER

Paul and Dione Weber made a decision to do less work. No, they aren't planning a farm sale or a move to a warmer climate; they made the decision to implement cost and time saving feeding strategies for their cow herd.

With time at a premium in their family operation - the Webers need to accommodate the commitments of their other business interests. Paul and Dione, along with their children and his parents, farm nearly 5000 acres in the Carlyle area, have an on farm welding and fabricating business as well as a snow removal service for private and oilfield customers.

To find a feeding management option that would simplify and suit their operation, the Webers looked to their peers. They participated in field days, workshops and tours to see what other livestock producers were doing. The method that appealed to them the most was bale grazing - a practice used by some of their neighbors.

While they were fond of the concept, it wasn't until they actually started to implement it that they realized the advantages. Paul noticed substantial savings in the amount of hay he was using. Before bale grazing, he would feed four bales a day with his bale processor to meet the needs of his 100 some cows. Now, he has dropped them to three bales a day. He credits the change to the savings in leaves and increased nutritional value of the hay by feeding it whole and not shredded.

Along with the savings of feed, there is a notable advantage in nutrient management as well. The cow herd is being fed on the land where the manure is left without mechanically moving or cleaning it. This in turn adds a significant saving to their operation as well as drastically improves the productivity of the land. They feed 4-5 days worth of feed each move and string electric fence to keep the cows separated from the rest of the bales. In fact, the Webers feel that they have improved their stocking rates to a point where they could expand their cow herd. Instead of

expansion, they have stockpiled grass to try to cut down winter feeding days. In the past year, Paul has shaved 50 days of feeding off of his winter. This, combined with the increased stocking capacity, has been a positive sign that bale grazing has moved their program forward.



The Weber family trailing cattle home in December 2009 by snow machine and a bale truck. They will turn them into the bale grazing field close to home.



In the fall, bales were placed all over this tame pasture, so when cattle were brought home in December they could graze them.

PAUL & DIONE WEBER (CONT)

Paul and Dione have also worked with the AEGP to help establish grass on the farm. In addition, they have also applied for portable windbreaks and a solar water system. They were pleased with the process because the technician was easy to work with and the paper work was simple and very straight forward. The leadership and guidance provided through the AEGP made the adoption of different feeding and grazing strategies more feasible.

The Webers feel that the changes they have made have been hugely beneficial. Increased forage production, decreased feeding costs and time commitments have made the cow herd a profitable part of their family operation. If nothing else, the extra 50 days of feed saved could be sold. Bale grazing has given Paul and Dione more time to enjoy their lives; not that they are slowing down, they are just investing time in improving other parts of their business.



An aerial view of a bale grazing field in May 2011, showing good coverage of spreading nutrients out across the entire pasture.

PAUL & ANITA DELALLEAU

Paul and Anita Delalleau are not only your typical young farm family - but young producers the AEGP would definitely like to target.

Situated on the north side of the Moose Mountain Creek, the Delalleaus are working hard to reduce nutrient loading into the creek. In partnership with the AEGP, they have developed a strategy to reduce the loading and are now implementing it.

Paul and Anita are just like most young farm families. They have taken over their parents' farm and are committed to keeping it viable and prosperous. Like so many "newer-generation" farmers, Paul also has a full-time job off of the farm. This makes it very difficult to continue the same management practices that his parents and in-laws used. The labour component becomes trickier as his farm needs to work around his day job - instead of it being his day job. Both Paul and Anita's parents had a reputation of being very good farmers with a strong work ethic. This rubbed off on the two, as they felt that they needed to improve their management practices to keep up with the example that their parents set. As they took stock of their farm, they realized the wintering site for their cows could be improved.

They started by digging a large dugout to capture snow and runoff to use during the winter when they brought their cows home. The dugout was placed as to provide natural



Drain-back solar powered winter water system. A wet well installed beside a large dugout, housed by an insulated culvert provides winter water for the cattle. The motion sensor detects cattle approaching, which triggers the pump to fill water into the bowl. The dugout in the background is a safe distance away from the wet well, to avoid risk of nutrient run-off back into the source water. To protect dugout water further, the pipe is angled downwards into the wet well from the dugout as to prevent water from draining back into the dugout.

shelter from its banks and also flow the livestock back to the wintering site. The dugout was fenced and an alley way erected to keep the cattle out of the adjacent shelter belt. A motion sensor drain back water bowl was installed close to the dugout in a wet well. The wet well controls the debris that flows back down the bowl, guaranteeing that the original water source does not get contaminated. They feel this is a very good, trouble-free set up. The entire system is powered by solar energy.

In addition to the solar water system, the Delalleaus plan to fence the entire home quarter to utilize the stubble ground for fall and spring grazing. This will

PAUL & ANITA DELALLEAU (CONT)



Holes in the drain-back water bowl slowly drain the water back into the wet well to avoid freezing.



First calf of the year! Paul holds daughter Tiana and introduces her to the first calf she has ever seen.

extend their grazing season, help rest their native grass longer and relieve pressure on the riparian area of the Moose Mountain Creek. They feel this fencing project could provide even more benefits with the use of portable windbreaks. Being able to move their wintering site around would spread out more of the nutrients and reduce manure cleaning in their traditional wintering site.

The thought of seeding down another quarter for some extra fall grazing is on their minds as well. This would definitely give their native pasture the rest it needs, all the while adding more opportunity for them to pasture, feed, or even calve on another “fresh” piece of land.

Paul and Anita will be the first to tell you that they are certainly not experts on how to improve the environment. But they see the merits in the steps they have taken to help improve their land and their bottom line. This “leap of faith” was not taken lightly; it actually was discussed and thought out very diligently. They want to improve their farm for their young daughter, just like their parents did for them.

In setting and meeting their goals, the Delalleaus appreciate the guidance and assistance that is available. Anita enjoyed working with the AEGP technician. She found her easy to deal with and the application process very simple. The advice of the technician was also very beneficial. By working with the AEGP, they were able to access farm stewardship funding to help off-set the initial expense of setting up their winter watering site.

Both she and Paul felt that the AEGP was listening to them and helping point them in the right direction. Most importantly, they both feel that the opportunity to work with the AEGP in the future is very exciting and that there are plenty of projects that could be done since they took their “leap of faith.”

PRODUCER PROFILE: JIM VANDEWOESTYNE

For Benson area producer Jim VanDeWoestyne, environmental awareness means putting ideas into action. The Benson area farmer has been making important changes to both his ways of thinking and his ways of farming. VanDeWoestyne knows that these changes will create a healthier farm operation into the future.

Although VanDeWoestyne's 1920-acre mixed operation – which he farms together with his wife Celeste, son Justin, and daughter Cali – has been certified organic since 1999, it was a concern about water quality that motivated him to get involved with the AEGP.

It all started when VanDeWoestyne noticed the increased damage occurring around his dugouts, where his 80 Angus-based cows were standing up to their necks in the hot weather, drinking and leaving behind their manure. The vegetation on the dugout banks had all but disappeared, and the water quality had been drastically depleted.

One particularly dry spring, one of the dugouts dried up, and VanDeWoestyne was forced to haul water to that pasture. Later that year, he realized that he had not treated any of the animals from that pasture for foot-rot. Ordinarily, several animals standing in the dugouts would have required treatment. After discovering this hidden benefit of effective water management, VanDeWoestyne immediately got involved with the AEGP.



Solar watering system. Photo courtesy of Solar West

As part of the AEGP, Jim has engaged in four specific Beneficial Management Practices, or BMPs, which are focussed on protecting the water resources on his land. The first practice is to protect the riparian areas by planting vegetation in these areas. For the same purpose, he has also installed remote watering systems, which ultimately preserve the area around the original water source.

After witnessing the damage caused by his cattle to the dugout areas, VanDeWoestyne installed fencing to protect the water quality and vegetative areas around the dugouts. Finally, a fourth BMP has allowed him to utilize portable windbreaks to avoid winter corralling, ultimately reducing manure build-up and preventing nutrient loading into the surface waters.

JIM VANDEWOESTYNE (CONT)

Although some benefits from his environmental practices will appear over the long term, some benefits accrue quickly. VanDeWoestyne has been winter feeding on his hayland for several years, and has noticed a dramatic increase in his hay yield where he bale-grazed, as compared to areas where he did not.

The biggest challenge, says VanDeWoestyne, has been “to change my way of thinking”. Fortunately, he isn’t alone in making these changes. His environmental endeavours have been strongly supported by the Cornerstone AEGP and its affiliated programs. The AEGP has been an important pillar for Jim, who reports that his experience with the group has been a very good one. “I would recommend it to anyone,” he says.

As a certified member of the AEGP, VanDeWoestyne was eligible for funding from the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program, which allowed him to achieve the goals of his BMPs. Involvement in the program provided the producer with a shift in consciousness about his relationship with the land. “The Farm Stewardship Program made me stand back and take a look at the impact I have on the 1920 acres that I control”, he says. Importantly, the program also provided him with the ideas

necessary to make fundamental changes to his operation. “It provided me with solutions – some short-term and some long-term – nevertheless, solutions that pointed me in the right direction”, reports VanDeWoestyne. Funding from the program was also crucial to his success. “Without funding,” he says, “the projects we undertook would have taken a whole lot longer to complete”.

Recently, VanDeWoestyne attended a workshop hosted by the AEGP, where he learned more ideas to expand his environmental practices. The workshop, which focused on planned grazing, promoted strategies for feeding the soil and restoring its biological health. Jim came to understand that, in the bigger picture, “healthy soils produce healthy crops, healthy animals, and eventually healthy humans”. At a smaller scale, VanDeWoestyne recognized the need for another adjustment to his ranching strategy. For several years, the family had been encouraging rotational grazing in order to preserve the plant population and soil health in the pastures. However, after doing rotational grazing on pastures planted with only alfalfa and brome, the family had seen disappointing results – some areas had been undergrazed while others were overgrazed, and the vegetation in some areas was diminishing.

JIM VANDEWOESTYNE (CONT)

“After attending [the planned grazing] workshop, my thinking changed drastically”, says VanDeWoestyne. He realized that the family needed to establish multi-species pastures. “The more diverse, the better”, he asserts, pointing out the importance of high density stocking over short periods of time. VanDeWoestyne promotes this strategy as a means to improve plant population, soil structure, and biological activity. This, he says, “will provide you with an overall healthier environment”. He reminds producers that planning is paramount in diversifying grazing lands. Planning is exactly what VanDeWoestyne is currently engaged in. This summer, the family plans to begin a diversified grazing program – a strategy that has been heavily shaped by the workshop Jim attended – by investing in more cross-fencing. Starting small, they plan to rotate the grazing every three to four days.

Another plan to improve soil quality is to graze down cover crops instead of plowing them in. If this is successful, it will significantly reduce the need for tillage, which has been known to speed the rate of soil erosion. In addition to its environmental benefits, this technique can result in economic benefits for producers. According to Ducks Unlimited Canada, soil erosion reduces profits by an average of \$12 per hectare, a point that emphasizes the financial benefit to producers who reduce erosion on their land.

Other new developments in VanDeWoestyne’s operation include the installation of solar water systems. This year will be his first full season of grazing with these systems, which he implemented with assistance from Ducks Unlimited. As a result, VanDeWoestyne expects to see better water quality for his cattle, as well as restoration in the riparian areas.

As his ways of thinking about his operation continue to change and evolve, so do Jim’s plans for the future. “Our long term plan for our farm is to pasture all of our cows at home, to push back our calving to May, and to eventually grass out all of our yearlings,” he says.

VanDeWoestyne has other goals for the future – goals that reflect the continuing evolution of his connection to the land. Ultimately, he seeks constant improvement to both his operation and the land base that sustains it. “Whether it be with crops or with livestock, it all starts and ends with the soil”, he says. By prioritizing soil and water health, VanDeWoestyne knows that a stronger and healthier farm operation will follow. This growth will begin, he says, “when we start working with nature instead of against it.”

By Amber Fletcher

NEIL & BARBARA DENNIS

A new winter watering site opened the door for Neil and Barbara Dennis at Wawota, Saskatchewan to accept custom grazers before spring thaw. Up until a few years ago, the half section located across the road from the home quarter was just used for summer grazing. The water was piped across from the farm's deep well and the cattle drank from a plastic tub with a float system.

"My customers want to send cattle earlier in the grazing season depending on the market prices and availability of 600 lb wt calves," Dennis tells us. "That sometimes means the beginning of March, and now with this watering system, it really doesn't matter about the timing."

With funding from the Canada/Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program and planning assistance from the Cornerstone Agri-Environmental Group Plan, previously called the South East Upper Souris River



A 9-10 ft. deep buried waterline that runs comes from the well and main pressure system supplies this winter water station. A culvert is buried and the trough sits on top. The water line with curb stop valve in bottom, runs up the culvert and feeds into the trough with a quick coupler and float. The 45 gallon barrel in center enables Neil to crawl down the culvert if need. For winter, the combination of the ground heat, and having a lid on the trough with drinking tubes in it keeps the water from freezing.



*Cattle bale grazing at Neil & Barbara Dennis Place.
Photo by: Philip Grimard*

Agri-Environmental Group, Dennis deep trenched an additional 300 feet of water pipeline to move his summer water source farther away from the fence line and install a thermal heat, rubber tire watering system. "I put in a four foot culvert, 10 to 12 feet down, and used an implement tire as the watering bowl," Dennis explains. "The tire has a cement plug and a pipe comes up from the ground into the centre. There is an insulated lid on top and a couple of drinking tubes for the cattle to drink from. This system won't freeze as long as there is lots of use. So far, it's worked very well."

The new watering site is really just the icing on the cake that this holistic intensive grass manager has been baking for several years. Pushed by economics to move from a traditional mixed farming operation and then a purebred cattle operation, this southeastern Saskatchewan cattleman has managed to turn a failing farm operation into a profitable custom grazing business.

"By increasing my stock density and allowing enough recovery time, I have increased my carrying capacity three-fold from when I first started rotational grazing in 1988. I now have carrying capacity for 800 yearlings and 60 cow/calf pairs on 1100 acres of tame grass and 640 acres of native grass. In the spring, I move cattle daily, but when we get into grass, I'll move them up to eight times a day." Initially, Dennis bale fed in the spring but found that there was too much damage to the wet sod. Now, he turns the

NEIL & BARBARA DENNIS (CONT)



View from the top of the barrel looking down to the bottom of culvert.



Waterline empties into the trough with a quick coupler and float.

calves on to stockpiled grass from the previous year, and allows the calves to graze it down to where it resembles indoor/outdoor carpet. He calls it the "deep massage" method of winter or early spring grazing. "I put 600 to 800 head on an acre of stockpiled grass and it only lasts a few hours," he says. "Then I roll out bales strategically across the same acre so that the manure is better distributed. I don't use a shredder because it shreds the leaves and downgrades the nutritional value. This way, the manure is strategically deposited and I take advantage of all the natural fertilizer."

Using this strategy, Dennis's 20-year mono-cultured crested wheat pasture became home to more than 40 plant species. This is very desirable since biodiversity is key to soil health – and soil health is key to forage quality and quantity.

Dennis accepts the custom yearlings in March and grasses them until September. While some people may believe that intensive grass management strategies are difficult, and require too much management, Dennis disagrees wholeheartedly. "Once you get holistic or intensive grass management principles in your head, the rest is easy," he suggests. "I love being on the farm, and I had to find a way to make a decent living and be able to stay. I once thought I had to have iron to farm, now I'm farming grass without it."

By Bonnie Warnyca

TRENT & CAROLYN WALLS

For the past five years, Trent and Carolyn Walls near Alameda, Saskatchewan, have been diligently working towards creating an environmentally sustainable farm environment while increasing profitability.

“The economic downturn in farming and raising cattle forced us to rethink our farming practices, says Trent Walls. “We opted to put our cropping acres into forages and become grass farmers. We’ve gone to more intensive grass management on 1800 acres and it has been a rewarding journey. We’ve already increased our cow herd from 90 to 180 head and increased our ability to provide the cattle with high protein forage from 60 days to almost 200 days. Through changing our winter feeding strategies, we have decreased the number of bales per cow from six to three.”

The couple has completed their Environmental Farm Plan, taken a Holistic Management course and accessed funding from Canada/Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program to establish new watering sites in order to move forward with their grand plan. “We assess our program almost daily,” admits Walls. “Water is certainly the limiting factor when designing an intensive grazing program. We have added dugouts and new winter water sites and still plan to expand our pipeline, add another solar watering system and dig more dugouts while fencing them off to protect the riparian area around them.”

Reaching beyond their own fence line

While the couple is still on the early learning curve of their grass management, sharing their successes with others is high on their list of priorities.

“We have done a lot of water projects on our farm,” shares Walls, “and it wasn’t always easy to access funding programs and expertise. “A few years ago I agreed to sit on the board of the Cornerstone Agri-Environmental Group Plan, previously called the South East Upper Souris River Agri-Environmental Group Plan (AEGP). We were already quite advanced in our water development, and I saw this program



Photo of bale grazing site before cattle put in, taken on Feb 21 2010.



Cattle cleaned up the bales well, notice the even distribution of manure and litter across the field, photo taken March 20 2010



This photo taken from the same field, shows the lush growth of forage as a result of bale grazing, photo taken June 5 2010.

TRENT & CAROLYN WALLS (CONT)

as a valuable tool for other farmers. The program provides farmers with assistance in discovering various water solutions for their individual programs. The AEGP Advisor is available to help producers find the right water solution and to help fill out the various funding applications, which we had already found was not an easy task.”

Walls says that being on a board and sitting around the table with like-minded grass managers has brought with it many dividends and new ideas. “There are so many opportunities that we can consider as we improve and increase our grass production,” he admits. “We’ve reinvented our winter grazing system to include later season grazing, bale grazing, bunch piles and chaff grazing. Having the AEGP promote beneficial management practices and raising the awareness of our watershed is helping to pave the way for many new ideas.”

“There are a small percentage of people that are willing to try new things. Another small percentage of folks are willing to adopt new ideas; while 85 percent of people change over time without even realizing it. Programs such as the AEGP help farmers to advance change no matter which category they might fit into or feel comfortable with,” Trent adds.

By Bonnie Warnyca



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Producer Experiences
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