

# Brandon to host regenerative ag conference

BY MIRANDA LEYBOURNE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

The Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association's regenerative agriculture conference is set to return to Brandon on Nov. 14 and 15, with a focus on the link between healthy soil and healthy farm animals — which in turn leads to healthy Canadians.

So far, several producers have already signed up for the event, being held at the Victoria Inn Hotel and Conference Centre, said Duncan Morrison, executive director of the association.

"We're right on track ... response has been really good," he said.

Producers from all over Manitoba are developing an interest in regenerative agriculture, and how it can not only help the environment but their bottom line, Morrison said. The association defines regenerative agriculture as an approach to farm and ranch management that aims to reverse climate change through practices that restore degraded soils.

Regenerative agriculture practices include no-till or minimum-tillage techniques, the use of cover crops, crop rotations, compost, animal manures, the inoculation of soils with composts or compost extracts to restore soil microbial activity and managed grazing.

"I really believe that farmers are doing an outstanding job on their lands — especially the ones who were the early adopters that are dedicated to regenerative agriculture principles," Morrison said.

Some of the regenerative agriculture topics that will be on the agenda for Nov. 14 include a day-long look at carbon, which is a significant contributor to the productivity of soils because of how it benefits soil structure, nutrient cycling and water retention.

It's important for producers to know how to make use of carbon to their advantage, said Larry Wagner, a co-chair of the event.

"Is the carbon market enough, or do we have to look at ecological surveys, or combine the two together?" Wagner said.

Canada's carbon market, called the Greenhouse Gas Offset Credit system, is a trading system in which carbon "credits" are sold and bought. One tradable carbon credit equals one tonne of carbon dioxide



Pictured here (left) working in the field, Kara Kroeger of Grassroots Carbon in Texas will give a talk on soil health at the Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association's regenerative agriculture conference in Brandon on Nov. 14 and 15 at the Victoria Inn Hotel and Conference Centre. (Submitted)

or the equivalent amount of a different greenhouse gas reduced, sequestered or avoided.

The federal government launched the market in June of this year, aligned with the Pan-Canadian Greenhouse Gas Offset Framework, which is made up of four pillars. These include pricing carbon pollution; introducing complementary measures to further reduce emissions across the economy; introducing measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change and build resilience; and to put into motion actions that "accelerate innovation, support clean technology and create jobs," according to the federal government.

As well as a talk on carbon, the first day of the conference will feature a trade show, the Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association's Hall of Fame and producer panels discuss-

ing annual crops, grazing and market trends, featuring Ryan Boyd, a local regenerative farmer, and Kimberly Cornish from the Food Water Wellness Foundation.

Canada's first Agri-Food Sustainability Index will be revealed by David McInnes, the former president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute. The index will be the first one that encompasses the entire agri-food sector, placing an importance on sustainable food production. McInnes will focus on what the agriculture sector is currently doing to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and what other sustainability-related priorities it could adopt to improve food security and labour priorities.

After that, producers will have the chance to network and socialize with each other during suppertime.

The chance to have peer-to-peer conversations with other producers is incredibly important for the industry, Morrison said.

"It's ... a very important social experience for those considering regenerative agriculture because they're hearing from some of the best [regenerative agriculture farmers] from Manitoba that are excited about it."

After dinner, a session to update attendees on the MFGA's core projects will be held, including information on forecasting tools, watershed programs, conservation programs and more.

One speaker Wagner is the most excited to hear from is Randy Booker, director of operations at Otter Creek Golf Club in Otterville, Ont. Booker will be speaking on how to make golf courses green with regenerative agriculture from 8 to 9 p.m.

the evening of Nov. 14.

It's important for all sectors and industries in Canada to look at how they can reduce their carbon footprint — not just producers in the agriculture industry, Wagner said. Booker will speak with attendees about how he cut out fertilizer usage on his golf course and how other organizations can do the same.

"Can people live with golf courses and lawns and parks with no fertilizer or chemicals in them?" Wagner said.

The focus of the second day of the conference will be on soil health and the effects it has on healthy animals, crops and humans. Fred Provenza, one of the keynote speakers of the event and an author from Utah State University, will be discussing how plant diversity is linked with the health of all animals, including people.

After a question and answer session with Provenza, the "Made in Manitoba" producer panel will be held, featuring farmers from around Manitoba who have made regenerative agriculture part of their best practices.

Before lunch, Kara Kroeger of Grassroots Carbon in Texas will give a talk on how to connect the dots between soil and human health, and how producers can find opportunities to provide the market with more nutrient dense food through best soil practices. She will speak on how soil porosity, aggregation, infiltration, water-holding capacity, microbiology and nutrient cycling can improve soil and plant health.

Another "Made in Manitoba" panel will be held after that, followed by a late lunch, trade show and networking event. A panel on regional regenerative agriculture will follow, in which six producers from Manitoba will share how they use regenerative agriculture in their farming operations.

With the federal government's carbon tax rising to \$50 per tonne as of April of this year, and Canada's plan to achieve net zero fertilizer emissions by 2050, interest in regenerative agriculture will likely only grow among Manitoba's producers, Wagner said.

Producers can sign up for the conference by visiting [mfga.net/regen-ag-conference](http://mfga.net/regen-ag-conference).

» [mleybourne@brandonsun.com](mailto:mleybourne@brandonsun.com)

» Twitter: @miraleybourne