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Evangeline Community Pasture

*Helping keep farms
in the green*



Canada 

Community pasture finds down-stream solutions to protect the environment

At the Evangeline Community Pasture near Wellington, up to 700 cattle from different farms graze on over 600 acres of pasture. But it's not only the grass that's green..

When the cattle need to drink, they do it without setting a hoof in the pasture's fenced-off brooks and streams. Instead, they drink from solar-powered and gravity-fed watering stations, and in the process reduce soil erosion, protect water quality, and safeguard wildlife and fish habitat.

For the past 15 years, the pasture has been a showcase for more environmentally sensitive pasture management. Managers John Gallant and his father Melvin credit PEI's Alternate Land Use Services Program, or ALUS, for making it happen.

Introduced in 2008, ALUS provides financial support to help take environmentally sensitive land out of production and support land stewardship practices. For the last five years, it has received federal and provincial funding under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

"We are proud to be one of the pioneers in ALUS with one of the first projects, and we have been involved with it ever since," says John. "We've

been able to erect about 18 kilometres of fencing with support from the program over the years."

The community pasture offers its farm members grazing land on three sites from May until November.

John says the land was originally chosen for pasture because its patches of wetland and the brook and stream running through it made it unsuitable for other farming.

But when the province created an environmental regulation to restrict cattle access to waterways, John says the pasture team began working with ALUS staff and the PEI Soil and Crop Association to develop more environmentally friendly watering alternatives.

John and Melvin say their first ALUS projects used a combination of gravity feeds and battery-operated pumps to water the cattle.

"When we first started, we did manage using mostly a gravity feed, but we had to run a thousand feet of pipe," John remembers. "All it would take is a little bit of dirt and the pipe would stop flowing and then it would be a long process to find out where it was plugged."



Melvin Gallant displays a solar power pump used to provide water to cattle in the Evangeline Community Pasture



Cattle rare free to graze in the Evangeline Community Pasture from May through November

The solar-powered watering stations have been a huge improvement, he says.

“With the solar option, I don’t really have to touch it all that much. I usually just set it up in the spring and take it all down in the fall, just checking things every day to make sure everything is operating.”

While some of the pastures do have well water, he said with the new technology funded through ALUS and the Soil and Crop Improvement Association, he can pump water to the cattle rather than having them come to the well to drink.

John and Melvin said it would be impossible to offer the pasture service without the help of programs like ALUS, since the solar water systems cost approximately \$4,000 each.

“As a non-profit organization, we are trying to keep our price as low as possible for the farmers and we are just looking to cover our costs.”

John says funding from the ALUS program helps cover the cost of ongoing management and maintenance of the alternative watering systems while new projects are spearheaded through the Soil and Crop Association.

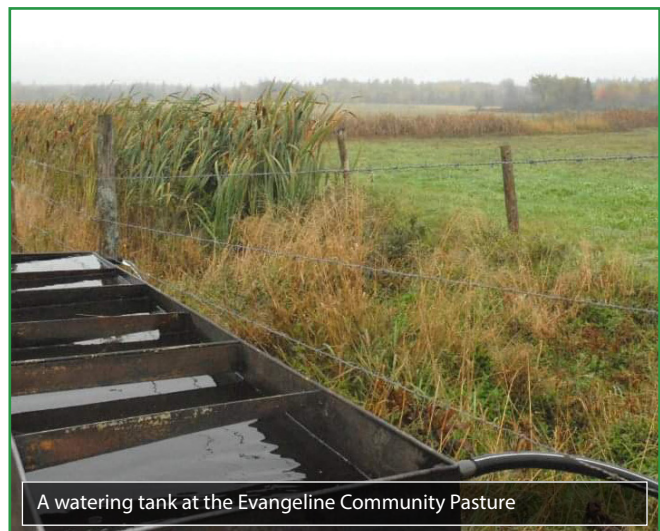
The managers praised staff ALUS and Soil Crop Improvement Association staff and said their programs work well together.

PEI was the first province in the country to limit access to waterways by livestock. Melvin said he is proud of the contribution the community pasture has made to protecting waterways and fish habitat.

If the environmental work is rewarding, John says he also enjoys the opportunity to work with his father and appreciates being able to stay in the community he grew up in,



A cow gets a drink of water at the Evangeline Community Pasture



A watering tank at the Evangeline Community Pasture

Melvin had cattle on his St. Timothy farm prior to taking the job as pasture manager and his son has now revived the tradition with his own herd of 30 beef cattle.

“I always knew growing up that I wanted to be involved in the farming industry,” John says. “That is my passion, and I am happy to be bucking the trend, so to speak, to reintroduce cattle to our farm.”