

## nouvelleagriculture

## Project good for the farmer, good for the environment

by Dan Brisebois  
Bonnyville

The Tellier project is an ambitious undertaking by one area farmer to improve production on his farm, while doing something good for the environment at the same time.

For all intents and purposes Luke Tellier's ranch southwest of Bonnyville is a typical cattle farm, except for the watering system.

The cattle's traditional watering location has been dammed up and fenced off, even though it still provides

water for them. Now a set of eight 64-watt solar panels pumps the water automatically, thanks to a motion sensor above the nearby trough. The system has a wind-based power source to complement its solar aspect, and can accommodate 600 cattle.

Five years ago, under its Water For Life strategy, the province encouraged environmental projects that would help farmers improve their operations in an eco-friendly manner. Funded equally by Ducks Unlimited and the Moose Lake Water For Life committee, the project also came to fruition thanks to Tellier providing countless hours of work, such as putting in the fencing.

"The thought behind this particular project was that this drainage does eventually wind up in Moose Lake," Ducks Unlimited's Trevor Matthews explained.

"The cattle were wintering in the slough area, and there was quite a buildup of manure over the course of the winter. When you get a big flush of spring run-off, some of those nutrients do get flushed into Moose Lake. By plugging the ditch and maintaining the wetlands, the vegetation that's in the wetland will use up those nutrients before they can drain off into the lake."

This fall will mark the one-year anniversary of the project and Tellier said he's had nothing but positive results from the experiment.

He has two watering troughs for his cattle on another portion of the ranch, but he prefers to rotate the cattle throughout the year.

"We looked at putting in a gravity system, but we just don't have the hills here to make that work, so we went with this system instead," he said.

Matthews noted that although measurements of the actual wetlands on the Tellier ranch haven't been done, the pos-

itive impact of the new watering system has been enormous.

He estimates the reclaimed wetlands area on the ranch is playing home to 30 to 40 pairs of waterfowl per square mile. This number varies across the province.

"We wouldn't know for sure unless we came in the spring time and did a nest count... But 30 to 40 is probably above average in this area."

Matthews explained that Ducks Unlimited's focus was at one time to create new grass covered areas for waterfowl. But over the last few years the focus has changed to restore wetlands to their natural state.

"We're not buying land to convert it from canola fields or barley fields to grass, with the intent of providing more cover for ducks. The programs have changed with the focus now primarily on restoring wetlands," he said.

"We'll do these wetlands reclamations anywhere from one or two acres to several hundred acres. If you have any drained wetlands on your property, we'll come out and do an assessment. We can look and see where the drain is, put a small ditch plug made of earth in it, or if it's a big wetland, 100 acres or so, they can build a big engineered structure."

After an assessment and approval, Ducks Unlimited will pay the farmer 100 per cent of the value of the land for all wetlands areas the farmer puts under the program.

"The conditions are you can never break it, and you can never drain it," Matthews clarified.

"So for cattle guys it's great because when it dries up you can still go in there and cut the hay. You can still put your cattle in it to graze it. There are no conditions on grazing intensity or time of haying. Our main objective is to get the wetlands back to their original state."

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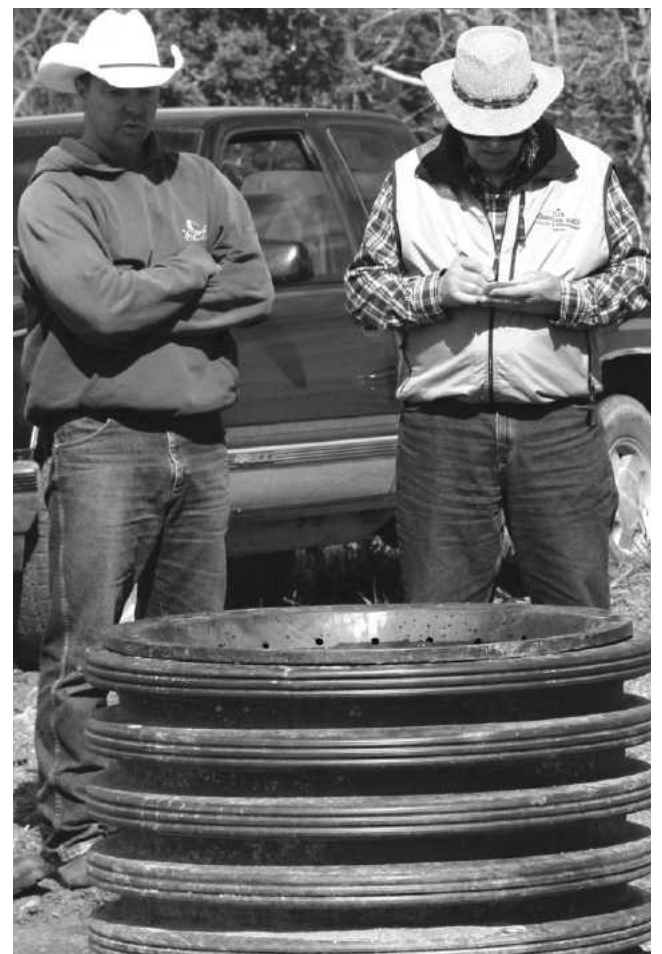
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■ **FARMING INNOVATION** — (Above) Powered by eight solar cells, Luke Tellier's new watering system can sustain up to 600 heads of cattle's watering needs. (Below) Luke Tellier, left, gives a fellow farmer a tour of his high tech cattle watering system, a partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Photos by Dan Brisebois



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