

Grazing Forward Program Helps Ranchers Improve Cattle Management and Grow More Grass

In 2022, the County of Vermilion River took part in a new ALUS initiative called Grazing Forward which supports enhanced grazing projects with local producers. With funding support from Cargill and A&W, the program provides technical and financial resources to implement new grazing management practices on portions of ranches. One of our first grazing participants, Cole Goad, manages 80-90 cow/calf pairs on a half section in the NW part of the County and was eager to take advantage of the new program. "ALUS has really helped us improve our operation, as we are limited on land base, and to rent additional grazing land is near impossible. With ALUS we have been able to graze more cows on the same land base that we have always had."

Enhanced grazing is a suite of management tools that builds rich, healthy soils and increases grass growth. One of those tools, Adaptive Multi-Paddock (AMP) Grazing, uses multiple smaller paddocks, higher stock densities, shorter grazing times, and extended periods of rest in a unique, flexible plan based on careful observation, recordkeeping, and the ability to change along the way – that's the adaptive part.

AMP grazing provides benefits to both the environment and the livestock operation. The ecosystem services produced include soil health, carbon sequestration, cleaner water, cleaner air, and wildlife habitat. For the producer, AMP grazing buffers against flood and drought, increases forage quantity and utilization, lengthens the grazing season, and improves animal nutrition and overall health. "We are seeing increased production from this land since we have start rotational grazing. We started with 60 pairs for the whole grazing season on this half section. We are now up to 80-90 pairs for the grazing season. We are hoping that we can get this increased to 100 pairs in the future," Goad says.

Spring workshops outlined the principles of AMP grazing and gave participants the opportunity to work on grazing plans in the company of local experts as well as their peers. "With ALUS we have been able to take training sessions to learn the increased value of rotational grazing and new ways to look at grazing practices. We have been able to get to smaller paddocks with funding help from ALUS that has allowed for increased rest to each parcel," says Goad.

Once their plans were put in action on the ground, ALUS reimbursed 50% of the establishment cost for things like electric fencing, energizers, portable and temporary fencing tools, permanent wildlife friendly fencing, and pasture water systems. ALUS will also pay an ongoing per acre annual payment for the management and maintenance of the grazing projects.



Goad's cows turned out on fresh grass. Cole Goad photo.

By the end of this year, seven new projects resulted in 38 new grazing paddocks totaling 460 acres in the County. ALUS Vermilion River is looking to expand on the program in 2023 by adding more producers who are new to enhanced grazing or those who have tried it but need some extra support for their operation. We are looking for a small group of producers to participate in a 2-part facilitated workshop on March 15 and 29 in Blackfoot. Contact the ALUS Coordinator, Chris Elder at 780-853-7844 or celder@county24.com for more information.

