

LIVESTOCK PREDATION PREVENTION PROJECT (LPPP)

COW BELLS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF LIVESTOCK/PREDATOR INTERACTIONS

As tested by Manitoba producers cooperating with the Manitoba Livestock Predation Prevention Pilot Project



mbbeef.ca | 204-772-4542

Livestock producers are all familiar with the concept of cow bells, a simple metal bell attached to a collar around the cow's neck. Small dairies used cow bells to find cows to round them up for milking time when small herds were on pasture between milkings. The question investigated in the pilot project was: Does a cow bell stop predator attacks on pasture livestock in the modern era? We tested cow bells and had positive and negative comments.

Background:

Cow bells have existed and been employed by cattle and sheep herders since the Bronze Age of human history. Bells can assist in locating stock, identify ownership, and some believe that the sounds of a bell may ward off predators.

Our project involved purchasing 10 bells per farm and finding producers who were willing to try bells to determine if they ward off predators or make any difference to predation risk.

Most of the producers involved in the project applied one bell per every 20 cows or a 5% application rate.

Cow Bell Project Facts:

1. Tested on 6 commercial Manitoba farms.
2. Six beef farms, no sheep farms.
3. 50% of farms had every bell remain intact through the season.
4. Producers averaged 213 head of cattle.
5. 50% of producers believed that bells would help protect livestock.
6. 67% of producers believed that bells assisted them in finding cows quicker.
7. 83% of producers would replace the bells if they were lost.
8. One producer believed that the bells attracted wolves and the wolves could find his herd easier.



Cow Bells as a Predator Risk Mitigation Practice

Predators: Wolves, coyotes, foxes, bears, cougars

Livestock: All species of livestock

Pilot Project Costs of installing 10 cow bells (2022)

Qty	Item	Cost Each	Total
10	Bevin Model 2K 5.75 inch Kentucky cow bells	\$20.59	\$205.90
10	nylon collars	\$12.49	\$124.90
Total			\$330.80



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Cow Bell Basics:

1. Cow bells are intended to assist in predator reduction by scaring predators when the bell rings loudly or with unusual pace.
2. Cattle at rest with bells make no noise.
3. Cattle fleeing, or challenging predators with head grinding, or foot stomping will cause erratic bell ringing.
4. Erratic bell ringing on one cow is likely to raise the awareness of other cows to come to the rescue, and intentionally surround and attack a predator.
5. Cow bells are impractical on an entire large herd, as the ringing would rarely stop, and cost and maintenance would be impractical. As such a small portion of cows in the herd might be better choices upon which to affix a bell.
 - a) **Option 1:** Affix bells to most aggressive dominant cows which show the most aggression towards cattle dogs or humans.
 - b) **Option 2:** Affix bells to cows which are older or lame or cows most likely to be attacked, so when fleeing or defending themselves, their bells will ring.
 - c) **Option 3:** Affix bells to mother cows who have slower or recuperating calves so that their defense acts will ring their bells.

Limitations of Cow Bells

- Cow bells do not harm any predator.
- Cow bells ring a little bit almost all the time that cattle are grazing.
- Most research on cow bells has some positive feedback; however, one study in Switzerland indicated that some predators may be attracted by bells.

Conclusions

Producers like the idea of bells, because they can fairly quickly identify where their cows are located. There is also a level of enjoyment derived from listening and seeing cows graze with the occasional docile ring. The project assessment did not find that producers perceived less predation with the application of bells.

Project Participant Feedback

"Bells help at night; when one cow makes a noise, all of the cows know there is something to watch for."

– Eriksdale Manitoba beef producer

"Bells are okay, but some pastures are so dangerous with wolves that not much helps."

– Moosehorn Manitoba beef producer

"The bells were not effective; the whole herd might need a bell each. I think a few bells makes the prey easier to find by wolves."

– Lake Winnipegosis Manitoba beef producer

"The bells didn't deter the coyotes, they got used to the sound and walked between the cows. A bigger improvement was good grass production in 2022; the cows grazed in smaller groups and were not spread out as far as in the dry year of 2021."

– Portage la Prairie Manitoba beef producer

**For more information on the
Manitoba Livestock Predation
Prevention Pilot Project
and other Risk Mitigation Practices
please visit <https://mbbeef.ca/>**



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