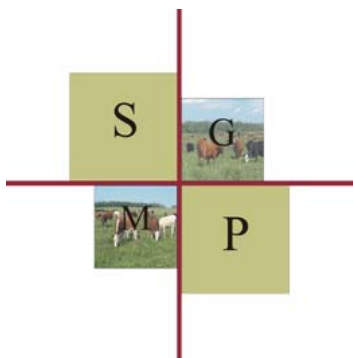


The Grazing Mentor

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



Volume I, Issue 3
October/November 2007

Inside this issue:

- Note from Mentor-in-Chief Jim Stone 1
- Interview with Grazing Mentor George Kyle 2
- Interview with Grazing Mentee Rob Swackhammer 2
- About the Grazing Mentorship Program 3
- Upcoming Conferences and Workshops 4
- Provincial Partner Organizations and Contact List 4

From the Editor

Given the nature of our industry with its dramatic market fluctuations, the unpredictable whims of Mother Nature, and constant demands of “too much to do and not enough time to do it”, it’s not surprising that even the most hardy beef producer can feel overwhelmed, overstressed and question whether it’s all worthwhile. Too often we work in isolation with thoughts and worries chasing each other around in our minds. A trip to coffee row or to the local auction mart doesn’t do a lot to alleviate those worries and it’s easy to just hunker down and do what we do best; work harder and worry more.

This fall has seen the general morale of beef producers hit and hit hard. The situation is complex and most of us need all of the gumption we possess to see the bright side of things or better yet, the bright side of our profession.

I’m certainly not here to offer

any pat answers or to downplay the gravity of the situation, but I do think there are a few simple truths out there that can help us to keep our wits about us. We need to be able to keep the lines of communication open – with our families, our business partners and our lenders. Although it may be easier said than done, it’s probably the most important first step in getting through a crisis. The other one and again, I don’t want to sound trite, but we must try to be mindful of the thoughts we think and the words we use.

I recently heard a speaker who reminded those in attendance, “Our words reflect our attitude. When we change the way we think, the things we think about start to change.”

Over the last months I have had the opportunity to speak with many of our mentors from across Canada and each month I am able to add a couple more to that list. And with each

phone call, I come away renewed and enthused about the optimism, creativity and genuine concern that the mentors have for their fellow producers, the lands they live on and the animals they raise. Time and time again I have heard from folks who have worked with our mentors say, “it has been one of the most beneficial, user-friendly and cost-effective things they have done in years.”

So, if you’re one of those folks who could benefit by having someone look at your grazing operation with a fresh set of eyes, I encourage you to get in touch with your respective provincial partner. Act soon as remaining spots are filling quickly.

Until next month,
Happy Trails.

N. Lee Pengilly
walksfar@sasktel.net

From the Mentor-in-Chief

When the markets are low, I often think about a conference I attended a few years ago. Harlan Hughes asked 450 cattle producers what it cost them in real terms to produce a pound of calf. Only one gentleman raised his hand to indicate that he knew exactly what it costs him to produce a pound of calf in the fall. He operates a large cow calf operation that is managed using sustainable grazing management practices, and employs

many innovative processes to produce the calves he raises. The end result was that it was costing him \$.75 per pound to produce a calf in his operation. At that time, the provincial average [Alberta] was closer to a \$1.45 per pound of calf using traditional management practices. Many producers who were using excessively high feed inputs had costs as high as \$2.00 per pound of calf. The good part about this story is that even this year this producer

would be making a profit and when prices are higher, an even larger profit. As a producer, you really need to take stock of where you are in terms of your costs, and take steps to reduce them. This is something that the Grazing Mentorship Program Mentors can help you with. Just call your provincial contact for more information.

~Jim Stone



Canada

Funds for this project provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Greencover Canada Program.

The Grazing Mentor

Interview with Grazing Mentor George Kyle

Located near the midpoint between London and Toronto close to the town of Ayr, George Kyle and his family own and operate Ashlawn Farm. With third generation sons Christopher and Carman fully employed on the farm, a diverse mix of livestock including a purebred beef cattle herd, a dairy operation and an expanding flock of sheep keeps everyone busy. In an area that sees the majority of the arable land going into cash crops like soy and corn, Ashlawn Farm's forage base is definitely the exception.

The beef component of the operation consists of a purebred Shorthorn herd. Calving begins in mid-April with the best heifers and a couple of bulls retained for breeding stock. The balance of the calf crop is sold as stockers in the fall at a local auction barn. On a loamy land base, their grazing land is divided into 13 paddocks with a central alley. Cattle are generally moved every couple of days and early in the growing season two or three paddocks are cut for hay. Later in the season when growth slows, some of that hay may be fed in order for pastures to recover before cattle return to them. George figures the stocking rate at 10 cow/calf pairs per acre.

Last winter George utilized bale grazing and has also used strip grazing on corn stalks. According to George, "The biggest challenge in extending the grazing season revolves around ice. In this area, that poly-wire can turn into an ice rope in no time at all making it totally ineffective and bringing an abrupt change in winter feeding plans. Another problem occurs when the snow is iced over and cattle can't access enough snow to provide their water requirements. When that happens, we have to haul water to them or winter them in an area with year round running water.

The Kyles have chosen Jersey cows in their dairy operation. In summer they are grazed in addition to receiving their usual ration. George claims, "The exercise is good for them. We have fewer breeding problems, fewer foot problems and have to spend less time on hoof-trimming." The dairy cows are on a faster rotation than the beef cows, with a change in paddock every day. The paddocks are close to the same size to help even out milk production and pasture growth. Stocking rate for the dairy operation works out to 25 cows per acre.

The sheep component is relatively new, but certainly sparks George's enthusiasm. At this time more fencing and cross fencing is planned for the sheep operation. Currently the sheep are grazed separately from the cattle, but thoughts of poly-grazing in the future have been considered. Although there has been some direct marketing of the lamb crop, most of the production is sold at the community sales barn when the lambs reach 70 – 85 pounds.

This is George's second year with the Grazing Mentorship Program and the demand for mentoring is keeping him busy. He's pleasantly surprised with the requests he's had in his area given that it isn't traditional "beef country." According to George, "The most common request I have from people is in how to improve efficiency – get better utilization of their pasture. As fertilizer and fuel prices have risen, people are starting to look towards forage-based beef as a viable option. Many are looking for some direction on how to manage pasture rotations. As grazing mentors, we can help them get started in that direction."

As fertilizer and fuel prices have risen, people are starting to look towards forage-based beef as a viable option. Many are looking for some direction on how to manage pasture rotations.



Interview with Grazing Mentee Rob Swackhammer

After reading an article about the Grazing Mentorship Program in The Canadian Cattleman's magazine, Rob Swackhammer decided to take advantage of what he saw as a perfect opportunity. That was over a year ago and with the capable assistance of Grazing

Mentor George Kyle, Rob has seen significant progress toward both his long- and short-term plans.

Like many involved in agriculture Rob has an off-farm career and was grateful that George was so willing to work

around his schedule. With an initial on-site visit, Rob explained both his long- and short-term plans for the grazing operation. As Rob relates, "I showed George my pasture, what I had done, what I thought I wanted for fencing

Cont'd on page 3

...Cont'd from page 2

and explained my ideas, both short- and long-term. I hoped to move from an "extensive grazing system" to an "intensive grazing system!" The field was an established hay base, but after my grazing season, it looked more like a golf course. I knew I needed to get better utilization of the grass. I also knew from past experience I only wanted to build fence once and so I figured I could benefit from George's experience — both his success and mistakes. George came back with lots of practical advice and from there I was able to make my decisions and begin the implementation."

Prior to his work with

George, Rob had already constructed a 5 strand high tensile fence around the perimeter. Based on the new grazing plan, 15 paddocks were created where previously there had been one. This grazing season, when the grass was growing fast, the cattle were moved fast, usually once a day. When paddock recovery times slowed, so did the grazing moves. The cattle soon caught on to this new system and began anticipating the moves. As Rob indicated, "I sure do prefer taking my family and going for a walk to check grass and move cows rather than spend those hours sitting alone on a tractor!"

Able to assess this year's graz-

ing successes and challenges, Rob is excited to see what's going to happen next year. According to Rob, "I see this as an ongoing evolution that I definitely want to pursue. A close examination of my land indicates I still have some bare ground and getting that filled in is important. Whether I do it by mechanical means or let the cattle do it for me remains to be seen. I will admit I haven't fully implemented all of the recommendations, but I am moving forward."

When asked whether he'd recommend the grazing mentorship process to others he replied, "There's no doubt about it. For a very reasonable price you receive independent

advice and benefit from first hand experience. It's so much better to learn from someone else's successes and mistakes. George was friendly, knowledgeable and very accessible. It is so helpful to have someone to run your ideas by. This program provides unbelievable value for the dollars invested."

Rob, his wife Melissa and young family, daughter Anna, three years of age and two-year-old son, Alexander, live near Rockwood, Ontario just north-east of Guelph.

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.

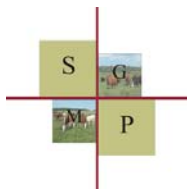
How Soon Do I Have to Decide?

We urge you to get the process rolling as soon as possible. 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.

Book Soon – Spaces are Filling Quickly!



The Grazing Mentor

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 for more information.

Group	Conference	Dates	Location	Contact	Website
Manitoba Forage Council and MAFRA	Manitoba Grazing School 2007	Dec. 4,5	Brandon, M.B.	MAFRI (204) 622-2006	www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca
Sask. Forage Council; Agriculture and 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 2008	February 6,7 2008	Saskatoon, S.K.	Brenda Freistadt Western Beef Development Centre (306) 682-3139 Ext. 246	www.saskforage.ca

Provincial Partner Organizations and Contact List

Province	Partner Organization	Contact	Telephone	Email Address
British Columbia	B.C. Cattlemen's Association	Sandy Burton	877-630-2198	sburton@pris.ca
Alberta	ARECA	Grant Lastiwka	403-227-6392	lastiwka@areca.ab.ca
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Forage Council	Ross MacDonald	306-447-4600	rossmacdonald@xplornet.com
Manitoba	Manitoba Forage Council	Pam Iwanchysko	204-648-3965	pamela.iwanchysko@gov.mb.ca
Ontario	Ontario Cattlemen's Association	Jack Kyle	705-324-5855	jack.kyle@ontario.ca
Quebec	Gatineau-Outaouais Beef Improvement Club (GOBIC)	Hubert McClelland	819-827-1793	hubert.mcclelland@simpatico.ca
Atlantic Canada	AgraPoint International, Inc.	Sean Firth	902-678-7722	S.Firth@agrapoint.ca
National Sustainable Mentorship Program	Mentor-in-Chief	Jim Stone	403-438-0172	jstone05@telus.net
	Newsletter Editor	Lee Pengilly	306-728-5484	walksfar@sasktel.net

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