



FARMERS CREAMERY

Monthly Newsletter | April 2019

GENERAL NEWS

Thank you for those who came to the latest Producer Meeting!

We had a great turn out at our latest producer meeting (4/23). For those who weren't able to make it but were interested in learning more from our guest speaker, Mark Seeley (Organic Certification Inspector), please reach out to Phil or Scotty. Thanks again and we look forward to seeing you at the next producer meeting.



Rejuvenating Depleted Soil with Cover Crops and Livestock

Story Courtesy of Heather Smith Thomas with The Stockman Grass Farmer

SALTCOATS, Saskatchewan: When you want to rejuvenate tired fields, there's a certain path to follow in order to get the soil biology back into proper balance.

This includes getting more carbohydrates/sugar back into the soil to wake up the soil biology, which results in healthier soil and more forage. "As soon as you get the soil biology back into place," said Kevin Elmy of Friendly Acres Farm near Saltcoats in east central Saskatchewan.

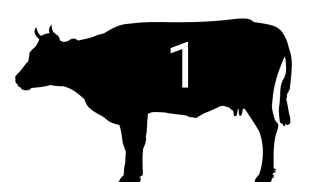
He often consults with and gives presentations for producers regarding ways to improve their pasture production and to work on regenerative agricultural management systems. He does some public speaking during the winter at meetings devoted to cover crops and soil health.

"Jay Fuhrer gave a presentation at an organic meeting in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in November 2018 and one of the things he talked about is how important this balance is. He told a story about a family farm and said grandpa was a great farmer. He could throw any kind of seed at the ground and get a bumper crop. The dad was also a pretty good farmer, but not quite as good as the grandpa, but he got good crops. The son, however, was struggling to make it work. Fuhrer explained that it all goes back to

(cont. on p. 4)

COMMODITY PRICES

Grower FOB Farm Gate Organic Grain				
Commodity	Price Range	Average	Change	Prior Year
Yellow Corn	8.25 - 9.50	8.87	0.00	9.03
Soybeans	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Grower Delivered Elevator/Warehouse Organic				
Commodity	Price Range	Average	Change	Prior Year
Yellow Corn	9.00 - 10.80	9.60	0.33	9.99
Soybeans	18.30 - 19.00	18.95	-0.04	18.40





INDUSTRY NEWS

Rejuvenating Depleted Soil with Cover Crops and Livestock (Cont. from p. 1)

Carbon in the next generation it was dwindling. It's important to manage the carbon," Elmy explained.

"To see where your soil is, look at the fence-line and compare that soil to the soil in your field. What's the depth of the A horizon (the top part, of the soil usually the darker part darker due to higher organic matter) and what does the aggregation look like? These are benchmarks you can use, to see if your side of the fence is coming or going and whether you are inadvertently overgrazing or mismanaging the grass. This will be reflected in your soil in the field versus what it is at the fence-line."

In Ohio it's been estimated that about 50% of the carbon in the soil is gone compared to what it was prior to breaking it up for farming. "I think the numbers in Saskatchewan would be similar. David Montgomery, a geologist from the University of Washington, was also talking about this, and the loss of carbon. He wrote a book called *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*. He said that basically every civilization that grew and then collapsed failed because the soils fell apart from overuse and were no longer fertile." said Elmy.

One of the interesting cases is the Persian Empire. This was an early civilization located in the area called the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East. Mesopotamia, the part of the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, was where several early civilizations flourished thanks to fertile soil and irrigation from the two rivers. Early farming efforts and advances in agriculture blossomed, enabling civilizations to grow in size and complexity. This area is now Iraq and Iran, and mainly desert, due to the way those early farmers mismanaged that soil.

"The Aztec civilization in Central America did the same thing. Soil deterioration also happened in Greece and Rome. In North America we are currently in the same process, creating bacterial-based soils which are addicted to inputs," said Elmy.

"I was recently in Alberta talking to some ranchers about rejuvenating tired pastures and told them we need to change our perspective. We are actually not cattle producers; we are grass managers. We grow grass to feed our cattle, and the cattle are our best tools for managing the grass, and also for solving the problems of over-cropping on a farm," said Elmy.

"I like Jay Fuhrer's illustration about ideal grazing. He takes a grass plan and balances it on his finger, and said, "There's 50%, and that's what you should be leaving, when you are grazing.' Some of the feed tests he's taken from the top 50% of that plan versus the bottom show that the top half has far superior feed values. If you are taking just the top half (the best nutrients) and leaving the bottom half to enable that plant to fully recover (and recover more quickly) you will have better feed quality to the cattle and more production from the catter and the pasture and the farm," said Elmy.

"One of the things that Clayton Robins in Manitoba talks about is never grazing perennial forages in August, September, or October because that's when those plants are trying to set up for overwintering. This is where annual crops come into the picture to fill that gap. They are not going to overwinter and you can graze those acres very hard," he said.

The challenge for many livestock producers is that they don't grow crops. THIS is when it's great to partner with a neighbor who farms. Many farmers don't own cows and don't want to own cows, but livestock can benefit their land coming in to graze at the right time to help improve soil fertility.

"I haven't see very many livestock producers who are long on feed, so this is a great opportunity to partner with someone who grows crops. The farmer doesn't need to learn how to raise or manage animals but knows how to grow things. The cattle producer knows how to manage his cattle but doesn't know how to seed and harvest. Partnering with someone who does can be a win-win situation if you can find a farmer who wants to diversity his cropping system and reduce the chemical load on the land and reduce the fertilizer needs," he explained.

When you bring cattle in, it solves a lot of the issues that we face in modern agriculture. The cattle do the trampling and leave litter and natural fertilizer, which is much better than chemicals. "On our farm we haven't bought nitrogen for 11 years, and this year I won't be buying any phosphate or potash. By having cattle on the land at the proper time, my inputs for growing crops are greatly reduced and farming is fun."

In consulting as an agronomist, he said he is more of a psychologist than anything else. "People call me up with questions and ask if certain ideas are possible. They wonder if anyone has ever done this or that, and need some assurance. They may think they don't have enough time, or don't get enough rain or maybe have some other situation that might hold them back from trying something new. I ask them if they know where La Grete, Alverta, is in northern Alberta, just an hour drive from Northwest Territories where many producers are doing these things successfully. I tell people that the hardest change is between your ears, getting your mind around it." said Elmy.

If it's something they've never done before or haven't seen done, people are very cautious. "Usually if you don't have to change, you are not going to, but you also have the chance to start slowly and work into it. By contrast, when you have a wreck and you have to change, that's when it becomes really scary." Sometimes these situations can be a blessing in disguise, however, to get you on a better path.

"Gabe Brown said that if you haven't made any mistakes on your farm, you haven't tried enough new things. We have our crop tour here at our farm every year and I show people some of our mistakes and tell them that 'doing this particular thing doesn't work!' This is the risk. If conditions are right, something might work, but if not, you need a plan B or C."

