

Alternative Land Use Services - sustaining agriculture, wildlife and natural spaces for all Canadians

Submitted by the ALUS team

What is ALUS?

ALUS is a community led, farmer delivered program that provides payment to farmers and ranchers to enhance and maintain the benefits nature can provide to society. ALUS works by empowering local communities and puts them at the centre of conservation policy. ALUS then engages farmers and ranchers as productive environmental partners on the working landscape. ALUS farmers and ranchers in turn create benefits from nature necessary for everyone. These are called ecosystem services, and are made up of things such as clean air, clean water, erosion and flood control as well as habitat for pollinators, fish and wildlife.

What does ALUS do?

ALUS provides payment and support for the production of ecosystem services. Producers choose to enroll in ALUS by simply submitting an expression of interest outlining the environmental projects that fit with their operation. The priority is to restore and maintain marginal, unproductive, inefficient, or environmentally sensitive lands and put them into production of ecosystem services.

What is ALUS paying for?

ALUS is a “fee for service” model, that is, payment is made annually for the value of the ecosystem services produced in that year by the sites restored and maintained by the landowner. These services are often also referred to as environmental goods and services and often can be quantified as the tonnes of carbon sequestered or quantity of water filtered for example.

Where did ALUS come from?

ALUS was originally the idea of an innovative farmer named Ian Wishart of Manitoba and was quickly picked up by the Keystone Agricultural Producers in that province. After years of development in Manitoba and Ontario, together with the support of key contributors such as Delta Waterfowl Foundation and The W. Garfield Weston Foundation, ALUS landed in Vermillion River as the flagship Alberta community project. Today, a new organization, ALUS Canada, delivers the ALUS concept to rural Alberta communities. Participating communities now include Parkland, Red Deer, Lac Ste. Anne, Mountain View, Wetaskiwin and Leduc with more expected to join.

Where is ALUS heading?

ALUS Canada is leading a nationwide effort to develop markets for the ecosystem services produced by participating landowners. Markets include those created by regulation (The Specified Gas Emitters Regulation and carbon offset market in Alberta for example) and those that are voluntary, representing efforts by corporations, governments and even ordinary Canadians to reduce their impact on the environment by engaging with producers.

ALUS is now operating in 5 provinces and will seek to build a national, sustainable program that recognizes the value farmers and ranchers can provide from the working landscape with a goal to create a healthy, landscape that sustains agriculture, wildlife and natural spaces for all Canadians.

What does ALUS look like in Alberta?

Agriculture is different from community to community. ALUS is designed to be flexible and adaptable to the unique characteristics of each community, farm, and ecosystem. Local delivery of ALUS is guided by multi-stakeholder Partnership Advisory Committees (PAC) in each ALUS community, made up of farmers, ranchers, County Councillors and Agricultural Services Board members, and technical expertise from government and non-government organizations. The PAC makes decisions on local projects, and provides advice on how to make good projects even better.

ALUS in Alberta is currently focused on wetlands and riparian area, with adjacent native range and forests also being enrolled. On-the-ground ALUS projects in Alberta include riparian management fencing, off-site livestock watering, portable shelters, tree planting, wetland restoration, buffer zone establishment around wetlands in annual crop fields, and more.

One of the principles of ALUS is integration. In Alberta, ALUS is integrated at the local and farm-gate levels, with other agro-environmental initiatives such as Growing Forward 2, Alberta Environmental Farm Planning and the Environmental Stream of the Agricultural Services Board program.



Keith and Tracy Johnson beside a wetland on their custom grazing operation that they have enrolled in the ALUS Program. Here, they are being interviewed by Jim Fisher of Delta Waterfowl (and ALUS Canada) for a “Meet an ALUS Farmer” episode, available at <http://www.alus.ca/video/meet-alus-farmer-johnsons>



Kevin Ziola, an ALUS Farmer who has done multiple projects on his farm. He and his wife Roxanne are growing ecosystem services on over 25 acres of riparian area on their land, along 2.5 miles of stream. They are doing this through off-site watering, riparian management fencing, riparian tree and shrub planting, and installing mallard nesting tunnels.

More information on the ALUS Program can be found at www.alus.ca or by contacting any of the people and communities delivering ALUS.

Key Climate Change Messages from the Alberta Crop Commissions

Submitted by Erin K. Gowriluk

On Thursday, September 17, 2015, we (Erin Gowriluk, Government Relations and Policy Manager with the Alberta Wheat Commission, and Nevin Rosaasen, Policy and Program Specialist with Alberta Pulse Growers') gave a presentation to the Government of Alberta's newly formed Climate Change Panel on behalf of Alberta's cropping sector. The panel has been meeting with representatives from a variety of sectors over the past few weeks and took time on the 17th to meet with stakeholders in the agriculture, forestry and waste sectors. The recommendations that the panel brings forward to Premier Rachel Notley at the end of this month will be considered as the government endeavours to develop a framework for climate change in Alberta. The Premier will present this framework at the United Nations Climate Change Conference which takes place in Paris from November 30th to December 11th, 2015.

In preparation for the consultation we have worked with representatives from Alberta Barley and the Alberta Canola Producers' Commission to ensure alignment in the messages brought forward to the panel. This type of collaboration continues to make sense as many of our farmers grow all four crops.

The presentation included an overview of the grains sector which started with an introduction to the all of the practices that Alberta farmers have voluntarily adopted over the years with the aim to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions including: conservation tillage, precision agriculture, responsible fertilizer use (4R Nutrient Stewardship) and an increase in continuous cropping through the conversion of summer fallow acres (from 8 million acres in the 1970's to 700,000 today). These advancements are possible in part to the ongoing and significant financial investments into research and innovation made by Alberta farmers every year. In addition to the aforementioned practices, these investments have led to improved crop genetics using biotechnology as well as traditional plant breeding methods aimed at increasing yields, improving herbicide tolerance, developing resistant cultivars and improving water and nitrogen use efficiency.

In response to the issues outlined in the *Climate Leadership Discussion Document* (pg. 52 – 57), which cites nitrous oxide as the source of approximately 30% of agriculture's total emissions, we identified two opportunities: the sector could decrease its overall emission intensity, this can be achieved by either increasing input efficiency or increasing outputs (yields) or a combination of the two. This could be accomplished through broader adoption of the 4R Nutrient Stewardship, which has the potential to reduce emissions by up to 20%. This coupled with the increased adoption of precision agriculture and soil testing to ensure that only the required amounts of nutrients are being applied, represent opportunities for the sector to reduce emissions.

Closing messages reminded the panel that agriculture is a small contributor at only 7% of the provinces total GHG emissions (split between crops and livestock); that modern agriculture is a leader in sustainability, that Alberta farmers are driven to be better - voluntarily investing millions of dollars into research and development - and that any policy changes aimed at agriculture would have a minimal impact on Alberta's total emissions.

Interested in joining the conversation!? Tweet using the hashtag #abclimate and contribute to the live discussion at <http://alberta.ca/climate-leadership.cfm>

Commissions and associations also have the opportunity to make formal submissions to the panel before the end of September 2015.

Link to Climate Leadership Discussion Document: <http://alberta.ca/climate-leadership.cfm>

Link to video Alberta Crops Sustainability Certification Pilot Project Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3PizRN8NsM>

On Common Ground: Messages from the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta – Issue #11, Sept 2015

McDonald's VSB Pilot Update

September 17, 2015

Where we're at today

The McDonald's Verified Sustainable Beef Pilot Project (VSB Pilot) has continued to gain momentum over the last several months and celebrated the following significant milestones.

1. **Indicator development completed** – After more than 12 months of robust stakeholder engagement, resulting in more than 150 edited versions, the Cow-calf/Extensive and Fed cattle/Intensive indicators have been finalized. McDonald's recognizes and appreciates the significant insights and value they received from the twelve-member Scientific Advisory Board¹. These indicators enable Canadian beef producers to demonstrate the outcomes they achieve. This is in contrast to practice-based indicators that prescribe the practices producers use. These indicators have been shared with all enrolled participants and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef Indicator Committee to help them draft their own indicators.
2. **Chain of custody making progress** – Our collaborative work with BIXS Co. have yielded significant progress in tracking movements of cattle to and from operations enrolled and verified in the pilot through BIXS 2.0. Our work with the BIXS team has progressed to the point where they are generating monthly reports on the following data:
 - a. Operations – The number of operations enrolled and verified by sector (Cow-calf, Backgrounder, Feedlot and Processing plant)
 - b. Animal movements in general – The number of head born on or after January 1, 2013 that have come through those operations by sector
 - c. Animal movements related to verified operations – The number of head who have moved only through verified operations from birth to harvest
3. **Field engagement shifts gears**
 - a. Phase 1 – In Phase 1 we began working directly with a select few producers who volunteered as part of a beta-test group. This work enabled us to test and rework the indicators at the same time Where Food Comes From refined their verification procedures, and trained Canadian verifiers to manage the pilot.
 - b. Phase 2 – During Phase 2 we opened up the door to more producers as we continued to refine the indicators, develop comprehensive training materials for the verifiers and train additional verifiers, develop a producer manual and a starter tool-kit for the pilot as we learned what works and doesn't work for field engagement and share lessons with the CRSB. Key lessons learned include:
 - i. Multiply our efforts – To ensure a smooth transition to the CRSB, we need to multiply our efforts through others (e.g. Forage associations, Breeders, Veterinary clinics and Feed companies) in the Canadian beef community. We began holding field workshops hosted by producers who have been through verifications so they can share their first hand experiences. Verifiers are also present at these workshops so producers can ask questions and gain insights before they go through their own verification.

¹ Fawn Jackson-CCA, Bob Lowe-ABP, Page Stuart-ACFA, Jackie Wepruk-NFACC, Susan Church-AB Chair NCC, Melinda German-MBP, Lauren Stone-Cargill, Nancy Labbe-WWF, William Burnidge-TNC, Julie Dawson-AAFC, John Basarab, UA & Lacombe Research Centre, Joe Stookey, USK



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- ii. Value proposition – The value proposition for pilot participants includes the following:
 1. Leadership opportunity – Producers take an active role in shaping the future of the Canadian beef community through the CRSB; and
 2. Free verification – McDonald's pays for them to receive a confidential, professional, independent verification of their operation with the opportunity to benchmark their results against their peers at the end of the pilot; and
 3. Share their story – The opportunity to participate in the pilot celebration workshop in April, 2016 and share their personal vision of what sustainable beef means to them and why that is important; and
4. **Verifications ramping up** – Based on follow up conversations with participants, the verifications have gone very well and producers are eager to get their reports back and learn how they scored. Where Food Comes From has submitted a preliminary report to the Project Management Team and producers will receive their reports by the end of September.

By The Numbers

Participant Status	Participants by Sector by Status					
	Cow-calf/ Extensive	Fed cattle /Intensive	Both C-C & Fed	Unknown	Processor	Total
Enrolled (Expressed an interest, reviewing expectations)	65	15	8	9	2	99
Declined (Expressed an interest then decided no)	3	0	0	0	0	3
Scheduling in progress	5	2	1	0	0	8
Verifications scheduled	2	0	1	0	0	3
Verification completed	17	8	8	0	1	34
Verification with barriers to entry identified	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total operations work in progress	92	25	18	9	3	147
Operations achieving VSB Status	0	0	0		0	0

Where we're headed

1. **Indicator development** – We will issue a press release regarding the finalized indicators in September. The CRSB is scheduled to present their draft indicators at their October meeting. The processor indicators will be finalized in October.
2. **Chain of custody** – To increase the data available for monthly analysis, we will be working with producers and processors to get their animal records (births, move-ins, move-outs, tag retirements) updated in BIXS.
3. **Field engagement** – We will be participating in the following activities
 - a. Livestock Gentec conference – October 13
 - b. Several ABP regional meetings
 - c. Beef Booster Cattle Industry Focus Group – week of November 16
 - d. Longview 4H Club Workshop at Chinook Ranch – November 20



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- e. Western Canada conference on soil health – December 8-10
 - f. Foothills Forage Association Workshop – Date TBD
 - g. West Central Forage Association Workshops – Dates TBD
 - h. Beef Boosters Industry workshop, Thorlakson Feed yards – February 24, 2016
4. **Verifications** – We will continue working with Where Food Comes From to schedule and complete verifications and disseminate reports. We will begin drafting the benchmarking reports and sharing drafts with participants to refine them and deliver the most value while being reviewed at the celebration workshop in April.



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Partner Profile: Alberta Barley

Submitted by Alberta Barley

Alberta Barley is a farmer-directed, not-for-profit organization representing Alberta's barley farmers.

Founded in 1991, Alberta Barley was the first established wheat or barley commission in Canada, and it served as a successful model for commissions that have since been formed across the Prairies.

Alberta Barley is funded through a mandatory, yet refundable, \$1.00 per tonne of barley, check-off. This deduction is the organization's sole source of revenue.

Over the last 24 years, the industry has changed, but our commitment to grassroots representation continues. Without the support of individual farmer members, Alberta Barley would not meet the needs of our farmers.

Every farmer who contributes to Alberta Barley through the mandatory, yet refundable check-off, \$1.00 per tonne of barley, has a say in the decision-making process. Following the direction of our farmer members we reinvest the check-off funds we collect into key areas to grow the barley industry—and its profitability.

Top Priorities:

Alberta Barley works on behalf of its members to bring added value to barley production. We do this by investing in projects, initiatives and partnerships in three key areas: research, market development and policy. These are Alberta Barley's top priorities and areas where we see the greatest return on investment.

**Research**

Our research activities include a number of research projects focusing on feed, malt, food, agronomy and bio-products. Specifically, we invest in research and trials that lead to new barley varieties, fight disease and pests, increase yields, and discover new uses for barley.

Currently, we are involved in 39 ongoing research projects that represent a combined investment of more than \$1.75 million from our farmer members.

Market Development

Our market development activities include the expansion of barley's market reach, promotion of the grain for a variety of end uses and consumer and producer outreach.

To maintain market access we work in collaboration with agriculture commissions and government organizations to uphold relationships with buyers in current markets, and identify emerging opportunities for barley.

Policy

As the voice of Alberta barley farmers, we represent the needs and concerns of our members to governments, regulatory agencies and industry associations.

Over the past year, Alberta Barley has been actively working on sustainability and social licence. These matters are top of mind for the agriculture industry provincially, nationally and internationally, and they have the ability to impact trade at all levels.



To align farm best practices and consumer demand, Alberta Barley partnered with the Alberta Wheat Commission, the Alberta Canola Producers Commission and the Alberta Pulse Growers Commission to spearhead the Alberta Crops Sustainability Certification Pilot Project.

The goal of this project was to identify the successes and gaps within sustainable farming practices in Alberta.

To learn more about this sustainability project and our other priorities, visit albertabarley.com.

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