

Saskatchewan Pasture Tour 2023
August 2023
Shannon McArton

The Saskatchewan Pasture Tour trekked north-west on August 9th, 2023. This popular annual event was another success, with a tour route that started and ended in Cochin and included stops at Hatherleigh Pasture, Rising Sun Ranch near Sandwith, Siklenka Seed Farm near Glaslyn and Sunset Bison Ranch near Livelong.

With about 70 people in attendance, we started the day with a land acknowledgement and some history of the community pasture era and Hatherleigh Pasture in particular. This was followed by a session of native plant identification led by some of our partner group members. Moving on to Rising Sun Ranch, Jessie and Rob McNabb described their journey into an expanding rotational grazing program and provided some insight into their purebred Angus operation. They talked about the possibilities and pitfalls they have encountered along the way, and the satisfaction they have realized with a move from a large commercial herd to a more compact purebred operation. At this site, we also learned about some Ducks Unlimited forages programming from Brooke Howat. A quick bite of lunch, and we were off to Glaslyn and Siklenka Enterprises and seed farm. Alison Fransoo and Trish Johnson from the Ministry of Agriculture provided overviews of the Resilient Agricultural Landscapes Program (RALP) and Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program (FRWIP) before introducing Nathan Siklenka. We enjoyed an insightful presentation about forage seed production and its vital role to the industry from Nathan, and toured his beautiful field of Cicer Milkvetch as he answered many questions. From seed production back to grazing with a side of soil health, we travelled on to Sunset Bison Ranch, where Avery Shepherd and his family have a growing bison cow-calf herd. Avery is passionate about rejuvenation of the land, using bison. His switch to cover crops, swath grazing and rotational grazing has increased the soil health on his ranch significantly, and he shared many relatable stories about what works, and what doesn't, on the road to better land management for healthier soils.

Producer presentations, and the willingness of our site hosts to freely share their experiences with wisdom, honesty and humour, is a big part of the ongoing success of the Saskatchewan Pasture Tour. The opportunity to compare operations and best management practices and to take home useful nuggets of information that are immediately relevant to our own businesses is invaluable. We are very grateful to the McNabb, Siklenka and Shepherd families for opening their farms to us for the day.

We made good use of the travel time, as well, with updates and presentations from Annette Smith with Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds (SAW) who provided an overview of the Prairie Watershed Climate Program (PWCP); Duncan Morrison, Executive Director of Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association spoke about their Aquantary Forecasting Tool and Casey Rempel with The Nature Conservancy of Canada summarized NCC's Stewardship Investment Program (SIP).

The weather was perfect for a tour that ended with supper at the Cochin Community Hall and more networking opportunities. The day would not have been possible without the generous support of funding partners and sponsors. Many thanks to Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds who provided the transportation and the Nature Conservancy of Canada who supported administration efforts. Many of our day sponsors have supported this event for years and we are grateful for their loyalty, as well as the contributions of first-time sponsors who we hope to see again. See their logos below, and please remember their generosity as you make your supplier choices throughout the year.

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The Saskatchewan Pasture Tour is organized by a partnership group including Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, Ducks Unlimited, Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association, Saskatchewan Forage Council, Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan and Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence and the Young Cattlemen's Council.