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# Sainfoin – A New Light is Shone on an Old Forage Plant

Sainfoin comes from two French words, "sain" and "foin" meaning "healthy hay." It is native to and has been grown for centuries in Europe and western Asia.

## Set up an interview

### Media Relations

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What is unique to the plant is that sainfoin contains a moderate concentration of condensed tannins, which help cattle process plant protein more efficiently. This in turn prevents bloat (the build-up of gas in the rumen), a condition common in the spring, when pasture plants are at their most luscious pre-bud stage. Bloat can kill cattle within minutes, so sainfoin and other forages high in condensed tannins are a desirable addition to grazing lands.

Canadian research into the forage crop boomed in the '60s and '70s, but tapered off due to the crop's poor ability to grow in mixed forage stands (for example, with alfalfa or other standard forage plants). This reduced stand longevity (ability to thrive and re-grow year after year) meant pasture managers had to replant them frequently, which was too expensive for most to consider worthwhile.

However, sainfoin made a comeback, with a new Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)-produced variety *AC Mountainview*. Developed by AAFC's Dr. Surya Acharya at Lethbridge, this variety has proven itself with excellent productivity and good longevity.

What is adding excitement to this somewhat forgotten crop is that sainfoin forage quality is similar to alfalfa, and forage production is generally similar to or slightly lower than alfalfa, depending on the growing conditions, although *AC Mountainview* has forage production equivalent to alfalfa. That holds big potential for pasture managers!

Other developmental sainfoin varieties are also being tested for their forage production and stand longevity in southwest Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta, which are Canada's primary grazing lands.

*"What is important here is that sainfoin is being tested in a variety of mixtures under real-life grazing condition. This will tell us which varieties will stand the test of time and be good investments for pasture managers."*

*– Dr. Alan Iwaasa, research scientist, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*

Testing will be done at AAFC facilities in Swift Current, Lethbridge and in conjunction with the Western Beef Development Centre at Lanigan. Results from this work are expected in 2017.

## Benefits

- Sainfoin is a desirable, bloat-safe grazing plant, but its stand longevity needs improvement.
- AAFC is developing and testing new varieties targeted to grow in the Brown Soil Zone.

- New sainfoin varieties will give pasture managers a bloat-safe forage that does not need to be replanted as frequently as the older varieties.

## Photo Gallery



*Sainfoin, a bloat-safe forage plant that has much potential for pasture managers.*



*Plots of sainfoin being tested at AAFC's research facility in Swift Current.*



*Steers grazing on sainfoin, a bloat-safe forage plant being researched by AAFC.*

## Related Information

- [Dr. Alan Iwaasa](#)
- [Lethbridge Research Centre](#)
- [Western Beef Development Centre](#)

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