

The Ranch Sustainability Award

COPPER-T RANCH



Summer Pasture with a view

Congratulations to Trevor and Janice Tapp from Copper-T Ranch near Fraser Lake, B.C. on receiving the 2017 BCCA Ranch Sustainability Award. The Award, formerly called the Environmental Stewardship Award, recognizes ranchers that have demonstrated excellence in environmental stewardship and sustainability.

The Tapps have demonstrated strong environmental stewardship. This is evidenced through their care of the shoreline and riparian habitat. Two creeks, Perry and Stern, flow through the ranch into Fraser Lake. Part of the ranch is situated along approximately 5000 feet of shoreline. The lake provides the drinking water for the community and is a valuable recreation area with cabins, resorts, lodges, residential homes, recreation sites and a provincial park located on it. The area is rich with wildlife, waterfowl and the

lake supports a variety of fish species including rainbow trout, lake trout, burbot, lake char and sturgeon.

Copper-T Ranch was an early adopter of the Environmental Farm Plan (2005, renewed 2015) and is accredited under the Verified Beef Production Plus Program. They also use the Canadian Hereford Association Total Herd Evaluation (THE) as a decision making tool. "Copper-T Ranch is one of the few herds in B.C. to receive five stars-the highest rank achievable," notes Janice.



Hawk at the Farm



Bill Lloyd, Jamie Richardson, Jesse Lloyd, Janice Tapp and Trevor Tapp

Ranch Beginnings & Future Plans

Nestled west of the Village of Fraser Lake is Copper-T Ranch. Trevor and Janice Tapp started their purebred Hereford operation here in 1999 but the wheels were put in motion long before they owned the land where the ranch sits today. The story of how Copper-T Ranch came to be is unique and telling of the passion and dedication Trevor and Janice have for cattle ranching. "We grew up on farms that had mainly cattle. Then, of course, as we got into our careers we got away from farming. But it was always there in the background-my family has a dairy farm in Alberta," says Janice. Trevor was an RCMP officer and Janice was a teacher. While their careers took them away from ranching, agriculture was never far from their minds. One year, Janice bought Trevor two bred heifers for his Christmas present – despite the fact that they lived in Parksville, B.C. on a city lot! The heifers stayed on the family farm in Alberta and over the years, Trevor and Janice slowly added to their herd. As luck would have it, Trevor was told to "go north" and they were transferred to Fraser Lake, B.C. where they purchased three and a half acres on the lake. "We came here for three years and have stayed for 32," laughs Trevor. When Trevor retired, they acquired 240 acres of hayfield and bush pasture nearby and began developing the ranch. Today the ranch spans nearly 1,000 acres of deeded land and is home to 80 purebred, registered Polled Hereford cows.

The Tapps put a lot of hard work into developing Copper-T Ranch, building the ranch from the ground up. As a result, ensuring a sustainable future for the cattle and the land was a major driver behind the development of their succession plan. "Because we have no children of our own, we were very concerned about a succession plan," says Janice. "We wanted to make sure that the ranch we have established continued on as a ranch and the Hereford herd that we have built continued to develop and improve."

In 2015, the Tapps brought Bill Lloyd and Jamie Richardson onto the ranch with the intention that they will eventually take over the ranch and own it. "They come with a lot of experience and that gives us the confidence to believe that Copper-T Ranch will continue, develop and advance," says Janice.

CATTLE: MANAGING & MARKETING

Copper-T Ranch markets their purebred herd and sells government inspected meat locally. The Tapps reproduction management plan includes using AI on about 20 percent of the herd and natural service on the remaining cows using bulls with a variety of Hereford genetics. Each year, the Tapps calve out about 80 registered Polled Hereford cows and background the calves. Two-year old bulls sold as herd sires are their key market. The ranch also sells replacement and bred heifers, 4-H steers and heifers, and grassers.

Copper-T Ranch is well known for their farm gate sales with their meat being sold at the local corner grocery store, the community market and from the farm. They also sell composted manure for landscaping and gardening.



Fencing keeps cattle out of creeks and dugouts

GRAZING

Trevor and Janice operate their ranch on deeded land (no Crown range) using a rest rotation system for grazing. The ranch's pastures are a mixture of native grasses, seeded pastures and bush.

To get the most out of their grass, the 80 cow/calf pairs plus replacement heifers are divided into four breeding groups and each group is rotated through a set of pastures using solar powered electric fencing. The pastures are grazed to a stubble height of three to four inches then rested for six to eight weeks depending on weather conditions. The goals are to ensure that the cattle are always on good feed and the grass is healthy and has time to recover to maintain quality and quantity. "Maintaining those pastures and making sure the cattle are getting as good of forage as they can get, is really important," says Janice.

The Tapps devised an alley system on the ranch to make it easier to move cattle from one area of the ranch to another. "This makes moving animals more stress free for both the animals and us," says Trevor. The long alleyway stretches from the barnyard to the farthest pasture with gateways or additional alleyways providing access to pastures along the way.

Cattle graze the hayfields in the fall and are fed forage there throughout the winter, spreading manure across the fields.



Energy free waterers are used in the barnyard



Martin on the farm



Alley system



Healthy riparian areas



The Tapps describe the ranch as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow

WATER & RIPARIAN

The Tapps have made a major commitment to water quality. "The creeks that go through our places end up in Fraser Lake and the community of Fraser Lake and others get their water from there," says Janice. Both Stern and Perry creeks traverse through the ranch emptying into Fraser Lake. Since the community draws their water supply from the lake, the Tapps wanted to do whatever they could to protect the water quality.

With the goal of keeping the water clean and having healthy riparian areas and streambanks, they invested heavily in restricting cattle access to all water sources on the ranch. Over the years, they have completed three riparian projects. Along with fencing cattle out of all the water sources, including creeks and dugouts, the projects also involved the installation of three solar pump systems and the creation of an emergency water access using geo-grid fabric and gravel. "That way, we keep the animals out of the water courses completely," says Trevor. The riparian areas have rejuvenated naturally and are lush and healthy. "The stream rehabilitation after fencing has been phenomenal," explains Trevor. "It all came back naturally." They also use energy free waterers in the barnyard pens. The water is heated using geothermal heat from the ground. Some of the projects were completed through collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Nechako Water Stewardship Council or as part of the Environmental Farm Plan.

In addition to the creeks on the property, one of the ranch's hayfields is has 5000 feet of shoreline along Fraser Lake at the front end of Simon Bay. Buffer areas of natural vegetation have been left along the edge of the field next to the lake and, because they are concerned about run-off, this field is not fertilized. "We keep it natural for wildlife and waterfowl habitat," says Janice. Irrigation is not used on any of their land.

The location of the field next to the lake makes it terrific habitat for waterfowl and wildlife. The Tapps have had the enjoyment of seeing four bears playing in the bay recently. Deer and moose often feed in these fields and the area is also used by migrating Canada Geese, Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes and Trumpeter Swans. The Tapps take pleasure in creating an environment that is hospitable to wildlife and use farm management practices that maintain and protect habitat as demonstrated by the intact riparian areas and the efforts to ensure habitat connectivity.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & ADVOCACY

Trevor and Janice are very active in their community and use those opportunities and connections to talk about ranching with diverse groups of people. "We are both members and directors on numerous local organizations which means we speak with different groups and are always able to answer questions about ranching and sustainability," says Janice. Their participation in farm gate sales and community markets gives them a chance to talk to consumers about meat production and ranching.

They also host high school students taking career programs and university agricultural students from France that come to the ranch on internships. "They work right along with us on the ranch and we take them wherever we go while they are here," says Janice about the students from France. "They learn about agriculture on a beef ranch in Canada and improve their grasp of the English language."

Recently, the Tapps participated in the filming of the CBC program *Still Standing*. "We felt this was a unique opportunity to present how local agriculture can benefit a community."

“It is exciting to have our efforts to work in a sustainable way be recognized. We enjoy our work on the ranch, love where we live and it has always been important to us to treat our land with respect. It is a really deep need to make sure that we are good stewards of the land ...it is very important that the water sources that we have are protected ... and that is what we work really hard to do.”



Calves in their shelter

Thank you
 "We would like to express appreciation to those who nominated us and sent in supporting information, as well as to the Evaluation and Selection Committee for choosing us. Thank you to the BC Cattlemen's Association and the generous sponsors who support this award and to the BCCA staff who prepared all the reports etc. We are honoured to be the 2017 recipients of the BCCA Ranch Sustainability Award."



Rotational grazing



The ranch has a current EFP and is VBPP+ accredited



Solar water system at creek

This award is made possible through our generous sponsors:





Understanding AGRICULTURE WATER



Should Farmers Irrigate when it is Raining?
Answer: Quite often yes!



The answer to this question is not a direct yes or no. It will depend on a number of factors and conditions. This question reminds me of a meeting I attended many years ago. It was the middle of the summer and while travelling to the meeting it was raining and I noticed many of the farms were irrigating their alfalfa fields. The meeting was regarding water management in the south Okanagan and upon arriving at the meeting staff from other agencies were pointing out the fact that farmers were irrigating while it was raining. Their comments were rather derogatory in nature, making it seem that producers did not really understand irrigation or the need for irrigation.

My response to the situation went something like this: Driving past the fields I could not determine the soil moisture in the field, how much irrigation was being applied by the system, how much rainfall had fallen or what the crop water demand was based on the current climate conditions. Being the provincial irrigation specialist (which I was at the time) I am unable to assess the need for irrigation. Needless to say, the rest of the meeting did not go very well but the point was made.

During my career, I have heard the comment about irrigating in the rain many times. The determination on whether to continue irrigating when it is raining is dependent on a number of factors. So, let's evaluate the need to irrigate if it is raining.

- Know how much water is being applied by the irrigation system.
- Have a good estimate of how much rainfall has accumulated during the rainfall event.
- Evaluate the soil moisture – is there enough storage remaining in the soil to accept the irrigation volume to be applied?
- Determine the crop water demand.

An irrigation system usually puts on about 40 – 50 mm (1.5 – 2 inches) of water during one irrigation event. During the summer rain showers often apply less than 5 mm. In this situation, when climate demand is high, the rainfall is insignificant and a producer should keep irrigating even though some showers may be present. There are however other considerations.

If there are a number of consecutive days of cool wet weather, irrigation could be suspended but the amount of soil moisture should be evaluated. It is much better to shut the irrigation system down after the entire field has been irrigated to ensure that sufficient water has been applied consistently across the field.

The decision to start irrigation again should be made on the soil moisture present at the first set, keeping in mind that it may take 10 days or more to reach the end of the field.

To be effective, irrigation or rainfall must penetrate the surface and move down to where the plant roots are. Small rainfall events of 5 mm or so will leave the moisture close to the surface and are not considered effective in moving moisture down to the roots. A rule of thumb is to ignore rainfall of 5 mm or less and consider 75 percent of everything over 5 mm to be effective. If sufficient effective rainfall has occurred, likely more than 15 mm, application of irrigation water can be suspended.

In summary, during the summertime, rainfall of 5 mm per day or less should be ignored and irrigation should continue. After going over the entire field, an assessment of soil moisture should be done at the beginning of the field to determine if there is sufficient soil storage to apply another irrigation. During the shoulder seasons (spring and later summer) irrigation can be suspended if there are a number of consecutive cool wet days. Monitoring soil moisture and climatic demand would be helpful in making this decision.

*Ted van der Gulik
President*



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*Public Speaking & Writing Competitions
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Provincial Team Competitions*

Visit www.bchereford.ca for the schedule of events including

National / Provincial Marketing Workshop and Meeting
July 19 at 1:00 PM

British Columbia Hereford Association
Annual General meeting
July 19 at 8 PM

Canadian Hereford Association
Annual General Meeting
July 20 at 7 PM



For more info contact BCHA Secretary, Janice Tapp 250-699-6466