

Good Electric Fences Make Productive Farms

By Andrew Bennett, General Advisor, Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors

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From installation to maintenance, fencing is one of a farmer's greatest investments in time and money, but the cost of a poor fence is greater. A herd of elk can destroy a forage crop overnight, coyotes can clean out your chickens before morning coffee and livestock escapees may damage themselves, neighbours' properties, and your reputation as a farmer.

Electric fencing has been a game-changer, offering farmers less expensive and more effective, adaptable, and easily-maintained fencing options than barbed wire, for example. A well-placed strand of **polybraid** can revitalize an old perimeter fence, multi-strand **high-tensile** requires fewer posts and costs less than page wire, and portable **electric-netting** can both end the problem of goats on the roof and open new opportunities on unfenced leased land.

Graziers who are able to modify their management to take advantage of the flexibility of electric fencing are poised to reap the greatest profits. Grazing guru **Jim Gerrish** made this clear at three field days in August with the Kootenay and Boundary Farm Advisors: moving cattle frequently with easily **reeled cross fences** can dramatically increase the production and quality of grass and meat and, practitioners maintain, actually saves time overall. Jim pointed out that across North America, ranchers who have switched from extensive to "**management-intensive grazing**" often see a doubling of their net profit per acre.

A common complaint is that elk and moose can blitz through an electric fence. Master fencer and equipment supplier **Rob Davidson** agrees that elk and moose are lazy jumpers: they see the fence, even high-tensile, but unless it packs a whollop they're unlikely to make the effort to lift their back legs on the way over. Weak fence problems are often caused by insufficient fencer power, insufficient grounding, and high-resistance conductors. A well-grounded fence on a modern **high-joule energizer**, running through low-resistance wire, will pose no risk of fire but can keep its strength across rocky, frozen, or heavily vegetated terrain. You might have to fix up a couple more breaks, Rob says, but within a week or two the animals will learn.

The Kootenay Boundary Farm Advisors (KBFA) offers our farmers consultations with Jim, Rob and other fencing experts tailored to your specific operation. Plans are also in the works for **Fencing Field Days in 2019**. If consultations or participating in a Field Day interest you, or if there are other ways KBFA can help your farm gain efficiencies and be more profitable, get in touch: coordinator@kbfa.ca or phone: 778-771-5851.

Links for additional information on electric fencing:

- **POLYBRAID:** <https://powerflexfence.com/collections/powerflex-polybraid>

- *ENERGIZER*: <https://www.stafix.com/en/product/x6i-unigizer%E2%84%A2>
- *HIGH TENSILE*: https://kencove.com/fence/4_Why+Build+High-Tensile+Fences%3F_resource.php
- *NETTING*: https://www.premier1supplies.com/goats/fencing.php?fence_id=88
- *REELS*: <https://www.speedrite.com/en/category/reels>
- *JIM GERRISH*: <http://www.americangrazinglands.com/>
- *MANAGEMENT INTENSIVE GRAZING*:
<https://www.chelseagreen.com/product/management-intensive-grazing/>