



Ryan Boyd, a beef farmer near Brandon, stands with his herd of cattle. (Drew May/The Brandon Sun)

Farmer receives Nuffield scholarship

BY DREW MAY

When Ryan Boyd wants to get his herd's attention, he yells "Cow boss!" across the field.

The cattle react almost instantly, turning with a "moo" and coming over, stopping approximately 15 feet away to look at him expectantly.

Boyd says the cattle are trained to come when they hear the phrase, and that each farmer has their own. His father used "Cow boss," too.

The herd of approximately 300 cattle is just one component of Boyd's farm and agricultural work. He also farms grain, using his herd to make the land more productive by having cattle graze on fallow land, fertilizing the land naturally with their manure.

Boyd was recognized for his work with a Nuffield scholarship, an international prize that celebrates farmers who are delivering long-term benefits to farmers and growers, providing them with international travel opportunities.

He said he was first introduced to the scholarship through other recipients who were touring through Westman, which included a stop at his farm. Scholars get the chance to travel to different countries

studying how other farmers do their work, learning about the issues that affect them.

"I kind of thought, 'Hey, this looks like a great opportunity,' so I applied thinking, 'Well chances of me getting it are probably slim but hey, we'll give it a shot, why not?' and lo and behold, here we are."

He said he was humbled when he heard he received the scholarship last year, which gives farmers \$15,000.

"In November we had the opportunity to meet the past scholars, and it's an impressive group of people," Boyd said. "I guess I'm still in awe and excited and a little bit nervous just waiting to see where this adventure takes me."

The third-generation farmer at South Glanton Farms — just north of Brandon — uses a method of rotating pasture and cash crops through his plots of land and lets his herd graze on the pasture land when it's not growing grain.

By doing so, Boyd said he is able to return the land to a more natural state and break many of the negative cycles, like having to fertilize and spray for pests, that regular farmers have to deal with. He said this is akin to what the land was like before large-scale agriculture in Mani-

toba, when bison would move through the area through the year in search of fresh grass.

While the pasture land doesn't make money itself, it reduces the amount he has to spend on feeding the cattle or buying fertilizer.

He uses this method in the winter as well as the cows stay outside for the season. Their manure will help fertilize the land in the spring, once the snow melts.

The method of land management also makes beef farming more environmentally friendly. When the land is growing pasture there are many different types of local plants on it, which provide habitat for wildlife, as well as food for cows. The cattle also reintroduce nutrients in the soil through their manure.

"Cattle get a bad rap because the cattle release methane. When you take that cow and put her in a grazing system on pasture, yeah she's still releasing some methane, but that methane pales in comparison to the carbon that's able to be sequestered."

When properly managed, the land is also able to absorb more water and filter it properly into the water table. Boyd said this could cut down on extreme runoff into rivers, reducing the

amount of flooding in the province.

"If we can reduce peak flows during flood events in Brandon, well that's huge money (saved)."

Boyd is looking for sponsors to help him with the costs associated with the travel portion of winning the Nuffield scholarship. He said winners get the chance to go to the United States, Mexico, Brazil, the Netherlands and New Zealand for six weeks in March and April to study other forms of agriculture.

He hopes to bring what he learns back to Canada and help improve agriculture across the country. Farmers are always looking for ways to improve things and provide the biggest benefit possible with their land. Boyd said he hopes to get a better insight regarding what the future might hold for farmers in Canada and across the world.

"I'm just really excited about this opportunity to do some travelling and visit with other farmers around the world and hopefully gain some meaningful insight for what we do here in our farm but also on a greater Western Canada and Canadian scale."

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