



GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVESTOCK

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINE

Canadian Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Programme

KEY MESSAGES:

1. Mentors encouraged innovative approaches to grass management
2. Implementation of sustainable grazing was accelerated
3. Each farm context is unique
4. Creates opportunities for neighbours to mimic success

Canadian Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Programme

Overview of practice

Better resource management contributes to long-term sustainability of Canadian farms and ranches supporting a healthy community in a functioning landscape. Science predicts that healthy grass sequesters carbon, increases drought resilience, protects water quality and provides wildlife habitat.

Accelerating the implementation of more sustainable grazing management practices and systems on farms and ranches across Canada strengthens the social license of cattle producers as responsible stewards of the land and producers of safe and nutritional food.

For a variety of reasons there is often a long time gap between when producers first hear of a management change or practice they believe would provide them economic and enhanced natural resource benefits, and when they take the first steps to adopt that management practice. With the help of a mentor, that time gap can be significantly reduced.

The Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program (SGMP) matched experienced grass managers with producers interested in expanding their grazing knowledge and other resource management skills. Mentors encouraged innovative approaches to grass management with changes to fencing, species, timing or stocking rates and the integration with winter-feeding strategies, water, biodiversity and a variety of ecosystem services.



Approach

The Canadian Cattleman's Association (CCA) worked with provincial partners, primarily forage councils, with existing expertise in extension and technology transfer and passion and knowledge of forage and grass management. The SGMP was delivered from 2007 – 2010 on private lands and Crown provincial grazing lands under long-term lease to producers

Management practices delivered were based on existing knowledge developed by federal, provincial and academic researchers and in most cases were already well studied in the field.

The program was based on the understanding each ranch and farm is a unique combination of natural, human, and financial resources making it necessary to apply different management practices for each one.

SGMP was a tool to help producers manage their resources more effectively. Experienced graziers (mentors) worked with producers to identify options on how to change management practices to benefit producers economically and environmentally.

An experienced grazer, as a mentor, can help a producer identify the available options, first steps and the ongoing strategies for making change happen in a manner that works for that producer's specific objectives and available resources.

Mentors were chosen based on their practical experience and reputation for personal success as managers of their own farms and ranches. These people were active members in their provincial grazing associations with speaking experience. They acted as coaches generally travelling to a producer's ranch for a face to face discussion. The mentors were not agronomists and did not prepare tools such as grazing plans.

A mentorship manual was created to encourage a national approach to mentoring. Each year of the program, mentors were brought together to share issues and successes.

The program was administered by CCA, a not for profit producer run organization. The program delivery was accomplished by provincial partners, primarily forage councils, with existing expertise in extension and technology transfer and passion and knowledge of range management.



Benefits of the Practice

Grazing is an art based on science. No two pastures are the same. When a mentor assists one producer to make change that provides an opportunity for their neighbours to mimic that success. Maybe the greatest benefit a mentor can bring to a producer especially in times of economic or climatic challenges is the recognition there are things within their control.

The program was not set up to measure economic benefit. However, work from the Western Beef Development Centre (WBDC) in Saskatchewan compared high and low cost producers and found the average margin for these low cost producers was \$222/cow versus \$118/cow for the remaining producers, i.e. a positive

difference of \$104/cow. The low cost producer was utilizing forage more effectively and so had the cattle on higher cost grain rations 25 days less. http://www.wbdc.sk.ca/pubs_fact_sheets.htm.

An economic analysis done by Alberta Agriculture has the same findings. It is cheaper to graze the forages than mechanically feed them. [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/econ12523](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/econ12523)

Key Characteristics required for success

Experienced graziers known locally for personal success as managers of their own farms.

Delivery should be done by a local trusted organization. Grass managers tend to be a conservative group, reluctant to change and slow to accept and trust groups offering help.

Acknowledgment that sustainable grazing supports biodiversity which is a public good delivered by the management of rangelands.

Report success based on acreage influenced rather than number of producers signed up.

The Good Practice Guidelines intend to provide practical operational information related to the Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock Focus Area 2: Restoring Value to Grasslands. The information has been drawn from a global inventory of pilot sites connected to FA2. This guideline aligns with FA2 Theme 2 Capacity Building. Please visit www.livestockdialogue.org for more information.

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FURTHER READING

<http://www.saskforage.ca/News/Press%20Releases/Media%20Advisory%20-%202008%20SGMP.pdf>

http://www.nuffieldinternational.org/rep_pdf/1223389466Gregson_Sara.pdf

AUTHORS

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