

Manitoba's Forage/Livestock Technology Transfer System

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ABSTRACT

There have been significant advances in forage/livestock technology systems in Western Canada in the past fifty years, including the introduction of new forage species and varieties, as well as new advances in harvesting, storage and cattle production systems. Adoption of new technology in Manitoba has been expedited by an extension system that involves all sectors of the agricultural community from primary producers and researchers to extension personnel and members of the agribusiness community all of whom are working together to find solutions to the local and regional challenges facing forage and livestock producers.

KEYWORDS

Forage/Livestock, Technology Transfer System

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally technology transfer involved an extension system that extracted new information from the researcher and disseminated it to the primary producer. Acting as a liaison between these groups were government extension systems, agri-business and the farm press. Such a system was vertical in nature, with limited contact between the primary producer and the research facility.

In contrast the current forage technology transfer system used in Manitoba involves a closer working relationship between the researcher, producer, the agribusiness community and those involved in the dissemination of information. In this horizontally integrated network, research projects are not limited to experimental plots at university or government facilities, but are expanded to farm sites and central demonstration sites.

METHODS

Forage/Livestock Information Transfer Model

The forage/livestock transfer system currently used in Manitoba is illustrated by figure 1.

All groups play a role in the planning and implementation of the projects, many of which involve livestock, are conducted on individual farms sites or central demonstration sites. Although project results are disseminated primarily by government extension agents, producers, as well as researchers and agribusiness play an important role in extending relevant information.

Producer Involvement...The Key to Success

Forage/livestock producers, the end user of new technologies, have become more involved in the identification of research priorities. Grassland Societies, Conservation groups, Manitoba Forage Council, beef and dairy clubs, 4-H clubs, Agricultural Societies are just a few of the organizations involved in research extension projects in the province. Furthermore many producers also sit on advisory boards at research institutions and other government funding agencies. In many case their role has also expanded to include the provision of funding and as was indicated earlier, extension of the results of the project. Producer organizations such as Grassland Societies, which have an active membership led by a board of directors are full partners in the management of demonstration and research projects. Providing resources such as the livestock, land base and volunteer labour, they are an important aspect of the research/technology transfer process.

Extension Methods

The extension "tools" used in Manitoba for extending information to

the primary producer/consumer include a wide range of activities.

- a) Central demonstration sites for grassland and livestock management, have been established which involve a total forage/livestock systems approach. All management aspects can be controlled at one central location and the latest advances in technology demonstrated. The contributing producers supply the livestock and incur a portion of the costs. It is an opportunity for the producer to observe the performance of their animals under a new management system and compare it to their own on-farm management system.
- b) On-farm demonstrations are perhaps the most common extension system used. Specific technology may be demonstrated as compared to the total systems approach. Selection of cooperators is critical so as to obtain a "credible" producer..one who will be a good role model or can provide a testimonial for other producers. The producer usually supplies the labour and management for a project, while the program supplies materials and a portion of the additional costs.
- c) Producer meetings and field days have been the traditional methods of introducing new technology. Short courses (day or evening), distance education courses and workshops have been used effectively in recent years. Teleconference and satellite technology have also provided access to more distant resources.
- d) Producer groups such as beef and dairy clubs, and forage associations are small groups which provide producers with an opportunity to share their experiences regarding the benefits and the limitations of new technology. In Manitoba, twenty five beef and dairy clubs currently exist, providing producers with an opportunity to network on a local basis. They have also provided an avenue through which extension agencies can introduce new technology. Current interest in management intensive grazing systems has stimulated interest in grazing network groups.
- e) Other information sources for forage/livestock technology include: fact sheets, bulletins, video, electronic data bases (FBMInet), production manuals and the traditional news media. They provide an excellent means of disseminating information to producers. More recently, electronic media has offered opportunities for reaching larger audiences.

Funding Forage/Livestock Technology Transfer

Funding of forage/livestock technology transfer in the past has been a shared responsibility of government extension services and agri-industry. However, unlike many other industries, the potential returns to the private sector from forage/livestock technology, are much lower than that of other industries, thereby limiting the potential input from the private sector. Producer organizations have in recent years tended to become more involved by directly funding projects or in the directing of public funds to the research and/or technology transfer systems.

Public funding of extension activities in Manitoba have generally involved human and financial resources from Manitoba Agriculture, and from several joint Federal/Provincial agreement programs. These have included programs such as Agro-Man, Agri-Food, Canada Manitoba

Agreement on Agriculture Sustainability and also Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PFRA)

In addition to serving as a technical resource, the agribusiness industry also provides financial support for individual research projects as well as to producer groups.

Additional funding is also provided by urban funded groups such as Ducks Unlimited, Sharp Tails Plus, Tall Grass Prairie which have developed demonstration sites in cooperation with forage/livestock producers. In doing so, they have established forage systems compatible with the goals of their individual group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Central Grassland Society demonstration sites were initiated in Manitoba in 1973. In the past twenty four years, approximately twenty three central demonstration sites have been established throughout the province. Each site was co-sponsored and managed by a local society and Manitoba Agriculture. The tenure of the project varied from three years to fifteen years depending on the interest/activity of the local group. Activities at these projects have demonstrated forage/livestock systems for cow/calf, stocker, grass/beef finishing, beef and dairy heifer replacement management systems, all utilizing intensive forage management systems.

Figure 1

In this model, there is interaction between all segments enabling it to be more responsive to the needs of the total industry.

