



ALUS project tours

Farmers throughout Wetaskiwin and Leduc counties work with ALUS to create nature-based solutions on their land. These projects help build flood and drought resilience and bring other positive environmental benefits such as improving biodiversity and water quality.

Registered guests hopped on a school bus and visited local ALUS projects. At each stop, farmers described their project and participants learned about:

- ▶ the work involved in establishing an eco-buffer planting;
- ▶ livestock fencing;
- ▶ off-site watering;
- ▶ a grassed waterway;
- ▶ native grass planting; and
- ▶ an adaptive multi-paddock grazing pilot project.

How do some ALUS projects improve biodiversity and water quality?

When referencing land directly adjacent to water bodies, biodiversity means more varied types of native, deep-rooted plants. These roots hold the bank together, filter and trap

sediment, and create structural layers that provide a home for species to thrive. The system is more able to cope with environmental stressors such as floods and drought, and provides cleaner water.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the ALUS project tours!

About ALUS

ALUS is a community-developed and farmer-delivered program offered in Wetaskiwin and Leduc counties through the sustainable agriculture program partnership. Recruitment of new projects and participants occurs yearly.

A Partnership Advisory Committee (PAC) reviews projects and makes funding decisions. Winter is the perfect time to contact the program coordinator and discuss how the ALUS program may fit your farm plans.

For more information on ALUS or to discuss your farm plans, contact **Kim** at **780-387-6182**, **kbarkwell@county10.ca** or **kimb@leduc-county.com**.



Cover crops and soil field events

This past summer, Leduc and Wetaskiwin counties collaborated or sponsored in-person field events with West Central Forage Association (WCFA) and Grey Wooded Forage Association (GWFA).

Cover crops

More than forty people met at El-Shaddai Dairies in Leduc County and heard from Dr. Linda Gorim, University of Alberta Assistant Professor and Western Grains Research Foundation Chair in Cropping Systems, and Kevin Elmy, Cover Crops Canada, before heading into the fields to see the on-farm cropping systems.

The prevalence of monocrops grown in Alberta surprised Dr. Gorim when she arrived here. In many other areas of the world, their soils are not as resilient and poly cropping is the general practice. Dr. Gorim's research focus is practical incorporation of cover crops in our region.

Switching to cover crops

Cover crop benefits include improved soil health and weed suppression, which can reduce input costs. Farmers

that switch to cover cropping can reap rewards in just a few short years; however, incorporating cover crops comes with a steep learning curve that carries more short-term risk than some farmers are willing to take.

Financial support for cover crop adoption is now available through the On Farm Climate Action Fund, managed by Results Driven Agriculture Research in Alberta. Learn more at rdar.ca/ofcaf.

Soil health

The Soil Builders Field School — hosted by Grey Wooded Forage Association — featured soil health specialist Dr. Odette Ménard, and Kevin Elmy, Cover Crops Canada. Dr. Ménard said soil health should be a priority when making crop decisions and listed three basic rules for protecting and building soil health:

1. Ensure vegetation covers soil.
2. Adjust crop rotations.
3. Avoid compaction.

Dr. Ménard's rule of thumb is to keep machinery weight below four tonnes per wheel; this keeps compaction less than

20 inches deep. Any deeper than that cannot be resolved with tillage. When asked about tracks and soil compaction, she said a good tire with the right weight and pressure is always a better option.

Participants enjoyed time in the field, where Dr. Ménard discussed and evaluated soils on site. She demonstrated a simple test to gauge compaction on your field:

- ▶ Dig a hole at least two feet deep and run a knife up from the bottom.
- ▶ If the knife sticks, you have found a compacted layer.

The field site the tour group visited was grey wooded soil, but was not compacted. The overall soil health demonstrated on this generally less-productive soil type was a testament to the farmer's efforts.

Learn more

Webinars hosted by WCFA and GWFA in winter 2022 featured Kevin Elmy. You can view the webinars at westcentralforage.com or greywoodedforageassociation.com.



Kevin Elmy, Cover Crops Canada, in the field



Fusarium head blight (FHB)

Fusarium head blight is a fungal disease of cereal crops caused by the fungus *Fusarium Graminearum* (Fg). The Government of Alberta added *Fusarium Graminearum* to the Pest and Nuisance Control Regulation of the *Alberta Agricultural Pests Act* in 1999 and subsequently removed it in 2020.

What changed? The disease impact remains but advances in seed treatment can lower the detection level of *Fusarium Graminearum* in seed to near zero. Meanwhile, regulating *Fusarium Graminearum* has failed to stop its spread in the province. The decision to remove *Fusarium Graminearum* from the regulation met with varying reactions, in part related to region. *Fusarium Graminearum* is more prevalent in southern Alberta and less common in central and northern Alberta. Alberta Seed Processors launched a three-year project in the fall 2020 to study *Fusarium Graminearum* seed infection called the *Fusarium Seed Infection Surveillance Project*. The 2022 interim project report contains a link to the FHB Environmental Risk Map tool developed by the project. It highlights areas of higher disease incidence in the province. The full report is on the Alberta Seed Processors website under the 'seed smart' tab at www.seedprocessors.ca.

Removal of *Fusarium Graminearum* from the regulation does not mean it is of less concern. The disease costs Alberta farmers millions of dollars per year due to reduced yield and down grading. FHB also produces mycotoxins that can cause reduced feed intake and other problems in livestock and lead to rejection of barley for malt and wheat for milling or ethanol production.

Gravity tables and colour sorters at seed cleaning co-ops can separate out severely infected *Fusarium* damaged kernels to

facilitate a grade increase. (See ASB News and Views, Spring 2022 issue for a review of seed cleaning co-ops). Send seed samples for detection of FHB and toxin levels to the Canadian Grain Commission or private lab. Tests are inexpensive and a valuable tool in the FHB management toolbox. The Canadian Grain Commission offers a free Harvest Sample program to growers that sign up. Sign up online at www.grainscanada.gc.ca/hsp.

Farmers can manage FHB disease using an assortment of strategies and should take more precautions if they are near a higher risk area. Risk reduction activities could include longer, diverse crop rotations, planting seed with resistance to *Fusarium Graminearum*, relative seed treatments, and regular field scouting. "Let's Manage It!" (managefhb.ca) is a website that provides more detailed recommendations. The Government of Alberta website also has extensive information on FHB disease and best management practices. Learn more at www.alberta.ca/fusarium-head-blight-overview.aspx.

JEDI | AG FORUM | SAVE THE DATE

► Nov. 24, 2022

► Wetaskiwin Agricultural Society Grounds

FREE event (including lunch) for local farmers/ag producers. Featuring Steve and Amber Kenyon from Greener Pastures Ranching as well as other expert speakers presenting on a variety of emerging Ag topics.

Learn more online at www.jedialberta.com or call 780-335-5334. Email cthompson@jedialberta.com to be added to an email list for event updates.

On Farm Climate Action Fund (OFCAF)

Alberta agents selected to deliver beneficial management practices (BMPs) targeted by OFCAF are beginning to accept applications. The programs will provide direct support to farmers in the following categories:

- cover cropping
- in-field nitrogen management
- rotational grazing

The total amount available for producers is \$75,000 from all sources. Full details are available from each delivery agent. A brief summary follows:

1. Results Driven Agricultural Research: rdar.ca/ofcaf/
 - Supports cover cropping, in-field nitrogen management and rotational grazing.
2. Canadian Canola Council: canolacouncil.org/4r-advantage/program-guidelines/
 - Supports in-field nitrogen BMP only - 4R Nutrient Stewardship practices when growing canola.
3. Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association: canadianfga.ca/projects-projets/ofcaf-funding/
 - Supports rotational grazing BMPs.
4. Farmers for Climate Solutions: farmersforclimatesolutions.ca/mentorship
 - Training and peer-to-peer learning for all BMPs.
5. Ecocert Canada: ecocert.com/en-CA/home
 - Nitrogen, cover crop and rotational grazing BMPs for certified organic production.

Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) and Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP)

www.cap.alberta.ca | 310-FARM (3276)

Current CAP agreement ends March 31, 2023. Some programs are fully allocated but still accepting applications. If additional funds become available, applications will be reviewed in the order they are received.

Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) will be in place after March 2023 when the current CAP program expires. Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development will work with stakeholders to develop their program over the coming months.

Stay connected

Leduc County

Sign up for Ag Matters, Leduc County's monthly agricultural e-newsletter. Subscribe at www.leduc-county.com/agriculture.

County of Wetaskiwin

Do you want to receive email/text message updates directly to your phone from the County of Wetaskiwin about agricultural services including mowing, spraying, the ALUS program, weeds, pest control and so much more?

To sign up, visit www.county.wetaskiwin.ab.ca/list, enter your email address, scroll down to News Flashes and select the letter(email) or phone(text) icon next to Agricultural to subscribe. For assistance, contact **780-361-6220**.

Looking for more?

If you have any questions or wish to bring a matter to the attention of your Agricultural Service Board, please contact:

- ▶ County of Wetaskiwin No. 10 Agricultural Services: 780-361-6226 or visit www.county.wetaskiwin.ab.ca
- ▶ Leduc County Agricultural Services: 780-955-4593 or visit www.leduc-county.com



Kim's cover crop garden in full bloom

Kim's corner

I have a 3400 sq. foot garden plot on my property and every year, a traditional vegetable garden has grown until this season. The plot is good black soil, but it has changed over the years and not for the better. To try something different, I decided that seeding a cover crop blend would meet the following garden plot goals for the season:

1. Take a break from gardening.
2. Avoid tillage.
3. Control weeds.
4. Improve soil health.

I made a few calls and sourced Imperial Seed's 30TG Annual Pollinator Blend (www.imperialseed.com). It is a blend of nine different varieties consisting of 21% H.O. Brand Crimson Clover, 15.5% Siberian Millet, 15.5% Sunflower, 10.5% Balo Brand Phacelia, 10.5% Laser Brand Persian Clover, 10.5% Winner Brand Berseem Clover, 10.5% Double Max Radish, 3% Teff, 3% Purple Top Turnips. The blend was described as a great blend to attract beneficial insects, improve soil health, feed the honey bees and not worry about any overwintering species in the following year.

The project was a delight! Pollinators were definitely attracted to the site and in turn, there were many birds too. My favourites were Siberian Millet and Teff while it appeared Phacelia was a popular pollinator choice.

Broadcast seeding happened on June 3 and allowed the sunflowers to bloom before mowing on August 23. The recommendation was to graze or mow before the plants had set viable seed; waiting for the sunflowers may have allowed other plants to mature. We will have to see what happens next year!

This experience was enjoyable and I am ready to try some more new-to-me practices in 2023.

