

# green pastures



FALL 2011 NEWSLETTER

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## Growing Tender Grass fed Beef - Not as Easy as you would think

by: Corie Arbuckle

It used to be that you would simply throw your cattle out to the pasture with their calves from spring to fall and hope for the best. Cattle were free to roam the pasture and drink alongside a creek, river or lake – fine – until you realize that cattle tend to congregate at the watering hole – resulting in mud holes, contaminated water and often hoof issues due to the wet conditions.

Times are changing as more and more producers adopt sustainable pasture management and watering practices for their herds. By practicing rotational grazing (a process where pastures are subdivided into many paddocks with the use of fencing and/or electric wire) producers are able to provide the best forage for their stock all season long and maximize the productivity of their land. The cattle are moved every 3 to 4 days when the grass is still knee high – doing this gives the grass .. pg 2



Simundsson Farm - near Arborg, MB

## MGFBPA PARTICIPATES IN 'THE GREAT MANITOBA FOOD FIGHT'

We were one of 10 participants selected to partake in the Manitoba Food Fight held at the Assiniboine College's Manitoba Institute of Culinary Arts in Brandon this past April. Participants were competing for three product development awards valued at \$15,000, \$10,000 and \$5000 for first, second or third place finish in the competition. Prizes could be used for a variety of expenses such as research and development; recipe refinement; package design; marketing; and food safety and handling training. "The Association has already invested a significant amount in product development and packaging and we were looking at this as an opportunity to source more funds for future products," said Jim Lintott, our representative at the event.

Jim entered the Saskatoon berry meat pie in a puff pastry into the ... pg 4

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(Not as Easy continued) ample time to grow back, minimizes trampling of wet land and spreads the manure throughout the pasture.

“This is ever so important with grass fed beef since we like to keep our animals on the pasture for the whole year,” says Bragi Simundsson, one of our members near Arbog, Manitoba. “Compare these two pastures,” he says as he shows me a pasture that is completely grazed down versus his on the other side of the road that is about 2 feet high and super lush. “The cattle on my neighbours paddock have been out there since spring and mine have been on this paddock one 4-day rotation this season, it makes a huge difference.”



Rotational grazing in practice - lush, healthy pasture



Over grazed land - cattle on field from spring to fall

It's really important to have ample grass for the animals and access to fresh water at all times. Sustainable producers use nearby water ways, or wells to pump water to troughs, haul water in, or use a combination of these. By limiting access by fencing or building gravel walkways a short way into the stream, producers mitigate the damage to the shoreline and waterway.

Grass fed beef producers are unlike traditional beef producers who use grain to finish off their animals. Grain fattens up stock earlier shortening up the time needed to finish an animal. A typical grain fed animal will go to slaughter in 15-18 months, whereas grass fed beef takes anywhere from 20 – 30 months to finish. “It's taking us a lot longer these last few years to finish off our animals,” says Bragi. “We have had very wet conditions here the past 5 years which has resulted in very washy grass. We haven't been able to seed much of our land and our hay has not been the best quality. It's taking 30 plus months to finish off our stock.” Grass fed beef remain on pasture all year long. During the winter, producers ensure they have shelter via bush and/or wind breaks, and bring the hay out to the field.

Another very important consideration in raising grass fed beef is the herd genetics. Both Bragi and Jim Lintott, Oakbank, MB have been working hard to develop a good grass fed beef herd purchasing bulls and using artificial insemination (AI).

“I've been improving our grass fed cattle genetics by removing cattle suited to grain finishing from the herd,” says Jim. “Ideal grass fed cattle are actually quite different – they must be shorter, have broader hips and back end and they →



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have to fatten on a grass/ hay only diet in a 20 – 30 month time frame. Jim has used AI and has brought in “Devon” bulls to improve his genetics.

All cattle produced by the Manitoba Grass Fed Beef Producers Association have minimal antibiotics and no antibiotics can be used after the calf is weaned. By providing more than adequate feed, water, minerals and shelter, the animals have greater resistance to diseases and medication is not required.

## Graziers tour one of our producers - The Turnbull Farm

A good business owner knows that technology doesn't stand still and Manitoba's producers are no exception. They're always looking for ways to maximize productivity and develop safe wholesome food products. To that end, many Grazing Clubs have been formed in Manitoba to identify new strategies to help those in the ranching biz. In fact, there are 30 clubs across the province who meet regularly to tour progressive farms or host seminars on various topics including how to extend the grazing season for grass fed beef.

Several south western grazing clubs banded together to tour one of our grass fed beef operators this summer – the Turnbulls near Binscarth, MB.

The Turnbulls showed their operation; custom cow/calf operation, last year's calves from his custom cow operation (yearling steers that are fed some grain) and his grass finished calves and their mothers. The first grazing strategy Doug Turnbull showed is how he grazes his custom cows first (1-2 days), and has his steers/grass fed cattle follow 60 days behind. Turnbull moves the cows through quickly, this leaves plenty of forage for the cattle and helps build up the soil and conserves moisture.



For his custom cow/calf pairs he has a different grazing strategy. The Turnbulls have unfortunately been in drought mode since the end of June, so they were grazing fairly hard but fast – no more than 2 days in a paddock. Care is taken to ensure there is still good ground cover and litter left behind to protect the soil. His re-growth is green and lush and as of September, untouched by the frost like some of the more mature fields.

Another grazing strategy the Turnbulls use is polycropping (seeding many annual crops together) to extend their grazing season and reduce unwanted plant diseases. This fall his cattle are enjoying a field of turnip, sunflowers, forage rapeseed, hairy vetch, Natto bean, annual ryegrass, and Golden German millet.

Visitors were also able to see their son Cody's pastured poultry enterprise and enjoy a BBQ complete with grass finished beef burgers.

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(The Great Manitoba Food Fight continued)

competitor. The school provided each group/individual two culinary students to help prepare the product for display and sampling on judging day. On event day, each competitor was given 25 minutes to pitch their product and business plan to the judging committee. All participants showcased their product independent of each other at the College's 100 seat teaching theatre. "We scored well," says Jim, "but alas, not as well as others – so it's back to the kitchen to keep improving our product line and developing new ones."

## This year's winners:

- 1st Place - Natalie Dueck from New Bothwell for her Chocolate Hemp Snackers.
- 2nd Place - Belinda Bigold from Winnipeg with her Imperial Cookies.
- 3rd Place - Reynald Gauthier from St. Claude with his Millet King Crunchies Cereal.

## Our Producers:

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Cell (204) 773-6237 gripfast@goinet.ca  
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## Meet our growers.....

### McBey/Simundsson Farm

Just over 10 years ago, Bragi Simundsson joined up with a neighbour Glen Nicol to begin marketing their grass fed beef. "Our group has grown to the point where we now have an Association and several members who now have enough grass fed cattle to actively promote our meat and products," says Bragi.

The Simundssons sell their meat to about 50 customers – direct to freezer, with customers buying halves or shared halves. Fusion Grill, a restaurant in Winnipeg, has been a customer for the past eight years and takes about half of the cuts from a carcass, including briskets, some stewing beef, the prime cuts, ground beef, some roasts, and all the soup bones.

"Their Sous-Chef loves our bones," laughs Bragi, "she said they make the best demi-glaze she's ever made!" Vita Health is also retailing some ground beef and also some of the Association's specialty products such as our pate, saskatoon and wine sausage, two types of farmer sausage – regular and dill flavoured, and our saskatoon and wine meat pies.

Bragi farms with his wife Heather McBey who also works in the Ag Industry as Office Manager of the Manitoba Forage Seed Association. Their sons also help with their operation. The Century Old Farm at Arborg (homesteaded by Bragi's grandfa-





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ther) consists of 120 beef cows, 85 ewes, and their sons raise pastured chickens. They also grow some annual crops, forage seed crops, and run leaf-cutting bees for pollinating the alfalfa seed fields. “The weather hasn’t been too kind to us in the past 5 years - it’s been pretty tough to manage as our land has just been too wet. We have consistently had 130% to 175% of normal precipitation, and the existing drainage system can’t handle the extra water. Most of the lower areas of our pasture land have had standing water year round for the last few years and those areas have reverted back to swamp, with cat tails and reeds,” says Bragi.

Still, Bragi’s stock looks fat and happy, munching away on the ample grassland. “Our cattle are on the pasture all year long. We use portable wind panels and natural bush for protection from wind in the winter.” The livestock have access to fresh water in summer from a nearby ditch and water trough, and in winter they drink from a geothermal powered water trough or eat snow. “It only takes them a day or two to learn how to eat snow.”

Bragi also practices rotational grazing – moving the stock through his 13 permanent paddocks that are subdivided even further, every 3 to 4 days. The Simundsson’s sheep are also grass fed and guarded by two beautiful livestock guardian dogs. “We haven’t lost lambs to coyotes since our oldest dog was 11 months old. Our neighbours had some sheep a few years ago, but they didn’t have guardian dogs. They killed over 20 coyotes on their farm one winter and they still lost lambs to the coyotes.”

The Simundssons utilize the services of Interlake Packers out of St. Laurent for slaughter, and Archie’s Meats in Starbuck, for cutting their beef. “It’s not easy to find a good butcher, but the fellows at Archie’s do a good job. We’ve been very happy with their work.” For more information about the Simundsson farm go to: [www.praire-grassfed.com](http://www.praire-grassfed.com). This site is under construction, but should be up and running in a few weeks.



Pyrenees Guardian Mountain dog guarding sheep on Simundsson’s farm near Arborg, MB





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## Meet

our growers.....

### Jim & Carolyn Lintott

by: Corie Arbuckle

The Lintott Farm – just outside of Winnipeg, near Oakbank is a unique situation in that his cattle business is a corporation owned by 6 local producers. As Manager of the corporation, Jim oversees the operation and ensures that the cattle are well attended to. “This works well because each shareholder brings unique skills and resources to the company,” says Jim who has been in the Oakbank area for the past 33 years. Jim farms with the part-time help of his wife Carolyn who is the book keeper since her retirement from the educational field. The Lintotts produce 100% grass fed beef and grow grain and oil seeds.

‘Pride of herd,’ comes out when you hear Jim talk about his 200 head herd. “Our herd is really starting to look good,” as he shows me a calf that is just the right type for grass fed beef production. He’s been working on developing the ideal herd – cattle that will finish with good marbling and grade AA to AAA in a 20 – 30 month time frame. The weather has been good this year around Oakbank and the cattle have lots to eat on the edge of his forested property.

Jim practices rotational grazing and makes use of bluffs and forested areas for winter shelter – although he is also planning on bringing in some portable wind shelters this fall to supplement the natural landscape. The cattle are calved on land close to home in spring and then moved onto a series of paddocks for the rest of the year. Having a separate calving pasture (for cows just in the spring) enables the land to remain disease free. The short time on the pasture and the UV rays from the sun helps eradicate disease.

Jim markets their beef under the [www.manitobabeef.com](http://www.manitobabeef.com) name and consumers can meet with him regularly throughout the summer at the St. Norbert Farmers Market on the south side of Winnipeg. He is also working



with some restaurants and stores in Winnipeg. In the winter months, after the Farmers’ Market closes, Jim has free home delivery, taking orders through his website.

Jim has played a key role in the start up of the Manitoba Grass Fed Beef Association and has worked diligently with the rest of the group to develop feed and animal handling protocols and to ensure that all beef supplied under the Manitoba Grass Fed Beef Producers’ Association of Manitoba is high quality and is processed at provincially inspected plants and butchers. Info: [www.manitobabeef.com](http://www.manitobabeef.com)