

## Risk of soil erosion over winter season

I must say it is nice to see the great turn outs at local agriculture workshops and conferences that are plentiful throughout the winter. I have attended some of these events which are a great help to renew ones optimism for the coming year. The spring season will undoubtedly be here before we are ready. Thankfully we have not had to see much of Oldman winter this year, I think he should stay away and take the wind with him. There are a variety of articles in this newsletter that are meant to offer local agriculture producers opportunities to help with the challenges of their industry.

The Agriculture Service Board (ASB) has constructed magpie traps to help remove any magpie problems you face. The beneficial aspects of the magpie should be considered when attempting to control this crafty bird. The role of magpies as scavengers and consumers of insects is well documented by several studies, and these beneficial aspects should always be taken into account. Page 2 directs folks on how to obtain these traps. There is also a reminder of the Plastics baler that is available from the ASB. One of the many jobs that the ASB is assigned with is to administer the Soils Act. In this area I believe it is always good to keep thinking about ways to reduce soil erosion.

Reduced snow cover and very intense winds have created a freeze-thaw effect that has put a

lot of land in southern Alberta at risk for soil erosion. This is not an uncommon situation here in the south. Thankfully producers understand the importance of their topsoil and do everything they can to preserve it. The article on page 3 is meant to relate the importance of considering soil health as a deposit into a reserve in the soil bank, earning interest in the form of soil tilth at a sustainable rate. The reserve should be withdrawn over an extended duration of time; this will allow the soil to replenish the currency of organic matter at a rate equal to the withdrawal. Crop residues are a must to create a resilient soil bank. If we do not include rotations that encourage the soil bank to earn interest, there will be no reserves to withdraw from. A sound rotation is a good way to try to decrease risk across the farm, which is similar to developing an Environmental Farm Plan for your farm.

Environmental Farm Plan instruction is picking up again. When I talk with producers about the benefits of completing an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) it always strikes me as a bit odd that many producers still do not understand what the EFP is nor do they understand the utility associated with completing an EFP for their farming operation. Page 4 and 5 discuss the importance of developing an EFP. If there is anyone out there that would like to complete an

EFP give me a call and we can get it done. Another avenue for producers to consider is the use of Near Infrared Spectroscopy (NIRS) to evaluate the feeding potential of grain.

On August 1, 2012 Alberta feedlots began using a technology known as Near Infrared Spectroscopy (NIRS) to evaluate the feeding potential of grain. The idea behind using NIRS is to get more value from feed grains. Energy is vital because it drives animal performance. NIRS potentially provides an approach that is fast, accurate and acceptable. Have a look at page 4 and 6 and expect more information to come in the near future.

The Oldman Watershed Council Holding the Reins Workshop is scheduled for February 11, 2014. I have been a part of this workshop since its beginning and can say if you are a livestock producer and have not been to this event, "get on it". There are many like-minded folks attending this event and it is always a wealth of information. Please have a look at page 7 for more information and try to fit it in to your schedule; you will not be disappointed, as most of the discussions are focused towards stewardship.

*Page 8 announces who the local CFO Extension Specialist is and how to contact him.*

Here's hoping winter remains mild and the year is a successful one.

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