

Grassland technology interaction and policy evolution in Canada

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Introduction Canada is the world's second largest country covering approximately 10 million km² (McCartney & Horton, 1997). About 90% of Canada is uninhabited with 90 percent of Canadians living within 500 km of the American border. The forage resources used by livestock grazing and the production of forage crops covers over 36 million ha of Canada's land base (3.6%) and is divided into 72% native range (26 million ha), 11% cultivated pastures (4 million ha) and 17% forage crops (6 million ha) There are 25 million ha in grain and oilseed crops (McCartney & Horton, 1997).

Forage/ Grassland Organisations Canada has several organisations that promote research and extension education on environmentally sustainable grassland management. Many grassland managers/farmers participate in grassland management educational programmes, but there is no national producer-driven organisation that represents the interests of the grazing industry to government policy makers.

The Canadian grassland/ rangeland scientific community comprising of about fifty University Professors and Agriculture and Agri Food Canada Research Scientists are either active members of the Canadian Society of Animal Science, the Canadian Society of Agronomy, or the Society of Range Management. In some provinces, farmers and ranchers participate in the activities of Provincial Forage Councils or local Forage Associations. Their activities include sponsoring seminars, grazing schools and provincial grazing conferences usually one to two days in length, news letters, field days and demonstration projects of local interest to cattle grazers and forage producers. Across Canada, there would be approximately 1000 to 1500 producers involved in these activities. On a national level the Expert Committee on Forage Crops, which is a sub committee of Canadian Agri-Food Research Council, helps co ordinate and provide input into research and extension activities and has limited input into federal policy and research priorities of the grassland industry.

Technology interaction Canadian research and extension personal have developed www.Foragebeef.ca a web site that summarises forage and beef research applicable to Canada. A large emphasis is placed on grazing management. The Western Forage Beef Group, an amalgamation of federal research scientists and provincial forage and beef extension agronomists at Agriculture and Agri Food Research Centre Lacombe Alberta, concentrate on research and extension to extend the grazing season and promote grazing management on seeded pastures. Many provincial governments promote environmentally sustainable grazing management systems through producer meetings, extension publications and provincial web site and telephone information centres.

Influence on policy and public perception The Canadian Cattlemen's Association is the largest producer organisation that presents policy concerns to Provincial and Federal governments. The Expert Committee on Forage Crops and National Forage/ Beef Research Reviews of federal research programmes at Agriculture and Agri Food Canada Research Centres has input into future research needs relating to grassland management. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration is a federal organisation responsible for the delivery of federal programmes that promote environmentally sustainable grassland management practices. Ducks Unlimited and Nature Conservatory are North America donor-sponsored organisations that maintain grazing lands and promote grazing management strategies to the public as well as the cattle producer. Canadians have an appreciation for grasslands, but there is no united producer voice or funding agency that promotes grassland research and grassland education at the University level. This is critical for the future of grassland research and extension of these new technologies in the future.

Reference

McCartney, D. & R. Horton (1997). Canada's Forage Resources. XVIII International Grassland Congress, Winnipeg/Saskatoon, Canada.