Forage U-Pick: Forage species selection and management decision tool for western Canadian producers

**Project Title:**
Forage U-Pick: A forage species selection, weed management, and seeding rate mobile site – a tool for western Canada

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**Background**

The foundation of beef production is forage, and therefore forages are a key area of management focus for beef producers. Forage seeding and management require an investment of time, risk and resources. Increasing forage productivity by just 0.1 tons/acre through proper selection, seeding rate or weed control on 160 acres produces 16 tons more forage per quarter section per year. Within the current market, this represents $2,000-$3,200 of increased value realized per quarter section for a producer.

**Objective**

To provide western Canadian cattle and forage producers with free and easy access to information regarding forage species selection, seeding rates and cost calculations, and weed identification and management to help make suitable decisions.

**What they will do**

This team will update and expand a decision tool developed by the Saskatchewan Forage Council, in 2007 called the Saskatchewan Dryland Forage Species Selection CD. It will be updated with new research information and expanded to include ecoregions across British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba. Information on weed identification and management will be added. The beta version will be tested with forage specialists and select producers across the regions to ensure ease of use and value for producers. The new
decision tool, which will be mobile-friendly and available through www.BeefResearch.ca, will be promoted to producers through various means, including agriculture media and several industry organizations’ communication channels. The tool will be designed with the potential to expand it across Canada, should the desire and future resources permit.

**Implications**

By providing an up-to-date integrated tool, producers in western Canada will have an improved ability to select forage varieties suitable for their growing conditions, determine seeding rates for new stands or pasture rejuvenation, and manage weeds in forages more appropriately. Ensuring forage species are well matched to growing conditions improves establishment rates, yield, vigour and quality, thereby reducing costs, improving utilization and number of grazing days, which increases farm/ranch profitability. As forage and pasture is essential for beef production, improved decision-making should produce positive impacts on beef and forage productivity, sustainability and competitiveness.

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