Agri-News

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Converting Canola into Forage and Winterfeed for Cows

Canola silage and canola salvage in the full bloom and early pod stage, and even into the more advanced stages, can be used as a forage source for cattle. Canola forage is acceptably palatable to cattle and the nutritional quality is good.

"Canola does make a good feed and there is a fair amount of experience and history in using canola crop on a salvage basis, especially when there are various stages of canola growth or the crop didn't develop as it should have," says Ken Ziegler, beef and forage specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "Many producers are finding that they are not going to have a great yield from a canola perspective and, given that feed prices are going to be higher than the long-term average this year, converting those crops into winterfeed makes sense. Producers can have confidence that canola has excellent potential as a crop for winterfeed and beef cows can do quite well on."

When it comes to harvesting canola as a forage or silage crop, treat it similar to cereal crops when cutting, chopping and packing. The one difference is that canola, with its hollow stems, takes about an extra day to dry down to the 60 to 65 per cent moisture content level. Putting canola up wet will result in seepage, poor fermentation and unwanted microbes in the silage.

Try to harvest the canola in an optimal stage, from full flower to early pod. Cutting at this stage provides the highest yield. Delaying harvest longer will result in leaf loss and reduced quality.

"As canola is predominantly stem and leaf, care should be taken to minimize leaf loss," says Ziegler. "Canola is very similar to alfalfa as it is important to get the stem to dry down so it can be stored, but without losing leaf. It is recommended to crimp, but not to the point where leaves and pods are being broken off. Do give it enough of a crimp to break the stems. If at all possible, bale it right after, without raking the crop."

The harvest window will depend on the stage of the crop. Being harvested before the crop goes into full pod stage will make good feed for the winter.

Cont'd on page 2

This Week

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Alberta AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

"One problem that producers should be aware of is that canola tends to accumulate sulphur," says Barry Yaremcio, beef and forage specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "If you are in an area where there is high sulphur content in the water, there will be sulphur in the silage and the total sulphur could exceed 0.4 per cent. At this point, rumen bacteria that produce B vitamins will be destroyed and the cattle could have problems with polioencephalomalacia (PEM). It is very important that a feed sample be sent for analysis on all silage to establish quality and content.

"To prevent these problems, canola greenfeed or silage are typically fed at 50 per cent of total dry matter intake on a daily basis, with the remainder of the ration being other feeds such as straw, hay and grains."

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Livestock traceability regulations are in effect

With the fall calf run under way, Alberta beef producers are being reminded about the province's new livestock traceability regulations.

New requirements now apply under the Animal Health Act as follows:

- **Mandatory premises ID** – All livestock producers and anyone who owns or keeps animals (other than household pets) and those who operate sites where animals commingle – such as feedlots – must obtain a Premises Identification Number from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.
- **Mandatory cattle age verification** – All cattle born in Alberta after January 1, 2009, must be age verified, with birthdates registered with the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency prior to leaving their farm of origin.

Along with animal movement tracking, these form the pillars of Alberta's livestock traceability system. Traceability is about animal health, consumer assurance, minimizing economic impacts and maintaining and expanding Alberta's global market share.

The legislation and regulations supporting traceability are crucial to the agriculture sector's viability and help provide a competitive edge in an increasingly aggressive global market.

Alberta's advances in traceability are expected to form the backbone for a national program. Provincial and territorial agriculture ministers met in July and agreed to partner with the federal government to implement a national traceability system by 2011.

"Traceability is important," says George Groeneveld, Alberta Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. "We in Alberta are more than pleased to be innovators. We believe it is our role to do our best to support producers. It is simply good business."

In its broadest definition, traceability is the ability to trace the current and historical location of an animal, group of animals or animal products from one point in the supply chain to another.

"A traceability system enables government to react quickly and effectively to address disease outbreaks, minimizing the economic impact and maintaining global market access," says Groeneveld.

The need for traceability was underlined during the minister's trade mission to Asia last year. Many government and industry officials emphasized that traceability and age verification are the minimum requirements for market access.

Value-added exports represented 41 per cent – or $3.3 billion – of Alberta's total agri-food exports in 2008, including $1.1 billion worth of beef and $342 million worth of pork.

Here is where producers can get more information about traceability:

- to register premises online or to obtain a registration form, visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca/premises
- (if you have already applied for an Alberta Premises ID number, your number will be mailed to you shortly)
- to register birthdates of cattle, visit www.canadaid.ca
- if you have questions or need assistance, please contact the Ag-Info Centre at 310-3276 or visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca

Contact: Ag-Info Centre
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Estimating Forage Yield on Salvage Grain Crops

When conditions are dry, livestock producers often acquire crops that are not harvestable for grain production to supplement their forage and grazing stocks. It is strongly recommended to estimate the crop's yield potential before striking an agreement to salvage a crop for feed. A hands-on, field-level yield estimate goes a long way towards preventing a discrepancy that may arise from differences in rough estimates, best guesses, eyeballing or ball-parking the crop.

"Swathing an area of the crop, baling it, and weighing the bales can provide a measure of forage yield," says Dale Kaliel, senior economist: production economics with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "The area of crop baled can be extrapolated to a field level yield estimate."

Cont'd on page 3

Another method of measuring what's in the field is to cut and weigh square metre samples from the crop to determine yields. If this is done in 10 areas of the field and the weights are averaged, this should provide a reasonable estimate of the average "moist" yield of the field.

The moisture content of standing crops can vary significantly. In order to create a solid footing for a bid and offer, moist yields should be converted to a dry matter basis. One method that can be used to determined dry matter is the microwave method for determining moisture content of forages:

1. weigh out approximately 100 g sample of the forage (W1), excluding the weight of the container, weigh to nearest gram
2. spread the weighed forage sample on a paper plate or place it in a paper bag and put it in the microwave oven
3. place an 8-oz glass that is three-quarters full of water in the oven to prevent igniting the sample
4. heat at 80 to 90 per cent of maximum power for four minutes
5. remove the sample, mix it and weigh it
6. continue to reheat for two minute intervals, re-weighing each time (to prevent burning, use a lower power level and 30 second time intervals as it approaches being dry)
7. when the sample weight does not change after two or three drying intervals, it is 100 per cent dry and this is the final dry weight (W2) (a slightly charred sample should not affect accuracy of the moisture determination, however you must repeat the test if the sample burns)
8. calculate moisture content as follows:

$$\textbf{Moisture content} = \frac{(W1 - W2)}{(W1)} \times 100$$

For example, if W1 (sample weight) were 100 grams and W2 (dry weight) were 36 grams, then:

$$\textbf{Moisture per cent} = \frac{100 - 36}{100} \times 100 = 64 \text{ per cent}$$

"There are a few other agronomic considerations that can affect the harvestable forage yield and should be taken into account," says Kaliel. "Many fields in crop production are not suitably fenced for grazing. However, constructing a perimeter fence can be done easily with electric fence, it also allows for limiting access to the whole field. Cross-fencing reduces wastage and encourages livestock to consume the whole plant."

Forage quality decreases as crops mature, so swathing a grain crop prior to grazing will prevent the crop from becoming too mature. Limiting access to the swaths similarly reduces waste and encourages livestock to eat the complete plant. If crops have been stressed by frost, be sure to analyze these stressed crops for nitrates to prevent nitrate poisoning when feeding salvaged crops.

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CCIA Announces the End of Bar Code Dangle Tags

The Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) is reminding producers that as of January 1, 2010, all cattle must be tagged with approved CCIA radio frequency identification (RFID) tags.

"It is important that we implement RFID technology across the board, as this will enable us to move forward on traceability. Of the three pillars of traceability, we have achieved animal identification. Once we have completed the second pillar – premises identification – the industry will require RFID technology to support the reporting of animal movement," states Steve Primrose, chair for CCIA and owner of Primrose Livestock Ltd.

RFID tags have been the only approved tags available to be issued for cattle since September 1, 2006. However, producers were allowed (until December 31, 2009) to phase out bar code tags for mature breeding stock and bulls.

Already applied bar code tags should be left in the animal's ear and a RFID tag must also be applied to that animal once bar code tags are no longer approved. The producers should cross-reference the barcode tag with the new RFID tag in the Canadian Livestock Tracking System (CLTS). This is strongly recommended to ensure that the integrity of the traceability system is maintained. If producers need assistance to cross-reference the tags, they can call 1-877-909-BEEF (2333).

On the recommendation of CCIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) will de-list bar code tags from the approved tag list effective January 1, 2010. As a result, after December 31, 2009, producers must apply an RFID tag and should cross-reference the bar code with the new RFID tag in the CLTS.

The CFIA is responsible for enforcing the national identification requirements under the Health of Animals Regulations. Compliance is the goal and CFIA inspectors regularly inspect cattle at various sites. National identification and traceability are important tools for disease management purposes and food safety problems. The CFIA is committed to ensure that the integrity of the national identification program is maintained through vigorous inspection for animals not bearing approved tags. CFIA will continue to enforce sections 176 and 177 which prohibit the sending, transportation or reception of a bovine animal without an approved tag.

For more information, visit www.canadaid.ca

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Spring Thaw Implications in TALL Stubble

A field that over-winters as standing stubble generally traps more snow than a field that is fall-tilled or left bare. As snowmelt and spring-thaw occur, residue-laden seedbeds dry slower and may remain colder longer. Residual straw and chaff can be a challenge if the direct seeding method is unable to handle the cut stubble and/or surface mulch after harvest.

Research and farmer experience are driving innovation towards improving crop residue management and subsequent direct seeding outcome. In 2008 and 2009, Reduced Tillage LINKAGES agronomist Ron Heller looked at the agronomic challenges associated with cropping systems to evaluate the impact of snowmelt and thaw in various stubble heights as well as to try direct seeding canola into TALL wheat stubble with narrow knife openers.

Some of the main results of Heller's research showed that snow accumulation (40 cm) in stripped-stubble was consistent throughout many fields, regardless of landscape features or wheel tramping. Snowpack was displaced and denser in shorter stubble, often exceeding stubble height with deep drifts. Blown snow from nearby short-stubble fields filled shelterbelts and roadside ditches.

In terms of seedbed warming, graphing the shallow soil temperature data indicated a difference in favour of taller stubble. This may in fact be due to reduced amounts of harvest surface mulch such as chopped straw that allows superior sunlight access and/or air movement, to warm exposed soil.

Even on cold days, exposed stubble converts sunlight into heat to melt snow. Standing stubble acts as a "solar rod" or conduit for heat transfer. It is fair to assume this effect extends well beyond snowmelt to enhance seedbed warming. In both the 2008 and 2009 projects, during two different spring conditions, soil and air temperature data show there are significant implications of stubble height on snowmelt, spring thaw and soil warming. The effect is generally in favour of taller stubble.

To review the findings, the full report is posted to the RTL website at www.reducedtillage.ca/article452.aspx

New Appointment to the Alberta Grain Commission

Greg Porozni, Chair of the Alberta Grain Commission (AGC), is pleased to announce that Minister Groeneveld has appointed Mr. Sean Royer to the AGC. Royer's appointment is effective August 1, 2009.

Royer will serve as one of two department representatives on the AGC. He has also just been appointed Director of Strategic Initiatives in Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA). Prior to this, he was Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's director of Economics and Competitiveness. In previous roles within the department, Royer served as unit leader of the Economics Unit, as manager of Ag Summit, and as program evaluation coordinator. He also spent a year with Alberta Transportation and Infrastructure as manager of Business Planning and Performance Measures.

"Sean is a welcome addition to the Alberta Grain Commission. He brings a wide array of industry knowledge and experience to the AGC table. His knowledge and experience with government, producers and the agriculture industry will be beneficial to the deliberations of the commission," says Porozni.

AGC members are:

Greg Porozni – Willingdon – Farmer (Chairman)
Terry Young – Lacombe - Farmer (Vice Chairman)
Henry Dechant - Fairview – Farmer
Daniel Greene – Carmangay – Farmer
D'Arcy Hilgartner – Camrose – Farmer
Ed Lefsrud – Viking – Farmer
Dennis Nanninga - Barrhead – Farmer
Gerard Oosterhuis – Bow Island – Farmer
Carol Bettac – Edmonton – Department member

The mission of the Alberta Grain Commission is to provide advice to the Minister and appropriate groups to enable a prosperous, sustainable, and market driven farm and agri-sector. More information on the Alberta Grain Commission can be found on the AGC website at www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agc

Agri-News Briefs

Alberta Foodservice Show

The Alberta Foodservice is designed to showcase Alberta's $8.4 billion foodservice industry. This year's show is an important market place attracting restaurants, chefs, qualified buyers, industry executives and decision makers. The show is being held in Calgary on September 27 and 28, 2009. For more information contact Bruce Guerin at 1-866-751-3833 or visit www.crfa.ca/tradeshows/alberta/

Arboriculture Conference

The International Society of Arboriculture Pacific NorthWest Chapter conference is being held in Kelowna, British Columbia on October 4 to 7, 2009. Presentations will cover a range of topics, including planting of trees, caring for young trees, caring for mature and veteran trees, new techniques for tree climbing, sustainable management in urban areas, and selecting trees for planting. Speakers are from England, Italy and many USA locations (Florida, California, Massachusetts). There will also be Canadian speakers, including one presentation by the David Suzuki Foundation. For more information, visit the conference website at www.pnwisa.org/conference.html
For the full program and registration information, go to http://pnwisaconference09.eventbrite.com/

New Website Aimed at Producers and Ag Media

The Beef Information Centre (BIC) has launched a producer-focused website, offering a new direct form of communication and interaction with Canada's beef producers. Housed within the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) website, the new BIC site is aimed at BIC stakeholders, primarily Canada's beef producers, as well as industry and government, and agricultural media. Updated weekly, the new site offers stakeholders and agricultural media a simple website on which they can find information about BIC, including vision and mission statements, information about projects and programs, and additional information pertinent to agricultural media and producers. Over the next few months, a significant amount of new content will be added to the site. For further information, contact Janet Kanters, stakeholder communications manager, at 403-275-5890, ext 310, or visit the website at www.bic.cattle.ca