

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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PROBLEM SOLVER



Cattle eagerly await their feed during one of the first warm days of spring. The new owners of JBC Farms are grateful to have their operation in central Montana, as it's a prime place for feed and cattle.

| PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDY KELLOM

Judith Basin County Farms manager Andy Kellom talks the new owners, overcoming unanticipated challenges

STORY BY CHARLIE DENISON | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

DRIVING out past Eddie's Corner en route to Great Falls it's impossible not to notice Judith Basin County Farms Ltd, the farm, ranch and feedlot previously known as Bos Terra LP.

General Manager Andy Kellom, who worked as cattle manager for Bos Terra, has overseen this transition and taken on additional responsibilities for the Serfas and Schooten families of southern Alberta, who purchased the property in May 2020. Altogether there are five owners: two brothers from the Serfas family and three brothers from the Schooten family.



Andy Kellom

"Their interest here was in expanding their base of supplying feeder cattle into their operation in Alberta," Kellom said. "Over the last 5-6 years there's been a lot more interest from the Canadian cattle-feeding industry in feeder cattle coming out of the United States, and that's benefited central Montana."

As manager, Kellom buys light-weight feeder cattle and calves from

central Montana ranches, as well as all around the state.

"I would say 90 percent of our cattle comes from Montana," he said.

The cattle are grown at JBC Farms for 4-6 months, and then sent to the owners' feed lots in southern Alberta.

Unfortunately, this mission came at a difficult time, as the COVID-19 pandemic created many unforeseeable obstacles.

"Oh, boy," Kellom said. "Not only do we have the everyday complications

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

84th Annual Meeting was a big success!

Thank you to everyone who attended our 84th annual meeting of the membership on June 9 at the Fergus County Trade Center.

The beautiful weather and recent moisture had us all in good spirits. The meeting was well attended, with approximately 250 attendees and 136 registered members. The Montana CattleWomen prepared an excellent lunch for everyone, and we thank them for their delicious annual meeting meals.

Our Election and Credentials Committee members were on hand to distribute, accept and count the ballots while members of the Director Nomination Committees spoke on behalf of their committees and introduced the board candidates. Thank you to everyone who took time out of their day to help us have a successful meeting.

Throughout the meeting, we discussed the significant growth and work completed in 2021, along with several projects coming up in future years. One project that we have discussed the last few years has been a new operations facility in



Former Manager Scott Sweeney, Former Manager Steve Balster and Former Foreman Dave Phifer support the co-op that they dedicated a large part of their lives to for years.

the community of Roundup. We have outgrown our existing facility, and we continue to see robust growth throughout the Roundup area. We have spent the last two years building a plan and asking for member feedback.

I cannot thank our membership enough for the overwhelming support and vote of confidence (112-9) in our proposed Roundup facility. We understand that this project comes at a considerable expense to our member-

ship. I commit to each of you that we will work to manage construction costs while providing a facility to meet the needs of our cooperative for decades to come.

During our meeting, we also had the opportunity to thank the estate of Charlie Guinn and Susan Knedler for the generous donation of their capital credits to be used for student scholarships. We certainly witnessed a special moment when our Board of Directors awarded all 19 students in attendance, who had submitted their applications hoping for a chance at winning the Luck of the Draw scholarship, a \$1,000 scholarship to pursue their educational aspirations.

I want to thank each of the students who attended, and I wish them the best of luck in their endeavors. Thank you all for a wonderful annual meeting. I appreciate your support and input.

The weather has been making up for lost time, and I hope our recent streak of moisture continues. I look forward to seeing fields full of round bales dotting our beautiful landscape. Enjoy your summer! RM



Fergus Electric's Board of Directors awarded all 19 students who attended the annual meeting a \$1,000 scholarship to pursue their educational aspirations, thanks to the estate of Charlie Guinn and Susan Knedler generously donating their capital credits to be used for student scholarships.

KELLOM

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that everybody's had during COVID, but we're dealing with an international border at the same time. It's created significant issues — some of which we are still dealing with today. We're often full of cattle and need to get cattle moving, which is easier said than done because the slaughter rates have slowed in Alberta...there are a lot of trickle effects down the chain."

One such effect included the owners' inability to travel to their new site.

"They couldn't come down here for a year," Kellom said. "It was crazy they could own a farm, a feedlot, a business in the United States, but because of the COVID restrictions they couldn't get across the border. Period. That was a challenge, alright. A big challenge. We had to shift our operation to match their vision without them being here. But you just have to find a way.

Most of the cattle purchased by JBC Farms come directly from rancher order buyers or video markets. The majority of these cattle are Black Angus from Montana. | **PHOTO**
COURTESY OF ANDY KELLOM

You have to figure out how to work around it."

And they did.

Fortunately, Kellom said, new technology has been a blessing to help navigate some of these drawbacks.

"Thanks to satellite images, the owners have been able to literally look at the fields to make a farm plan and a cropping plan without actually being here," he said. "Without that technology, things would be vastly different."

Choosing Central Montana

The Serfas and Schootens were looking for land around the Treasure State, and what they found in central Montana exceeded expectations.

"I don't believe they were expecting to find a property with a feedlot

A loader loads feed into a feed truck at JBC Farms in March. | **PHOTO**

COURTESY OF ANDY KELLOM

Judith Basin



County Farms Ltd.

on it," Kellom said. "I think they were probably expecting to find a property and then build a feedlot, so when they found this property, it was extremely attractive to them. And this property also has the grass with it, which complements their operation very well."

Central Montana's supply of feed and high-quality feeder cattle also complements the operation, as does the geographic location.

"We are closer to Alberta than we are to a lot of places in Montana," Kellom said. "Their operation in Canada is only about four hours from here."

Fortunately for the Serfas and Schootens, this transition was also relatively seamless in terms of personnel.

"Basically, all the employees who worked for the previous owners — myself included — transitioned to the new ownership," Kellom said.

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KELLOM

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Although the Bos Terra and JBC Farms business models have some differences, much of the general operation is similar: managing personnel, commodity procurement and all things cattle.

"Our number-one responsibility every day for all of us is taking care of the cattle," Kellom said. "There are a lot of logistics on the cattle side, especially when it comes to getting the performance out of the cattle that we need to get. The veterinary staff and nutrition staff we work with do an excellent job in this department."

Tying it to the community

Kellom, who started at Bos Terra in September 2011, is very familiar with the site, and with the operations at hand. Although his title is general manager, he simply considers himself a problem solver.

"I spend a lot of time solving one thing or another," he said. "I don't always get to wake up Monday morning and do what I thought I'd be doing Friday afternoon. I've learned to roll with it."

Kellom has many responsibilities, which at times can be a bit of a balancing act, but he enjoys it, especially when it comes to working with personnel and the people of the community.

"I essentially serve as the interface between the owners and their vision for both the employees and the community," Kellom said. "That's the best part about the job for me. I really enjoy getting to know the people in

Hobson and the surrounding areas. We can't do what we do without these relationships, and it goes both ways. We've become a really good market source for local farmers. It's really a great asset to the community to have a business like this here."

In fact, this is more the case than ever.

"Bos Terra typically was not after the same high-quality type of cattle right around us, but Judith Basin County Farms are after that kind of cattle," Kellom said. "Bos Terra may have bought a lot of grain and commodity, but now we are buying a lot of cattle out of central Montana, too. This being the case, it's my goal to build long-term relationships with cattle producers, just as we've done with the grain and hay producers. These are good people with the right cattle, and I look forward to working with them all."

Despite the pandemic-related misfortunes that plagued Kellom and the owners during the transition to a new operation, the long-term goal remains the same.

"We are interested in expanding the base of our production to provide more feed to the feedlot," Kellom said. "We want to continue to build relationships and operate as efficiently as we possibly can."

The future, Kellom said, remains bright for JBC Farms.

"We're hopeful," he said. "If you don't have a little optimism in the farming and ranching business, it can get pretty tough."

Editor's note: Judith Basin County Farms became a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative in May 2020.

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

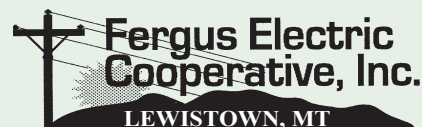
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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

★★★

CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative office will be closed Monday, July 4