

# **The Last Cattle Frontier**

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The Last Cattle Frontier is the name given to an initiative that has been in operation for 5 years to attract Alberta ranchers to East Central Saskatchewan. The name reflects the opportunities that exist in the region for cow-calf production. The main activity has been a concentrated advertising campaign and a January trip by a delegation to Alberta to present seminars at various locations.

Over the five year period, seminars explaining the advantages of Eastern Saskatchewan for livestock production have been given at nine locations; Red Deer, Ponoka, Olds, Strathmore, Westlock, Drumheller, Fort Macleod, Rocky Mountain House, and Vermilion.

The Initiative was begun in response to the poor grain economics of the late 1990's which resulted in a depressed farm economy. In East Central Saskatchewan, this economic condition coincided with an older generation that was ready to leave the farm but did not have young people in the area to provide a market for the land. In addition, much of the farm land in this region had become marginal because of being broken up by sloughs and bluffs which made it uneconomical to work with modern large machinery. Such land however, was ideally suited to grass and forage production. In addition, there was a lack of knowledge among local producers as to how to convert a farm from grain to grass or an understanding of how only grazing/forage production could be economical.

The initiative was started by Ducks Unlimited, SAF and the Churchbridge Business Association. Later the Good Spirit REDA based in Yorkton, the Yellow Head REDA out of Langenburg and the South Parkland REDA out of Melville as well as the city of Yorkton became the leaders of the project. Sponsorship was provided by the REDAS through the REDA Enhancement Fund along with direct support from Saskatchewan Agriculture and local business sponsors.

The goal of the project was to attract ranching families to East Central Saskatchewan to provide role models in converting grain land to grass production; increase the rural population and stabilize the land market.

The first year of the project was 2002 in which a delegation of 8 people presented a seminar in Red Deer. The seminar was preceded by a mail out of over 25,000 brochures as well as extensive media coverage. About 50 people attended representing about 30 families. The next year, two seminars were held and in the last three years 3 seminars have been held each winter. These meetings have been accompanied by an extensive media campaign which includes the mailing out of approximately 25,000 brochures to rural Alberta households as well as extensive media coverage and a website, [www.lastcattlefrontier.com](http://www.lastcattlefrontier.com).

The seminar presentations dealt with topics important to newcomers. These issues included the amenities of the region such as schools, hospitals, major shopping centres and agriculture support businesses; an explanation as to why the opportunity exists and was not being exploited by local Saskatchewan people; the details of the potential of livestock and forage production including forage yields, typical stocking rates for pastures and the services available to livestock producers such as veterinarians, auction marts, feedlots etc.. The two hour session concluded with a presentation from a family that had moved into the area and gave their experience of the issues involved in making the transfer and how they felt about the new area.

Attendance at the seminars ranged around 40 – 60 people for the first two years. The next two years, in 2004 and 2005 attendances were lower, from 15 – 25 people because of the BSE crisis and as well in 2004 the seminars occurred during a period of very cold weather. In January of 2006 meetings at Fort Macleod, Olds college and Vermilion enjoyed attendances averaging 60 – 80 people.

The results of the initiative have been encouraging. Over 100 families have been identified that have moved to the East Central Region over the last 5 years. There are now many examples of farms that have converted from grain to grass/livestock production. In some areas the land market has stabilized allowing older farmers to exit farming. There is now a critical mass of “cowboy folks,” such that a Cowboy rodeo has been organized and held in August for the last two years. Many of the organizers and supporters of this event are people who have moved into the area.

The project is being carried on with a targeted advertising campaign to beef producers in Alberta and Ontario.