

Foragebeef.ca web site: a model for technology transfer

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Introduction We live in an age of information overload. As budgets for technology transfer of scientific information and extension education continue to fall, new ways to disseminate agricultural knowledge are needed. Research findings, published in many scientific journals and reports, are seldom readily available to extension agents and farmers. Over time some of this material is lost. This program aimed to locate the best information on various forage and beef topics relative to Canada and the Northern USA and to summarise them in condensed form and in scientific review papers for a web-based site.

Materials and methods North American, European and Australian web sites were trawled in a massive initial computer search for information on a broad range of forage and beef cattle topics. The search concentrated on locating research information and agriculture fact sheets summarising the information developed by government extension and research agencies. This information was copied onto a master CD in PDF or text format and organised into different topics within forage or beef subject matter. Copies of the CD were then distributed to extension personal across the region for their assessment in selecting the best 5-10 fact sheets or research summaries for each topic. The extension agents then developed the 10 most important information points or knowledge nuggets for each topic, based on the information coming from the research summaries or fact sheets. The research community then located or developed scientific review papers that summarised the scientific research on the various topics. These scientific review papers were submitted for publishing in scientific journals and later posting on the web site. The project took 4 years to develop and involved various Canadian Agriculture funding agencies, researchers and extension workers from across Canada.

Results With massive advertising at universities and in the agriculture press across Canada and northern USA, Foragebeef.ca web site became operational in Dec 2003. The home page consists of the latest forage and beef news stories, weather and cattle market reports and an index of all the forage and beef topics. Upon selecting a forage or beef topic the knowledge nuggets, the best fact sheets and, if available, the scientific review papers appear. The web links takes the reader to the original web source for the fact sheet or research summary report. An editorial committee has been established to monitor the site and add new research summaries to the site in the future.

Conclusions The Foragebeef.ca web site has attracted >3000 visits/month from 40 different countries to date. New topics and information are added continually to the site. Other countries and agencies can use this model to consolidate and transfer agriculture information to the farming community, researchers, teachers, extension agent and the general public in the future.