



Agri-News

February 8, 2010

Dry Soil Conditions Pose Risk to Alberta Hay and Pasture

Producers are reminded of the **February 28, 2010** deadline to insure perennial crops. With soil moisture at extreme lows across much of the province, cattle and livestock producers are becoming increasingly concerned as they near the end of their winter feed supplies. Many are worried about the impact dry soils could have on their pasture and hay land this spring once the snow melts, says provincial forage and grazing specialist Grant Lastiwka.

“We’re much drier than this time last year,” confirms Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development soil moisture specialist Ralph Wright. “Extremely low soil moisture, typically seen once in 12-to-25 years on average, is being recorded across large areas of Alberta. That extreme dry soil zone is four times larger than this time last year.”

In southern Alberta, conditions are drier than normal along either side of the Highway 2 corridor, ranging from 1-in-12-year lows in Foothills M.D., to one in 3-to-6-year lows across most of Cardston County at the U.S. border. Soil moisture across the rest of the south is generally near normal, ranging to moderately high around Medicine Hat.

“Most of the province didn’t get enough precipitation to recharge soil moisture reserves this fall before the ground froze,” says Wright. “Plenty of spring rain will be needed to replenish dry soils and avoid a repeat of last year when drought conditions across much of the province crippled pasture and hay production.”

But Lastiwka warns, “No matter how much rain and snow melt we get this spring, producers in areas with low soil moisture should probably expect lower hay and pasture yields and definitely a delayed start to the grazing season – at least a month later than usual in the driest areas. Plenty of rain will

be critical, but prolonged dry soil conditions mean these plants are stressed and may take twice as long as healthy plants to grow.”

Lastiwka explains that the root systems and energy reserves of forage plants in many areas have been depleted by lack of moisture. He adds in many cases the damage is greater due to

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the hard choices livestock producers have been forced to make - such as overgrazing and under fertilizing amid high feed and fertilizer prices, and low returns in a struggling industry. If livestock begin grazing too soon this spring, he warns the damage to pasture will be much worse, and take longer to undo.

“It’s a serious situation because the majority of producers are very tight on feed supplies. Very few have enough to carry them through an extra month of feeding this spring,” says Lastiwka, noting that hay prices have doubled due to short supplies.

“Many producers rely on extending the grazing season on pastures as long as possible as the most cost-effective way to feed their herds. Now that tool may not be there when they need it most.

“Producers need to plan now for a later start to grazing, the risk of lower yields and the possibility of another dry spring. Strategies such as reducing herd sizes to stretch feed dollars further, renting additional pasture, fertilizing forage stands if possible, and insuring hay and pasture land should be considered. With the February 28 deadline to insure hay and pasture in Alberta just weeks away, producers must decide soon whether insurance will be part of their plan.”

“There are no easy answers. Managing your risk is important. It’s a matter of positioning yourself within what’s best for your operation,” says Lastiwka.

Last year, more than \$54 Million in hay and pasture insurance claims were paid out across the province compared to \$6.5 Million in 2008. “Most of the nearly 5,000 producers who purchased Perennial Insurance on hay and pasture received claim payments last year,” says John Kresowaty, co-ordinator of Perennial Insurance Programs with Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC), the provincial Crown Corporation that administers crop insurance in Alberta. “With about two-thirds of the premiums and all administration costs funded by government, producers view hay and pasture insurance as an affordable way to cover risk.

“Hay insurance is based on an individual’s hay production, while pasture insurance is area-based, relying on satellite imagery and moisture readings at weather stations to determine when claims are triggered,” explains Kresowaty. AFSC has added 10 new weather stations to its network this year, for a total of 183. “The more weather stations we have, the closer they are to each producer’s land base, and the better they reflect moisture conditions on each farm,” he says.

Producers who want information on Perennial Insurance should contact their nearest AFSC office or phone the AFSC Call Centre at 1-877-899-2372 before the **February 28, 2010** deadline.

Contact: AFSC Call Centre
1-877-899-2372

Freight Rail Service Review

Transport Canada is conducting a review of the rail system to develop recommendations to improve rail freight and transportation in Canada. The first stage, a data gathering and analysis, has been completed, and now a panel has been appointed to receive submissions and make recommendations. Submissions to the panel must be made by February 26, 2010. The chair of this panel is Walter Paszkowski, a former Alberta Agriculture Minister.

“The goal of the review is to develop recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the rail transportation system in Canada,” says Peter Kuperis, Domestic and International Trade Policy, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “For most grain and oilseed shippers, rail is the only practical form of transport to get their good to port, so the service they receive from the railways is very important and essential to their business.”

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development is involved in this review because shippers of all kinds, not just agriculture, have been dissatisfied with the service they receive from rail companies. In fact, some small grain shippers have filed formal complaints to Transport Canada.

“Alberta’s producers are a long way from ports in Prince Rupert and Vancouver so they need an efficient rail system with good service to compete for sales in export markets,” adds Kuperis. “If the system is inefficient it means producer costs are higher and if the system is not reliable for getting goods to port on time, that threatens our reputation as a reliable supplier. This is why the Alberta Government is interested in this situation and is making a submission to the panel.

“Performance of the rail transportation system can directly affect the bottom-line costs and Alberta’s agriculture businesses. It is very important that producers who have direct experience with the railways, such as producer car groups or small grain shippers, get in touch with the review panel, make a submission describing their experience with the rail system and provide any ideas for improvements that they may have.”

Submissions must be received by the panel by February 26, 2010. They can be submitted in three ways:

1. **E-mail** a PDF or MS Word document attachment to RFSR-ESMF@tc.gc.ca
2. **Mail** or your written submission to:
Rail Freight Service Review Secretariat
Suite 808 - 180 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N5
3. **Fax** your submission to: 613-990-9026

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Submission can also be submitted online by visiting the Transport Canada website at www.tc.gc.ca/policy/acg/rfs-review-examen-sfm/rvw-eng.htm or go to Transport Canada's home page at www.tc.gc.ca and enter *rail freight service review* in the search box.

More information is available on the Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca, again search rail freight service review.

Contact: Peter Kuperis
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How Wide-spread was Clubroot in Alberta in 2009?

Clubroot is probably the most significant new disease threat to canola since the 70s and the introduction of blackleg to Western Canada. Clubroot is a highly infectious plant disease that affects members of the cabbage family (*Brassicaceae*), which includes cole crop vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and ruabaga, as well as canola and mustard.

“Clubroot can only live and grow on a living host plant, and the pathogen causes uncontrollable root growth resulting in galls on the roots which can stunt growth, and ultimately kill the plants,” says Dr. Ron Howard, plant pathology research scientist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.

“Yield losses can be substantial in fields displaying clubroot infection. In Alberta, there have been instances where complete crop failure has been reported due to this disease.”

The first economically important outbreak of clubroot in Alberta was in a vegetable field south of Edmonton in 2001. The disease was first detected in canola in several fields northwest of Edmonton in 2003. Since 2004, the University of Alberta, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Agriculture Service Board Fieldmen and others have undertaken annual surveys that have taken in over 5000 canola and vegetable fields across the province, resulting in confirmation of clubroot in over 450 canola fields and three vegetable fields.

Sturgeon, Parkland and Leduc counties in central Alberta, have been the hardest hit and represent the epicentre of the clubroot outbreak in the province.

“In 2009, spring conditions were dry and it was hoped that clubroot activity would be significantly reduced,” says Howard. “That was certainly the case in southern Alberta with no clubroot being found in about 200 canola and mustard fields surveyed. However, in central Alberta, more clubroot was found than was expected, likely due to the late summer rains and uneven crop germination. University of Alberta staff confirmed the disease in 49 of the 224 canola fields surveyed, including one field in Thorhild County which represented the first confirmed case of the disease in this municipality.

“The concern over the threat of clubroot has prompted interest in disease management strategies amongst producers throughout the province. Initially, information, crop management practices and control recommendations were borrowed from vegetable growers, with limited benefits. A number of key areas were identified for research in 2003 and since then studies have focused on developing diagnostic methods, studying disease development, disease management strategies and pathogen biology. Today there are over 25 scientists, technicians and support staff in Western Canada working on clubroot, making this one of the world centres for clubroot research.”

Through Growing Forward, about \$3.7 million has been allocated for clubroot research over the next four years under the auspices of the Clubroot Risk Mitigation Program. The Canola Council of Canada will be leading this new initiative that will focus on pathology, breeding and disease management.

Additional information on clubroot, recommended management practices, research results and survey maps are posted to the Alberta Agriculture website and can be viewed and downloaded by visiting www.agriculture.alberta.ca/ or can be obtained from the Canola Council's website at www.clubroot.ca

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Investments to Improve Provincial Grazing Reserves and Create Jobs in Rural Alberta

Communities, farmers and ranchers throughout the province will benefit from a joint investment by the Governments of Canada and Alberta towards enhancing provincial grazing reserve sites and generating immediate employment opportunities.

The Honourable Lynne Yelich, Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, and Mel Knight, Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, announced a federal-provincial investment of more than \$9.2 million towards the initiative. The Government of Canada has committed \$5,925,000 and the Province of Alberta, an additional \$3.3 million over the current and next fiscal year.

“Today's announcement is about working with our farmers and ranchers so we can continue to help meet the needs of rural Albertans,” said Minister Yelich.

Funding will be used to refurbish infrastructure on Alberta's 32 provincial grazing reserves, which provide summer pasture for Alberta's farmers and ranchers on public land. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will oversee the project,

which will include activities such as replacing fences, developing and upgrading trails, and upgrading water systems. In addition to creating immediate employment opportunities in local communities and improving Provincial Grazing Reserve (PGR) areas, tourism opportunities in nearby rural communities will continue by attracting visitors interested in recreational pursuits and sightseeing on the scenic reserves.

“Our shared investment is about protecting an important part of Alberta’s heritage—the natural heritage of our grassland ecosystems, and the agricultural heritage of our ranching community,” said Minister Knight.

Federal funding is being provided through the Community Adjustment Fund (CAF) as part of Canada’s Economic Action Plan. Over the next two years, CAF will deliver a total of \$1 billion to local economies throughout Canada, including more than \$104 million over two years to support the most affected Alberta communities.

For more information please visit:

- Community Adjustment Fund (CAF) – www.wd-deo.gc.ca/eng/11269.asp
- Canada’s Economic Action Plan – www.actionplan.gc.ca/eng/index.asp

A copy of this news release is available online at: www.actionplan.gc.ca

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2010 Horse Breeders and Owners Conference

Alberta’s horse industry gathered in Red Deer on January 15 to 17, 2010, to take in the 28th annual Horse Breeders & Owners Conference. The exhibit hall hosted over 60 sponsoring businesses and organizations and 560 people were on-site for the seminars and networking opportunities afforded by this annual, mid-winter, equine educational event.

Conference sessions covered topics and timely issues such as:

- nutrition, supplements, feed and feed inventory
- horse and human health and research on equine health
- yoga for equestrians
- training, coaching, conditioning and getting the most enjoyment out of time with horses
- the performance horse market and equine businesses
- premise and equine identification
- Equine Canada’s national reform strategy

Again this year, the conference wrapped up with the very important SPCA Fred Pearce Memorial Lecture dedicated to the welfare of the horse. Dr. Derek Haley, now at the University of Guelph, Ontario, provided a balanced and sound argument on the topic of animal welfare and horses.

“The Horse Industry Association of Alberta thanks all who attended, all who sponsored the event and the 20 presenters who brought their expertise and experience to Red Deer,” says Teresa van Bryce, Horse Industry Association of Alberta. “As one conference delegate said, ‘We are so very fortunate to have an annual event of this calibre so easily accessible to Alberta’s horse people.’”

The Horse Breeders and Owners Conference is an annual event organized by the Horse Industry Association of Alberta and sponsored by a generous group of equine organizations and businesses. For more information visit www.albertahorseindustry.ca

Event photos can be viewed on the HIAA web site at: www.albertahorseindustry.ca/hboc/2010/photos/index.html

Photo credit to: Nollind van Bryce

High resolution files available on request

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Alberta's Outstanding Young Farmers for 2010

Ryan and Annette Mercer of Mercer Seeds in Lethbridge, a 5000 acre pedigreed seed farm, were chosen as Alberta's Outstanding Young Farmers for 2010. The couple were honoured in Edmonton on January 29, 2010 and presented the award by Geoff Hoar, the 2009 Alberta Outstanding Young Farmer.

The Mercers were selected according to the progress made in their agricultural career, maximum utilization of soil, water and energy conservation practices, crop and livestock production history, financial and management practices and his contribution to the well-being of the community, province and nation.

Three other farm families were also chosen as semi-finalist for Alberta's 2010 OYF:

- **Patrick and Cheryl Lynn Bos** of Ponoka, Red Ridge Dairies, mixed farm including dairy goats and a milk and cheese plant
- **Tamara and Mark Taylor** of Caroline, Ravenwood Farm Fresh Meats, mixed livestock including: beef, Berkshire pork, goat and rabbit, as well as a meat store, butcher shop and country café
- **Lee and Elise Townsend** of Stony Plain, TPLR Honey Farms, apiary with 2000 colonies

The Mercers will represent the Alberta Region at the Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers (OYF) National Awards Program being hosted in Victoria, B.C. on November 23 to 28, 2010.

The nominees were selected according to the progress made in their agricultural career, environmental and safety practices, crop and livestock production history, financial and management practices and their contributions to the well-being of the community, province and nation.

Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers Program spotlights and promotes young agricultural leaders to compete for the OYF title.

To learn more about the OYF program, visit the regional website at www.oymalberta.com

*Contact: Sharon Mueller
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Agri-News Briefs

Alberta Carbon Offset Market Workshops

A series of free workshop dealing with Alberta's carbon offset market are being held in Alberta in February. Producers wanting to know what agriculture opportunities there are in the carbon offset market and have other questions answered are encouraged to attend. The workshops are being held in:

- **Manning** – February 9, 2010
- **High Prairie** – February 10, 2010
- **Blue Ridge** – February 11, 2010
- **Taber** – February 23, 2010

The workshops will run from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Space is limited, so early registration through the Peace Country Beef & Forage Association is advised. To register, contact Akim at 780-835-6799 or Jamie at 780-523-4033.

Feedlot Movement Information

The Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development are hosting information sessions in February 2010. The information sessions provide an opportunity for producers and feedlot owners to learn more about:

- funding available for tag readers and software (readers purchased since April 1, 2009 may qualify for a retroactive payment)
- new regulations coming into effect on March 1, 2010 for feedlots that feed 1,000 head or more annually
- CCIA approved tag readers (there will be demonstrations of all approved readers)

Representatives from CCIA and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development will be on hand to answer questions. This is a no cost event; however, preregistration by February 15, 2010 is requested. Lunch will be provided. Sessions are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the following locations and dates:

Lethbridge February 22, 2010
Olds February 23, 2010
Vegreville February 24, 2010

For further information or to register, call toll-free 1-800-387-6030. When registering, please indicate which session you will be attending.

Below Your Watershed – Groundwater Conference

Alberta and Saskatchewan watershed professionals and anyone interested in water issues are invited to attend the Interprovincial **Below Your Watershed** Groundwater Conference in Medicine Hat on March 11 to 12, 2010. The conference will highlight the most relevant and current scientific and policy groundwater issues in Alberta and Saskatchewan. With speakers from university, government, research, industry, agriculture, consulting and NGO sectors, participants will gain an in-depth understanding of the increasing importance of groundwater. Early bird registration discounted rate is \$150 (plus GST) until March 1, 2010. Existing South East Alberta Watershed Alliance (SEAWA) members (as of December 31, 2009) and full-time students may also register for the early bird student discounted rate of \$75 (plus GST) until March 1, 2010. Registration cost after March 1, 2010 for the full two-day conference is \$175 (plus GST). For further information, contact Bob Phillips, MBA, executive director, SEAWA, at 403-488-8110 or e-mail bob@seawa.ca

To view the full agenda and to register, visit the conference website at www.belowyourwatershed.ca

Spring Energy Conferences

For those interested in learning more about renewable energy, two **Spring Energy Conferences** are being held in **Grande Prairie** on March 17 and 18, 2010, at the Saskatoon Lake Ag Society Hall and in **Stettler** on March 22 and 23, 2010, at the Stettler Community Hall. The two-day conference will cover energy basics (terminology, units, conversion factors, heat vs. electricity), microgeneration (detailed application process), understanding energy bills, calculating renewable energy system sizing based on consumption, small wind installations, consumer protection issues with RE technology (dealing with reputable suppliers, contracts, warranties), using the co-op model for local ownership of renewable energy, energy efficiency, the *Ontario Green Energy Act*, and, Peace Energy Cooperative. Registration is \$135 and includes a supper event. Single day registration is also available. For more information or to register, contact Kelly at 780-644-1197. Information is also available by contacting Dale Chrapko at 780-644-1969 or e-mailing dale.chrapko@gov.ab.ca