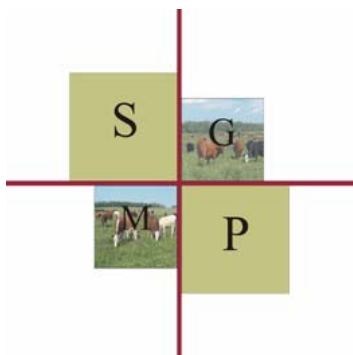


# The Grazing Mentor

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



Volume 1, Issue 2  
September 2007

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## From the Editor

Involvement with the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program has led me to reflect upon the mentors I have had over the course of my life. That process has once again reinforced how invaluable these relationships have been to me. Some connections have lasted a lifetime and others for a much shorter period, but each has made a profound difference to my life journey. Whether they have mentored me within a professional or personal capacity each has made my path a whole lot easier. Some have been so subtle that I hadn't even realized the role they were playing in helping me along while others

were more aggressive and assertive, pushing and encouraging me to accept my life's challenges.

As I talk with more of the mentors within this program and hear in their voices and see in their actions the enthusiasm, passion and commitment they have to improved grazing management it once again strikes me what an invaluable opportunity this program is providing. Working with and receiving insight from these folks on a one-on-one basis is just too good a deal to pass by.

Whether you're just getting started in agriculture or have an

operation that has been established for generations, whether you're a big operation, small operation or somewhere in between, spending time with a grazing mentor is bound to provide you with plenty of food for thought as you look to your winter feeding program and plan for the next growing season. Call your provincial contact soon to make arrangements.

Until next month,  
Happy Trails.

N. Lee Pengilly  
[walksfar@sasktel.net](mailto:walksfar@sasktel.net)

## From the National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Mentor-in-Chief

The early fall cattle market is indicating beef prices in all categories are on a downward slide. A high Canadian dollar, high grain prices and the natural swings in the beef cycle are all being held responsible. With any drop in the market, producers are again in a position to take a close look at their operations and most importantly to do a cost of production analysis on all of their current enterprises.

Some operations do this as a regular part of their annual planning, while many more tend to follow their historical pattern of production. If you are someone who would like an opportunity to brainstorm additional ways to

look at your ways of doing things, one of our grazing mentors may be just who you want to talk to.

Often simply explaining to someone else what you doing and why helps to reveal many hidden costs within your operation. Looking at alternate winter-feeding strategies can shave money off of the costs of bringing a cow through winter. Perhaps you are thinking of back grounding your calves, but need some help in crunching the numbers. Exploring grazing options may help you make more efficient use of your pasture allowing you to increase your stocking rates, extend your grazing season, have additional feed of your own to put up or even rent out some of your existing lands.

Getting through any financial crunch requires creativity, planning and a genuine will to make it. Our grazing mentors can provide a number of options for you to look at presented in a user-friendly manner. Your investment of \$100 may save you much more than that in the long run. It's always easier to make a decision when you have taken the opportunity to bounce your ideas off of someone else. Rest assured, our mentors are obligated to hold any information you share with them in the strictest of confidence.

~Jim Stone



Canada

Funds for this project provided by Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada's Greencover Canada program.

# The Grazing Mentor

## Interview with Grazing Mentor Hugh Blair

Located at the south tip of Lake Manitoba, Whitemud River Farms is the home of Grazing Mentor Hugh Blair, his wife Louise and their two university-aged children. Rounding out the family business is Hugh's brother Robert and his family.

Hugh and Robert's grandfather and father had their roots in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan prior to purchasing their second place at the Whitemud River location. For a while they had a mixed farm in both places, but eventually stayed in Manitoba. The Blair family has always been in the cattle business. For many decades, they also had a grain operation, but about eight years ago they decided to seed their grain land to forage and run yearlings.

This is Hugh's second year as a grazing mentor after becoming involved in the fall of 2006. Many of his 2006 mentees plan to visit the Whitemud River Farm later into the fall as Hugh and his brother begin setting up for their winter-feeding program. One might say that bale grazing is Hugh's pride and joy. And for good reason – Hugh is widely recognized for his success and ingenuity in fine-tuning his bale grazing operation.

The Blairs produce approximately one third of their own hay and purchase the rest from local suppliers. The feed is all tested, and based on those results is placed according to feed value with the poorer quality to be fed first

and the quality continually improving through gestation and calving until late spring when the grass is once again ready for grazing. Calving begins around the 20<sup>th</sup> of April. In further refining their management, the cowherd is divided into three groups – first and second calvers, mature cows and old cows. This assures that each age group receives appropriate access to feed and nutrition.

To set up for bale grazing, the Blairs use 5' rods inserted into the ends of the bales rather than fence posts and aircraft cable is utilized for wire. All the fencing is completed well before winter sets in. Once the winter grazing program begins, the wire is moved every couple of days.

With several years of success under their belts, the Blairs are tremendous advocates of bale grazing, citing such paybacks as reduced costs, saved manpower and tractor hours and improved pastures in the following growing seasons.

The Blairs are also very active in both the practice and promotion of low-stress livestock handling methods, something the whole family is involved in. With innumerable benefits to both livestock and people, low stress livestock handling is an art in itself requiring patience and practice, but the results are amazing.

In 2003 the Blair family won Manitoba's Environmental

Sustainability Award (TESA) and it's no wonder. With all of their riparian areas fenced off and an extensive planned grazing system in place, the Blairs have utilized the natural strengths of their land to create a system that works to enhance the ecosystem processes. With an on-going commitment to creativity, ingenuity and with an open minded, they have never stopped learning.

With that thought in mind, Hugh goes on to say, "My mentees give me as much as I give them. Many producers are so discouraged. I like to help them to try and take a look at their places with new eyes. Trying to keep things simple is an on-going challenge for all operations, but there are so many things that can make life easier. I just keep asking, 'What's making you do this?' or 'Why are you doing this?' and reminding them, 'In our line of work we don't get paid by the hour!'"

*Editor's Note: I like to include an interview with a mentee, but the folks I spoke to wanted to wait until after their trip to the Whitemud River Farms slated for later this month. I will try to arrange for a follow-up interview in an upcoming issue. Thanks!*

*The Blairs have utilized the natural strengths of their land to create a system that works to enhance the ecosystem processes.*



## Upcoming Conferences and Workshops

Although we won't have space to list all upcoming conferences and workshops across Canada, we would like to feature a few every month. We encourage all groups to also promote The National Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program on your website or during your conference. Please contact [walksfar@sasktel.net](mailto:walksfar@sasktel.net) for more information.

Group	Conference	Dates	Location	Contact	Website
Foothills Forage Association	Grazing Legumes for a Sustainable and Secure Future	Nov. 27-29	Lethbridge, A.B.	Dawn Vandermey (888) 541-0911	<a href="http://www.foothillsforage.com">www.foothillsforage.com</a>
Manitoba Forage Council and MAFRA	Manitoba Grazing School 2007	Dec. 4,5	Brandon, M.B.	MAFRI (204) 622-2006	<a href="http://www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca">www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca</a>
Sask. Forage Council; Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada; Western Beef Development Centre; Sask. Agriculture and Food; University of Sask.; Sask. Stock Growers; Sask. Cattle Feeders Association	Saskatchewan Beef and Forage Symposium	February 6,7 2008	Saskatoon, S.K.	Saskatchewan Forage Council (306) 966-2148	<a href="http://www.saskforage.ca">www.saskforage.ca</a> (by mid-October)

## 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 assess 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 of \$700 per grazing unit.

### How Do I Find A Grazing Mentor?

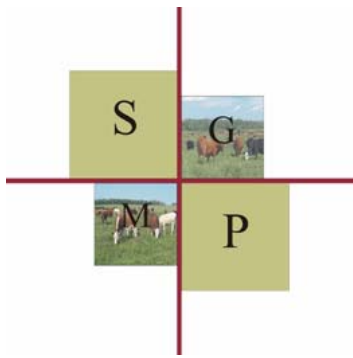
When you want to be put in contact with a grazing mentor contact the appropriate provincial partner organization listed on page 4 and he/she will find someone who meets your needs and location. In the event you already know one of our grazing mentors and would like to be working with that person, you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

seems to make sense that optimally, the first visit to your operation would take place before the land is covered with snow. That being said an early snowfall is not going to stop our mentors! 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.



## The Grazing Mentor

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### Provincial Partner Organizations and Contact List

Province	Partner Organization	Contact	Telephone	Email Address
<b>British Columbia</b>	B.C. Cattlemen's Association	Sandy Burton	877-630-2198	<a href="mailto:sburton@pris.ca">sburton@pris.ca</a>
<b>Alberta</b>	ARECA	Grant Lastiwka	403-227-6392	<a href="mailto:lastiwka@areca.ab.ca">lastiwka@areca.ab.ca</a>
<b>Saskatchewan</b>	Saskatchewan Forage Council	Ross MacDonald	306-447-4600	<a href="mailto:rossmacdonald@explornet.com">rossmacdonald@explornet.com</a>
<b>Manitoba</b>	Manitoba Forage Council	Pam Iwanchysko	204-648-3965	<a href="mailto:pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca">pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca</a>
<b>Ontario</b>	Ontario Cattlemen's Association	Jack Kyle	705-324-5855	<a href="mailto:jack.kyle@ontario.ca">jack.kyle@ontario.ca</a>
<b>Quebec</b>	Gatineau-Outaouais Beef Improvement Club (GOBIC)	Hubert McClelland	819-827-1793	<a href="mailto:hubert.mcclelland@simpatico.ca">hubert.mcclelland@simpatico.ca</a>
<b>Atlantic Canada</b>	AgraPoint International, Inc.	Sean Firth	902-678-7722	<a href="mailto:S.Firth@agrapoint.ca">S.Firth@agrapoint.ca</a>
<b>National Sustainable Mentorship Program</b>	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.