



Crop Residue Collection for Field Grazing



by *Lorne Klein*
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The fall and winter grazing options available for beef cows include:

- standing native and tame pasture;
- standing corn;
- swathed annual cereals;
- swathed second-cut perennials;
- hay and greenfeed bales; and
- crop residue.

Of these forage options, field grazing crop residue can easily be the lowest cost feed source. For producers who have their land fenced with available water and shelter, crop residue collection for field grazing can cost as little as pennies per cow per day. Even in cases where fences, water development and portable shelters are required, field grazing crop residues can be quite cost-effective. This is largely because crop residue is produced on the grain farm at no cost to the livestock enterprise. Most crop residues have relatively low feed value. Therefore, in order to economically provide them to livestock, they must be bunched during combining and grazed in the field. Any time crop residue is handled or transported, it adds costs. The least expensive option is to graze right where the residue is produced.

There are two relatively low-cost combine attachments that bunch crop residues. They are both old ideas that have been re-invented.

One attachment is the Whole Buncher®. Essentially, this tool is a giant pitchfork that collects both the chaff and straw, and deposits the material in piles approximately three feet high and five feet long. It trips automatically when full, and resets using a counterbalance weight. It is somewhat easier to mount on combines where the chaff and straw exit the combine in a single stream. Barley and pulse crops are better suited for whole-crop residue collection. The Whole Buncher® is patented by

AJ Manufacturing in Alberta. They are commercially built and distributed by Jack Sumner at Tompkins, Saskatchewan. Some producers have built similar units for their own use.

Another attachment is a box that collects the chaff only. This can be mounted on combines where the chaff and straw exit the combine in separate streams. The box has a solid bottom and deposits the chaff in piles approximately eight inches high and three feet long. It also trips automatically when full, and resets using a counterbalance weight. Wheat, flax and canola are better suited for chaff-only collection.



A wheat field after combining with a chaff box.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture has a Crop Residue Calculator that is easy to use. You simply input your data, including infrastructure and equipment costs, livestock numbers, crops and acres, and supplemental feed. The exercise takes only minutes to determine your cost per cow per day. You can easily input different scenarios for comparison.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Contact Lorne Klein, Regional Forage Specialist, at (306) 848-2382;
- Travis Peardon, Regional Livestock Specialist, at (306) 867-5504; or
- Visit the Saskatchewan Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca to find the Crop Residue Calculator under Management/Financial Planning.

DIRECT MARKETING CATTLE



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Marketing cattle directly from farm to feedlot has several advantages for the buyer and the seller. The buyer is getting calves that have not been subjected to as much stress as auction mart cattle, which can mean lower health costs. As well, the seller has an opportunity to maximize return from age verification, a good health program and his genetics.

There are a number of Saskatchewan businesses offering a direct marketing service for cattle producers.

A company will send out a representative to look at your calves and do a full description of quality, size and herd health. When this is completed, the information is disbursed to all potential buyers. Bids are then accepted on the cattle. Unlike the auction mart system, the seller has final say on whether to accept a bid or keep the cattle.



Weighing conditions, pencil shrink, price slide and pick-up date are all specified prior to a deal being made. Trucking costs are the responsibility of the purchaser.

Direct marketing will not be a match for all operations. Ideally, loads of similar-quality cattle of the same sex should be put together. However, some producers won't be able to accommodate this unless they can work with neighbours who have similar cattle and can agree on a marketing strategy.

Producers should plan ahead when it comes to direct marketing. Start thinking about marketing calves weeks in advance of the sale date. In order for direct marketing to be a success, the marketer needs time to come to your farm and get a description of the cattle out to buyers. Unlike selling at an auction, you cannot just haul the cattle in the day you decide to sell.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- on direct marketing, contact: Travis Peardon, Livestock Specialist, Saskatchewan Agriculture, (306) 867-5504.

