

Government of Canada Community Pastures

RAYMOND YOUNGMAN

Superintendent of Community Pastures, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Office, Regina, Saskatchewan

WESTERN Canada has always been community pasture minded, and this thinking has played a very important part in the growth of the livestock industry of this country.

These pastures vary from a very small organized effort by a few neighbors to larger local grazing associations, then the larger Provincial Government pastures and, finally, the P.F.R.A. or Government of Canada pastures.

Settlement of areas of lands submarginal for cereal production occurred in Western Canada, and unsuccessful attempts to farm these lands resulted in early abandonment of much of this land.

The coming of the severe drought and economic depression of the "thirties" meant disaster for those still attempting to farm such land, and by 1937 many submarginal farm areas were almost completely deserted; the majority of the few remaining settlers were maintained only by public relief. Farm lands thus abandoned were in a very weedy and eroded condition, of no economic value and a hazard to crop production on better quality farm lands in the surrounding districts.

The problem of the rehabilitation of both these abandoned areas and of those settlers still residing thereon, led to the organization of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act pasture program in 1937, with the following main objects:

1. The permanent removal of submarginal lands from cultivation.
2. The development of such areas as Community Pastures.
3. The rehabilitation and resettlement of farmers residing in submarginal areas.

The rehabilitation policy in brief, meant moving settlers off of submarginal lands on which they could not make a living, to other lands where they would have a better opportunity of carving out a future for themselves, developing these lands for community pastures and removing them permanently from cultivation.

As the natural resources of Saskatchewan are under the jurisdiction of the Government of that Province, an agreement covering this P.F.R.A. Community Pasture Policy was entered into between the Government of Canada and the Government of Saskatchewan, and action in the field was commenced in 1938.

In keeping with the Agreement, the Provincial Governments concerned select areas of submarginal lands for use as Community Pastures and make recommendations, duly supported by maps and local statistics, to the Minister of Agriculture of the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada, if the representation seems satisfactory, then proceeds to make surveys of the respective areas covering farms affected in the proposed pasture, farms benefited in the surrounding area and full information as to ownership and occupants. The survey also includes the livestock numbers, kind and quality, grass and water supply, stock carrying capacity—actual and potential; estimate as to rehabilitation costs for water development, regrassing, fencing, removal of buildings and other construction, the necessary steps to acquire full control of land and a statement as to the need for and the usefulness of the proposed pasture.

If after receiving the above survey, the Government of Canada decides to proceed with the project, then all the agencies concerned act in conjunction in getting control of all lands involved.

The Government of Canada then proceeds with the actual construction of all necessary works toward the establishment of Community Pastures and a thorough investigation is made by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration of the carrying capacity of the pasture for the guidance of the Advisory Committee and the management.

When the construction is completed on a pasture and it is ready for operation, a public meeting is called for the purpose of organizing a Community Pasture Grazing Association. At this meeting a representative of the P.F.R.A. outlines the duties and responsibilities of a Community Pasture Grazing Association and full details in connection with the operation of the pasture.

A provisional Advisory Committee composed of five residents of the districts directly concerned, is elected at this meeting, and hold office until the first Annual Meeting of pasture patrons is held. The Pasture Manager is appointed and bonded by the P.F.R.A. Administration; he acts as Secretary for the Advisory Committee and the Association. In electing this Committee every effort is made to nominate only probable users of the Community Pasture and residing so as to give the district equitable representation. Resolutions are passed at this meeting covering all matters appertaining to pasture operations, such as breed of bulls to be used, dehorning, warble and horn fly control, vaccinations, livestock insurance and also whether or not the pasture shall be made a Provincial Game Preserve. The Advisory Committee holds at least two official meetings each year, one early in the Spring to consider and

approve or reject pasture and breeding service applications, and the second at the end of the summer season so that the past season's operations can be discussed and recommendations made regarding future changes and improvements. The Committee can hold other meetings if considered desirable. For the two official meetings the members of the Committee are paid a per diem allowance of \$5.00 per meeting to cover out-of-pocket expenses for attending the same.

The Advisory Committee allocates pasturage on the basis of need with first pasture privileges being given to any farmer who has been moved out of the pasture by the Administration and relocated within the Municipality where the pasture is situated.

If after the local requirements are taken care of, the pasture can carry additional livestock, the pasture privileges may be extended into adjoining Municipalities on the same basis of need, up to the carrying capacity of the pasture. In order that the pasture privileges may be extended to as many residents as possible, the Advisory Committee sets a maximum number of livestock to be accepted from any one person, according to local conditions.

Pasture fees are established on the basis of operating costs including a fence maintenance reserve based on 2 percent of the capital cost of the pasture, and at the present time are on a monthly basis of 50 cents for cattle and 75 cents for horses; small charges are also levied for spraying, vaccinations and castrations.

An annual meeting of each Community Pasture Grazing Association is held as soon as possible after June 1 of each year, at which the financial statement covering the previous year's operations is presented by a representative of the Administration, and all phases of the pasture operations are fully discussed.

A breeding service is also operated in

conjunction with the pasturage and all bulls are supplied by the Government of Canada on a rental basis; this rental is estimated from the average cost at the time of purchase, the average length of service and the average salvage value at the time of disposal, this is charged as an operation cost against each pasture. The rental basis is as follows:

1. First three-year period, no rental charge

2. Second three-year period, one half rental charge

3. After six years, full rental charge. Full rental rate is now \$40.00 per bull per season. The number of cows being handled under this policy is approximately 35 percent of the total cattle in most pastures.

CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE ACCEPTANCE OF LIVESTOCK

The pasture patron relieves and discharges His Majesty the King of and from all claims and demands of any nature whatsoever arising from injury to or loss of livestock placed in the Community Pasture. In case of loss of any animal no pasture fees will be charged for that animal. All livestock not bearing a registered brand are branded with the Government brand and eartagged at time of entry for identification purposes. Dehorning, vaccinating, castrating and spraying operations are all handled by our pasture managers when considered necessary or advisable and all pastures are operated in accordance with local district or Municipal bylaws. No pasture fee is charged for calves or colts born in the pasture up to six months of age.

Settlement of all accounts must be made before stock may be removed from the pasture as otherwise, we have the authority to hold and if not redeemed, dispose of according to law.

The foregoing is the picture of the or-

ganization setup of P.F.R.A. Community Pastures—and now for its actual operations:

There are 56 operating P.F.R.A. Community Pastures, which include a total of 1½ million acres of land, each handled by a duly appointed manager. These vary in size from 7,000 to 160,000 acres. In addition, we have 7 new projects totalling approximately 175,000 acres in the construction or planning phases. In the organizing of these pastures some 300 families were moved, rehabilitated and resettled, some to irrigable areas, others to better dry land farms.

When these areas were first taken over many of them were badly overgrazed, and the overall carrying capacity was approximately 58 acres per head. In accordance with recommendations following surveys by the technical staff of the Swift Current Experimental Station, an intensive re-grassing program has been carried out through the years and we are now re-grassing approximately 15,000 acres per year. As a result, our carrying capacity has been practically tripled. Crested wheatgrass has been used almost exclusively in our regrassing operations and has undoubtedly been a major factor in the successful operation of our pastures as it is suited to our climate, stands exceptionally heavy grazing in the early Spring, and is the main source of the hay requirements for our pastures. In favorable years it produces considerable quantities of seed which is used in our regrassing program. As a matter of fact, we harvested some 200,000 pounds from our pasture areas in 1950. Seeding is practised at the rate of 4 to 5 pounds per acre and in 12-inch rows.

Our pastures are under the constant supervision of the Administration; all phases of pasture operations and management are supervised by three Agricultural Supervisors under an Assistant Superin-

tendent, and the forage growth is closely checked by the Forage and Grazing Division of the Dominion Experimental Station at Swift Current. Recommendations concerning the carrying capacities of the respective areas are made accordingly so that a policy of controlled grazing and grass conservation can be strictly adhered to.

An extensive improvement program is also being carried out in our pastures by the Forage Plants Division of the Dominion Experimental Station at Swift Current, and various methods of destroying brush coverage by spraying and tillage are being experimented with so that these areas can be regrassed and the carrying capacities increased accordingly.

Water has been our biggest problem in the past in our pasture operations as, owing to the favorable results from our regrassing program the grass supplies have out-paced the water reserves in many pastures, but we now have in the neighborhood of 1,000 water development units of different kinds (natural and artificial) in operation and located so that no animal has to travel over $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles between water and feed.

In the matter of stock we are handling an average of over 70,000 head annually for some 6,000 different stock owners.

Our breeding service is handling an

average of 12,000 cows annually and the 86 percent calf crop which would approximate well over 10,000 calves, by registered bulls, has certainly had an important bearing on the improvement of the beef cattle of America, as a very large percentage of the best cattle sold from our pastures have been exported to the United States for many years past.

Our losses from all causes averaged less than 0.5 percent, which we think is a very creditable record considering the many hazards that are a constant threat in operations of this kind and scope.

In an effort to offset these losses, the majority of our pastures carry livestock insurance either with a bonded company or their own mutual. This is proving very satisfactory, especially in these later years when with cattle the price they are, any loss at all represents real money.

This briefly, is our P.F.R.A. Community Pasture story of rehabilitation, resettlement and pasturage operations for the past twelve years. While we know we have made a lot of progress, we readily admit that there is still room for improvement in our various methods of operation, and we shall continuously strive towards that end in carrying out our Community Pasture policy of rehabilitation and resettlement.



HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

Would you like to review the history of the Society from its pre-natal stirrings to the 1951 Annual Meeting? A loan copy of the excellent history written by some of the men who helped sire our Society can be obtained from the Society Secretary.



Pay your 1952 dues now.