

# Soil Health Producer Highlights Series

## My Farm, My Soil, My Story

*Ben Campbell—Black Diamond, AB*

- \* What does “Soil Health” mean to you and why is it important?

*Soil health is the lifeblood of your land. It's a gauge that tells you if you have a healthy ranch or not. It's something that can't be faked, there is no spray or quick fix to have healthy soil. It's the result of years of good management. Healthy soil is a badge of honour for a rancher.*

- \* What management practices have you used to improve soil health on your operation?

*This year will be our third year bale grazing. We started cautiously, just putting out 2 days worth of bales at a time with the bale wagon. It worked on so many levels, cost and time were the first ones we noticed, but the following summer showed us how good it was for the land. We haven't experienced “dead spots” or weed problems, and the precision nutrient placement of bale grazing allowed us to target specific areas within fields.*

*We started cross fencing with high tensile electric fence this summer. This allowed us to shorten our rotational grazing to 1 day in our smaller paddocks up to 7 days in our larger ones in the fall. In a year like this summer where moisture was in short supply and so was the grass, rotational grazing allowed us to better utilize what we had and left enough residual for regrowth where we had been.*

- \* What changes have you seen?

*It's hard to see changes in the soil itself but you can see the changes in the grass fairly quickly. Our bale grazing sites are the first spots to show spring growth, they have thicker stands in the summer, recover quicker, are a richer green colour and the most noticeable difference is how long they stay green into the fall. All the other grass goes dormant and brown and the bale grazing sites are still green.*

- \* What are the biggest challenges for soil health in your area?

*Our biggest challenge is rodents in tame pasture and older grazing practices encouraging less desirable species.*

- \* How do you advocate for soil health?

*Ben is on the board of directors of the Foothills Forage and Grazing Association which holds numerous educational sessions throughout the year. Ben also hosts ranch tours and speaks at various events in the Calgary area.*

- \* Do you have any future plans for improving the Soil Health on your operation?

*We are looking to reseed and fertilize old and abused pastures with sod seeding and other methods. We'd like to increase plant diversity to make sure we have a living root growing during every portion of the growing season.*

- \* How has improving your soil health improved other aspects of your operation?

*It's extended our grazing season in the fall/winter as well as making moves and winter feeding more fun. Instead of being on a tractor rolling out bales we can go for a family walk and move the electric fence on our bale grazing.*



Ben and Steph Campbell grass finish and direct market beef North of Black Diamond. Ben also works with his father on his cow/calf operation on the same ranch. Ben was selected as one of this year's Cattlemen's Young Leaders which are put through an extensive mentorship program.

Foothills Forage & Grazing Association is based in High River and assists producers in profitability improving their forages and regenerating their soils through innovation and education. We envision a global community that respects and values profitable forage production and healthy soils as our legacy for future generations.

