Canadian Cattlemen's Association

Industry: Agriculture

Duration: 1996 - ongoing

Location: National

Case study type: Outreach and education

CCA Environmental Stewardship Award

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) was established in 1932 and acts as the national "voice" of Canada's 86,000 beef producers. The CCA is a non-profit federation of eight provincial member associations. The CCA board of directors consists of 27 producers representing eight provinces. It carries out day-to-day business in support of the industry and provides the leadership and unity necessary to for the beef industry to speak as one voice. The beef industry is the largest source of farm cash receipts in Canada. In 2008, the sale of cattle and calves totalled $6.59 billion or just over 14% of total cash receipts (including crops). Canada's beef industry contributes approximately $25 billion to the Canadian economy annually.

Beef industry's perspective on biodiversity

Potential impacts of the Beef cattle industry on biodiversity

Cattle grazing can have impacts on both terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity. While controlled grazing and related land management practices can have positive regenerative effects on grasslands, overgrazing can deplete plant cover and cause erosion. It can also cause a decrease in the amount of native plant species and increase less favoured ones. Uncontrolled access to wetlands and water courses can cause siltation and nutrient and bacterial contamination from animal manure.

Canadian Cattlemen's Association biodiversity conservation role

Canadian cattle producers own and manage about 30% of Canada's agricultural land as grass pasture. Natural pasture covers about 15.5 million hectares (22.8%) and tame seeded pasture makes up over 5.5 million hectares (8.4%).

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) role as an industry leader on environmental matters is becoming increasingly important. This is due, in part, to emerging understanding of the nature and scale of environmental issues and opportunities for the industry. The family owned farms and ranches that make up the Canadian cattle industry are relatively small businesses. On their behalf the CCA sorts though the layers of issues to encourage the development of policy, programs and research to minimize the industry's environmental footprint while maintaining economic viability.

In 2008, the CCA conducted an assessment of the social and environmental risks and opportunities facing the Canadian cattle industry. From that assessment, a comprehensive and adaptive environmental strategy is being developed. One of the deliverables of this work will be environmental objectives which will help formulate policies that translate into action plans.

There is an Environment Committee within CCA that deals with environmental issues related to the beef cattle industry. It encourages the development and implementation of environmentally and economically sustainable production practices. It also has a role in informing cattle producers and the public on environmental programs and initiatives that use effective resource-management strategies.

Cattle can co-exist with native plants and animals but producers need to be aware of the needs of the species, especially species at risk that populate their land. The CCA became a member of the Species at Risk Advisory Committee, reporting to the federal environment minister as an opportunity to contribute to implementing the Act effectively and efficiently. As recovery strategies and action plans are developed, land owner conservation is a critical component of the protection of plant and animal species at risk.

Biodiversity and habitat conservation is a major priority for the CCA. The CCA and its provincial associations partner in research in areas such as:

- wildlife – cattle interaction;
- grazing and grass/forage management;
- manure management;
- water quality;
- insects for biological control of pasture weeds.

Grazing is an important element in a balanced and sustainable prairie grassland ecosystem. Before cattle, bison grazed the Prairies and parts of the aspen parkland. Sustainable grazing practices utilize forages and legumes helping maintain natural grassland plant species succession as well as decreasing soil erosion, improving soil fertility and assisting in pest management. Eliminating grazing would lead to significant

habitat changes and the loss or decrease of many prairie plant and animal species and communities that are dependent on it.

The CCA has partnered with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's under the"Green Cover Canada" program to deliver the national Sustainable Grazing Mentorship Program. The program matches experienced cattle grazers with producers interested in expanding their grazing knowledge and other resource management skills.

CCA is interested in encouraging the development of programs and strategies to help improve grazing management which also addresses population declines in grassland migratory birds. The CCA joined the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Recovery Team to assist in the creation of programs to ensure the shrike's survival. Cattle producers operating in the birds' range are encouraged to plant trees and shrubs at the edges of pastures for perching and nesting sites as well as maintain existing pastureland where the birds like to hunt.

Grazing is important to maintaining habitat for many grassland birds in addition to the shrike. A variety in the structure of the grass/forage/shrub/tree community supports a variety in bird and other wildlife species. Well managed cattle grazing provides that hetero-geneity. Bird populations also play a very important role in controlling insect populations that can have a negative impact on the quality and quantity of pasture grassesand so the economic viability of the operation.

Canadian cattle producers understand the importance of biodiversity and implement practices that maintain and improve ecological systems. Investments in science and technology is providing solar and wind powered electric fencing that helps producers control cattle access to wetland and riparian areas to maintain water quality and habitat. Good management practices such as managed rotational grazing, riparian and nutrient management support the long term sustainability of pasture and range land.

CCA Environmental Stewardship Award

Rationale

As stewards of a vast portion of the Canadian landscape, Canada's cattle producers play a significant role in environmental enhancement and protection. They continuously work to improve existing stewardship conservation practices to create a sustainable future for agriculture. Many producers are third and fourth generation families who have built up extensive knowledge about good management of the many different and complex range and pasture ecosystems they utilize. It is often said that good grass management is both an art and a science. Through the use of management practices such as rotational grazing, they maintain biodiversity, a variety of wildlife habitats and prevent erosion. Practices such as these protect both the health of the cattle and the environment by protecting water sources and working towards the maintenance of a sustainable agro-ecosystem. Management practices that protect the environment and the health and well-being of cattle are also generally economically sound.

Description

The Environmental Stewardship Award (TESA) is presented by the CCA each year to a cattle producer who goes beyond standard industry conservation practices, setting a positive example for fellow producers and the general public. Award guidelines are sufficiently broad to include cow-calf, and intensive livestock operations. The award is intended to recognize innovative methods and approaches to environmentally and economically sustainable cattle production.

The goals of TESA are:

- recognize environmentally and economically sustainable land management practices within the cattle industry;
- promote environmental stewardship;
- develop environmental citizenship;
- encourage integrated resource management planning.

The results of the farm/ranch management planning will be examined against the TESA goals. The accomplishments need to be achieved in a manner which is economically sustainable and at the same time meet environmental objectives. The following are taken into consideration in nominee selection:

- short and long term goals;
- implementation of programs;
- accomplishments and how they have impacted sustainability.

Additional suggested criteria for award winner:

- leadership abilities as based on community and organizational involvement;
- ability to address the issues;
- cooperation with other groups;
- economic sustainability – repeatability and doability.

The award process begins at the provincial level. Producers receive provincial recognition for their outstanding contributions and these recipients move forward as nominees for national recognition from the CCA. While the award is only presented to one recipient each year, it recognizes that many producers across Canada are undertaking important and innovative environmental initiatives.

The national TESA recipient is announced during the CCA's Annual Convention each August. Each of the national nominees exemplifies significant innovation and attention to a wide range of environmental management aspects in their farm operation. Such innovations extend beneficially to areas far beyond their land – including water, biodiversity, air and human health.

Over the years the award has been given out for merit in the following categories:

- **Range management**: good range management, including rotational grazing, timing and intensity ensures the maintenance of natural ecosystems as well as the quality of the range.
- **Watering**: more widely available watering sites, water troughs and controlled access protect habitat and biodiversity as well as water quality.
- **Riparian management**: fencing programs protect sensitive areas from trampling as well as keep cattle out of the water which helps decrease nutrient loading and destruction of aquatic and wetland habitats.
- **Feedlot management**: managing nutrient and bacteria runoff.
- **Land conversion**: maintaining grazing lands and not converting to other uses.
- **Crop rotation**: crop rotation is very important for maintaining soil health and a diversity of habitats.
- **Manure management**: storage and use timing based on soil testing results and crop needs.
- **Conservation**: habitat conservation, restoration and creation.
- **Education**: demonstration and communication.

The 2008 TESA winner was Saskatchewan's Campbell family of the B – C Ranch, Inc., a three generations working family operation. The family's significant efforts have contributed to long-term sustainability of land and water resources on-farm and in the area.

The B-C Ranch is a 4,500 acre operation along the Beaver River established in 1948 by Bruce and Clare Campbell. Throughout the generations a holistic approach to ranching has ensured all decisions are socially, environmentally and financially sound and implemented practices best-served the operation's domestic and wildlife inhabitants. The Campbell's work on the Ducks Unlimited Canada's Woolard Project provided a system of water control gates along the Beaver River that ensures that adjacent wetlands maintain adequate water levels and minimizes flooding. On-farm practices to maintain and enrich grazing lands are key in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from cattle and reducing fossil fuel use were also implemented.

The 2009 TESA winner is the Madley family's Canyon Ranch, Alexis Creek, British Columbia. The Canyon Ranch is a fifth generation family ranch located in the Chilcotin River Valley. The ranch is situated at the confluence of Alexis Creek and the Chilcotin River, both of which are a very important for waterfowl and fish habitat. The Chilcotin River is known for producing spring and sockeye salmon, steelhead, rainbow and bull trout and is an important staging area for Canada geese.

The Madley family is recognized for their outstanding commitment to water quality, habitat restoration, riparian management and range and nutrient management. Extensive fencing maintains and protects riparian areas. Installation of water troughs and exclusion fencing on Alexis Creek protects riparian breeding habitat for curlew and other upland bird species. Holding pens are set back from the creek to establish a buffer zone that protects it from nutrient and bacterial runoff. Overwintering herd rotation is used as a management tool to naturally return nutrients to the soil in an environmentally conscious manner.

Canyon Ranch exemplifies excellent riparian management both on the home place and on provincially owned Crown range leased by the Ranch. The Madleys have incorporated riparian fencing to protect river banks as part of their environmental farm plan and the implementation of benificial management practices. Side channels and groundwater springs were fenced to protect habitat for salmon fingerlings. The British Columbia Grazing Enhancement fund was utilized to install a water crossing to protect Avon Creek on the Crown range so that the lower wetland range is only utilized in late August to minimize impacts on wetlands. A partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada resulted in a wetland conservation project on Crown range. Good management, cross fencing and stock watering has retained the health of sensitive bluebunch wheatgrass hillsides and enhanced biodiversity.

Communication

Educational material and demonstrations are used to make producers and the general public aware of and promote the use of management practices that promote healthy beef production, biodiversity conservation and provide outdoor recreational opportunities.

Outcomes

Benefits

Biodiversity

The benefits to biodiversity from agricultural practices are as varied as the programs that are implemented. Programs such as riparian management are important to aquatic life by preventing sediments and contaminants from entering watercourses. These buffer zones also act as a corridor that links various habitats with one another, allowing the movement and dispersal of wildlife and plant species. Any program that reduces the impact on or alteration of habitats will be of benefit to biodiversity.

Economic

Healthy range and pasture lands support rural livelihoods and provide ecological services, including biodiversity conservation. A key factor to achieve long term resilience, both economically and environmentally, is to ensure that those lands are effectively managed for ecological health and function.

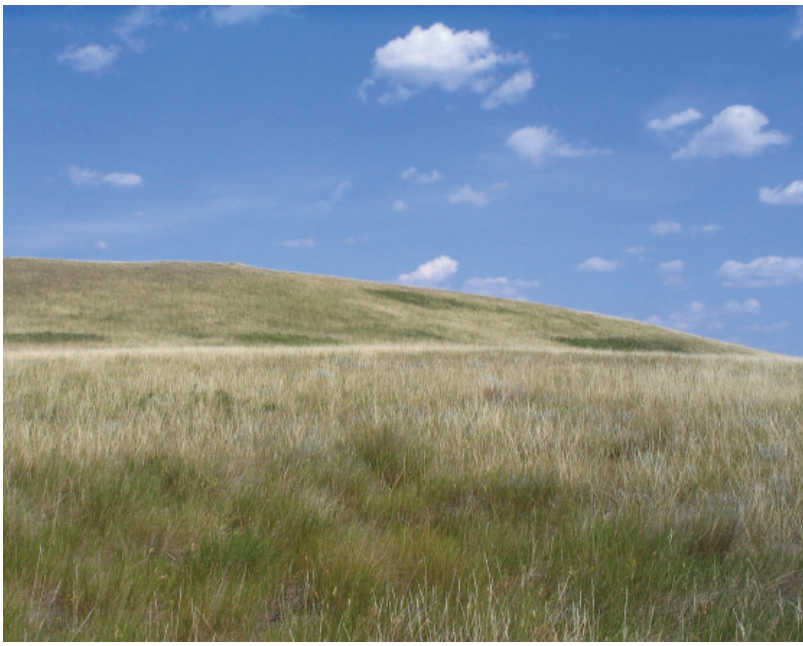
Only recently has society begun to ask for a calculation of the value of the ecological services that these grasslands provide. Environmental economics is a challenging and developing science. However, agricultural economists, along with others, are developing methodologies to measure the value of improvements in water quality, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities that are provided by the implementation of good management practices by cattle producers.

Healthy grasslands show an increase in forage productivity and quality which results in greater weight gains for cattle. Healthy grassland also reflects a similar increase in healthy native plant, wildlife, insect and amphibian populations as well as biodiversity in general.

Lessons learned

TESA is a source of pride for the cattle industry, but, as a group, cattle producers are not prone to promoting their personal or operational accomplishments. Nominations at the provincial level normally come via a third party, such as a conservation group such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, or a provincial association.

Although all the good management practices that TESA nominees implement have common elements it is obvious that they have been modified to fit the individual circumstances of the farm or ranch and the specifics of the regional agro-ecosystem. There is no template that will fit each situation.



Impact

The provincial award winners bring additional attention to the positive environmental impact of good management, which is also often a positive economic impact. These management practices are often not a "one fits all" solution. The challenge is to work through how each practice might fit into an individual producer's operation. This creates camaraderie amongst the producers who are doing similar things as well as those who want to learn and it helps to see how the award winner has manipulated a practice to fit their individual circumstances.

Contact information

Peggy Strankman
Manager, Environment
403-275-8558 strankmanp@cattle.ca

Canadian Cattlemen's Association
6715 – 8th Street NE, Suite 310
Calgary, Alberta T2E 7H7
Canada
www.cattle.ca