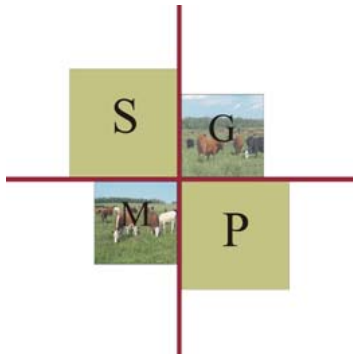


# The Grazing Mentor

The Newsletter for the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program  
Enhancing Profits and the Environment through Grazing Management



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Canada

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## From the Editor

Late last week I was in a local store and they had a big sign proclaiming 14 days until spring! How winter-weary we Canadians can get and with good reason. But after reflecting on this "first sign of spring", I came to recognize that spring's arrival is a symbol of hope, optimism and renewal.

In ancient cultures, and many modern ones, the commencement of a new growing season is cause for celebration. In my case, having spent much of the fall and winter in the midst of grazing folk, both mentors and mentees, I am well aware of all the thinking, planning, re-planning, and strategizing that can go into the formation of a grazing plan. The desire to get started is contagious. It is amazing what some fairly simple changes in recovery times,

locations of watering systems and points, fences and above all else, attitude can make in looking toward a new grazing season.

Working with Mother Nature rather than in constant opposition is largely a matter of respecting some of her basic principles. Paramount to that is an understanding of the ecosystem processes; the water cycle, the mineral cycle, succession and energy flow. Being mindful of how our actions impact the ecosystem is fundamental to improving our management. As we look around our operations what we see is a result of our previous years' decision-making.

We live in a high-tech, high-speed world of international markets, trade agreements and

disputes, rising energy prices, quirky weather patterns and previously unheard of diseases. For some folk, being up against all of our industry's difficulties can leave a feeling of powerlessness. I have heard so many times from mentees that one of the positive results of working with a grazing mentor is that they are once again looking forward to a growing season. Maybe that is the greatest benefit a mentor can bring to a producer; the recognition that there are things within our control – outcomes that we can have influence over. To me that is the essence of spring - a message of hope, optimism and renewal.

Happy Trails, Happy Spring,  
Lee Pengilly

## From the Mentor-in-Chief - Jim Stone

Put 50 grazing mentors in a room and watch the energy and enthusiasm begin to grow. That is what happened at our first National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Workshop held in Saskatoon, Sask. on January 22-24. You could see the outcome of this conference would be long lasting and powerful. These people as a group will probably increase productivity exponentially allowing them to be 2500 times as productive as they would be individually.

The enthusiasm and positive attitude grazing mentors showed at the workshop can provide some great benefits to cattle producers. Many men-

tors have at least a 50 cent advantage over the average producer in any province. Recent statistics indicate the profitability of a cow-calf producer is largely the result of low input costs. There is apparently about a 50 cent per pound variation between the profits of low-input cow/calf producers compared to traditional high-input cow/calf producers. This leads me to believe that if you make 50 cents or more per pound of calf on a year like this you are probably very close to the break-even point. On an average year profitability is a real likelihood if you are a low-input cost cow/calf producer, and one of the best ways to lower

costs is to make better use of your forage resource. A grazing mentor just might be able to help you do that.

There are mentors in most communities in Canada that are ready, willing and able to assist you in exploring options that could provide you with the basics for reducing your costs through improved grazing management. If you are interested in connecting with a grazing mentor, please contact your local program delivery partner. Contact information for each province is included in this newsletter.

# The Grazing Mentor

## Interview with Grazing Mentor Rob Davidson

*After observing firsthand the success of the project, Horst was convinced that this type of grazing was the way to go and he's been an advocate ever since.*

Although he was raised in the city, Rob Davidson always wanted to be a rancher. Without a lot of available opportunities for that, Rob opted for a career as a park ranger in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. A series of events led to him managing a piece of land in the foothills south of Pincher Creek and his dream career began taking shape. In time he moved to an operation in the St. Paul area and then on to Grande Prairie, land of the Mighty Peace River. He and his wife Norah made their home there for 18 years but last year decided it was once again time for a change. They decided they wanted something with a retirement feel to it and so they chose land on the flats of the Kootenay River in sunny southern British Columbia. As of December 2007, their address is officially Creston, British Columbia.

Their Creston land base is extremely productive river silt land and is sub-irrigated through a very high water table. With the area's worst winter on record under their belts Rob is looking forward to a new grazing season in a completely new environment. As Rob relates, "There has been snow on the ground all winter with a record snowfall of close to 7 feet! But the temperature

has never gone below -10 degrees C. When you're used to winters in the Peace Country this is pretty easy!" Needless to say Rob is excited about the growing season in his newly adopted home. He goes on, "People tell me I'll be cutting my lawn by mid-March!" In an area where three cuts of hay without irrigation is a reality, Rob feels optimistic about what this land can offer. "We were looking for a retirement project and this has the best of all worlds for us. It has ample water to do what we want to do and it's much less extensive than our previous land base."

Rob continues, "For our grazing program we plan to start with feeders and see how that goes. Perhaps we can move into a grass-finished meat business. This valley is a perfect place to do that with so many people here looking for natural produce."

Rob and Norah both have extensive experience and training in the grazing business. Rob has been doing grazing mentorships for at least 18 years. He goes on to explain, "I was an independent dealer in power fencing equipment and still am. As a rancher I know what my customers need. They phone about their

fencing needs and I sell them what they need, not what they think they need. I can visit their operations and help them with the planning and back up my sales by trouble shooting their fencing problems via on site visits or on the phone.

About a year ago when we still lived in the Peace I met Jim Stone and he suggested I come on board with this program as a grazing mentor." With Rob already very keen on the concept of mentoring and with years of experience doing it, it is a good fit. Through his years of grazing experience Rob knows the power of one-on-one contact with producers. "As a grazing mentor, producers realize I have been down and dirty in the trenches of agriculture and they know there's a benefit in learning from my experience at the 'school of hard knocks'."

Although it's always hard leaving friends, community and a ranch set up just the way they wanted it, Rob and Norah are enthusiastic about this fresh opportunity and look forward to putting down roots in their new land. Creston and area livestock producers can look forward to having this dedicated and highly experienced grazing mentor in their midst.

## Interview with Grazing Mentee to Mentor Horst David

Horst David is one of the many people in the Peace River country who will miss his friend and long-time mentor, Rob Davidson. They met by chance several years ago in an office where they had mutual business. Rob inquired if Horst knew of anybody in the area who had some forage land with

access to water and would be willing to host a demonstration site for a managed grazing project. Horst said he had both the land and the water and would be willing to participate. Rob said he'd set up the fencing and be back in two weeks to get started. Horst figured he'd probably never see him

again but Rob showed up in two weeks and the project was a go. A neighbor of Horst's provided 40 cow/calf pairs. Rob's electric fence employed poly wire and step-in posts. Much to Horst's surprise it kept the cattle in. As Horst



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remembers, "At some point we had to take the bulls out. We set up a panel corral and I was sure that those bulls would go right through the electric fence, but they just had to get close to it before they turned and made a rush for the barbed wire instead!" After observing first hand the success of the project, Horst was convinced that this type of grazing was the way to go and he's been an advocate ever since.

The David's home place is just south of Dawson in northern B.C. There is lots of bush and poplar logging is commonplace. Horst says, "I learned a lot from Rob. Soon after I got into grazing I quit farming all together. Right now I use poly

wire for the cross fencing and a single high tensile wire with rebar supports for the perimeter. We have lots of elk problems and with just one wire there's less damage than with two. There's moose too and they do more damage than the elk. I used to run 286 yearlings on my tame pasture, 140 cow/calf units on my native land and 50 replacement heifers on another piece. The yearlings grazed on a half section of land, which amounts to about 295 acres of grazeable land. I grazed everything twice and some of it three times depending on the year. I'd keep the paddocks small, sometimes as small as two acres. In the early growing season the faster we'd move the better! I'd move fast when it was growing fast.

Those yearlings had fresh feed everyday. Rob helped me set up the watering system. It was gravity fed and the water line went down the center of the pasture. I'd move the water tanks from side to side so the cattle would have fresh water all of the time. I prefer not to graze pure alfalfa, but I have done it. A good grass legume mix will do you well. With a good forage base there is no stress. The risk is too high with a pure stand of alfalfa."

Horst believes in spending plenty of time with his animals and is confident it pays dividends. He chuckles as he tells me, "When I was a kid my family had a dairy farm. Everyday after school and all summer long it was my job to take

the cows into the bush to graze and I herded them until nightfall. I fixed the fence when they'd break out and pretty soon I didn't like cows that much. Now I wish I had spent more time watching them. I have great respect for them now and I could have learned so much. They're smart and have good memories. In recent years I've hosted two Bud Williams Low Stress Livestock Handling Workshops. People start out not believing it works, but about 30 minutes into it they see that it does."

Just prior to the BSE outbreak Horst began to downsize, which included

*Cont'd on page 4*

## About The Grazing Mentorship Program

### What Is It?

The Grazing Mentorship Program is a unique opportunity for producers to receive individual input and suggestions on how to improve their profits, efficiency, forage productivity as well as land and water resources through improved grazing management. The folks selected as grazing mentors are respected fellow producers with extensive grazing management, knowledge and experience. Extra training has been made available to them to better assist with the mentoring process.

### What's In It For Me?

As a mentee (a person who is being mentored), a grazing mentor from your region will contact you by telephone and make arrangements to come to your farm/ranch, no matter how large or small your land base is. He/she will discuss with you and help you to as-

sess your grazing resources, as well as the opportunities and the challenges. He/she will work with you in making suggestions and providing input about fencing, watering systems, grazing systems, plant growth, forage species selections, dormant season grazing, winter feeding strategies...or just about anything you have questions about.

Your grazing mentor can spend a total of about 16 hours with you and that may be in the form of in-person visits or telephone follow-ups to guide you through any additional questions or decisions you may be making.

### How Much Does It Cost?

Your investment as a producer is only \$100, which you pay to your provincial partner in the program (see listing on page 4). The program will pay the

balance of your mentor's time up to a maximum of 16 hours as well as his/her travel expenses to a budget maximum.

### How Do I Find A Grazing Mentor?

When you want to be put in contact with a grazing mentor contact the appropriate provincial partner organization listed on page 4 and he/she will find someone who meets your needs and location. In the event you already know one of our grazing mentors and would like to be working with that person, you can make direct arrangements with him or her.

### How Soon Do I Have to Decide?

We urge you to get the process rolling as soon as possible. If, in the province you reside, the current year's funding for mentees has already been budgeted, don't hesitate to request

having your name put on a waiting list. In the event the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program is funded for another year (and we remain hopeful it will be) the likelihood of you being connected with a mentor is very high.

In the meantime, the process moves along faster if you have access to maps or aerial photos of the land you are managing. If you have completed maps with your Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), those will usually be fine to get started with. Extra photocopies of them would be helpful.

**Please note:** It is not necessary to complete an EFP prior to working with a grazing mentor.



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the sale of his cowherd. In hindsight it was a good decision. He now custom grazes about 150 cow/calf pairs for a neighbor and every year he gets calls from folks wanting to know if he can take more. For now, he's content with the numbers he has. He sees so much need for improved grazing

and wonders why so many people are afraid to move. He says, "They drive by and after all these years, they still wonder how long before I fall off this fence."

This past summer Horst David became a Grazing Mentor in the Peace Region.

## Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

Although we don't have space to list all upcoming conferences and workshops across Canada, we would like to feature a few every month. If you'd like your event listed, please contact Lee Pengilly @ [walksfar@sasktel.net](mailto:walksfar@sasktel.net) for more information.

Group	Conference	Dates	Location	Contact	Website
Sask. Forage Council; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Sask. Ministry of Agriculture; Western Beef Development Centre; Ducks Unlimited Canada; Sask. Watershed Authority	Saskatchewan Pasture School	June 18, 19	Saskatoon, Sask.	<a href="mailto:jbrynooge@saskforage.ca">jbrynooge@saskforage.ca</a> (306) 966-2148	Sask. Forage Council <a href="http://www.saskforage.ca">www.saskforage.ca</a>

## Provincial Partner Organizations and Contact List

Province	Partner Organization	Contact	Telephone	Email Address
British Columbia	B.C. Cattlemen's Association	Sandy Burton	250-719-7231	<a href="mailto:sburton@pris.ca">sburton@pris.ca</a>
Alberta	ARECA	Grant Lastiwka	403-227-6392	<a href="mailto:lastiwka@areca.ab.ca">lastiwka@areca.ab.ca</a>
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Forage Council	Ross MacDonald	306-447-4600	<a href="mailto:rossmacdonald@xplornet.com">rossmacdonald@xplornet.com</a>
Manitoba	Manitoba Forage Council	Pam Iwanchysko	204-648-3965	<a href="mailto:pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca">pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca</a>
Ontario	Ontario Cattlemen's Association	Jack Kyle	705-324-5855	<a href="mailto:jack.kyle@ontario.ca">jack.kyle@ontario.ca</a>
Quebec	Gatineau-Outaouais Beef Improvement Club (GOBIC)	Hubert McClelland	819-827-1793	<a href="mailto:hubert.mcclelland@simpatico.ca">hubert.mcclelland@simpatico.ca</a>
Atlantic Canada	AgraPoint International, Inc.	Bill Craig	902-678-7722	<a href="mailto:b.craig@agrapoint.ca">b.craig@agrapoint.ca</a>
National Sustainable Mentorship Program	Mentor-in-Chief	Jim Stone	403-438-0172	<a href="mailto:jstone05@telus.net">jstone05@telus.net</a>
	Newsletter Editor	Lee Pengilly	306-728-5484	<a href="mailto:walksfar@sasktel.net">walksfar@sasktel.net</a>

For program information, questions or comments, please contact your provincial partner organization.