

Agriculture in Alberta's Landscapes

The Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta's Backgrounder
for Agricultural Participants in Land Use Planning



A Keystone in Alberta's Economy & Community Life

Agriculture is an important economic driver in Alberta. It is a diverse and renewable industry, with a wide variety of commodities including wheat, peas, oats, canola and barley and specialty crops such as potatoes, chickpeas and sunflowers, and livestock such as beef, dairy, hogs, poultry, sheep, bison, elk, horses and goats. Agriculture production contributes greatly to Alberta's exports and provides the foundation for the province's food-processing and bio-industrial industries. Agriculture directly employs thousands of Albertans and generates economic activity in a wide range of agricultural support industries.

Agriculture's vital role in local economies makes it a mainstay of rural life. It builds and strengthens local communities across Alberta. Research and innovation have created new opportunities for agriculture and rural economies sustainability.

Improved crop varieties, better livestock nutrition, advances in crop and livestock management, and alternative uses for agricultural products such as bio-fuels, bio-fibres, and bio-industrials, have generated more options and advances giving agriculture great potential to increase social, environmental, and economic contributions in Alberta for the years ahead.

Demand for agricultural products is expanding. A growing world population is generating increased demand for food. Changing dietary preferences continue to create niche markets for novel products. Consumer interest is increasing in renewable options such as bio-fuels as an alternative to non-renewable petroleum fuels and bio-fibres for renewal and recyclable building products. The "open spaces" agriculture maintains for production will become even more valuable for tourism and recreation. Alberta's significant agricultural land base favourably positions the province to take advantage of these opportunities.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Alberta's real Gross Domestic Product for primary agriculture was \$4.1 billion in 2009.
- In 2009, Alberta's exports of primary and processed agricultural and food products totalled \$7.6 billion.
- The food manufacturing industry was the second largest manufacturing industry in Alberta in 2009. Food manufacturing sales in 2009 totalled \$12 billion.
- The agri-food sector employed 76,500 Albertans in 2009, with 55,300 in primary agriculture and 21,200 in food and beverage manufacturing industries.
- Alberta's total crop and livestock market receipts totalled \$8.5 billion in 2009. Of this total, cattle and calves accounted for 33.9%, wheat 19.8%, canola 19.5%, dairy 5.4%, hogs 3.7%, barley 3.2%, and 14.5% for all other commodities.
- Agricultural producers spent an estimated \$7.6 billion in farm operating expenses in 2009, including inputs such as feed, fuel and fertilizer, supporting the local economy.
- There are over 49,000 farms in Alberta (as of 2006). Total Alberta farmland area is 52.1 million acres, with an average farm size of 1,055 acres.

Source: Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. *Agriculture Facts 2010*.

Key Land Use Issues for Agriculture

The Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) has identified five major issues for agriculture with the creation of the Land-use Framework (LUF). These issues may help you clarify your concerns when you provide your input into decisions made under LUF and the regional plans. It is crucial that these issues be dealt with for agriculture to operate in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

Issue 1: Water Policy

Will water policies sustain the viability of the agriculture industry?

Water is a crucial resource for all sectors, including agriculture. The industry is continually taking steps to enhance water use efficiencies and minimize impacts on water quality. A few examples include more efficient irrigation practices such as using low-pressure centre pivot irrigation systems that conserve water and energy, retaining buffer strips along water bodies to help filter pollutants from the land, and using livestock drinking equipment that reduces water spillage.

Agricultural producers need to be actively engaged in the review of provincial policy on water allocation, and in the development of policies on water quality and watershed management in the regional planning process. Such policies will have important consequences for agriculture. As well, because there is still some uncertainty around the risks posed by climate variability, these policies need to be based on flexible decision-making systems that manage the risk to agriculture's water supply. In addition, if the industry is to remain economically viable, it will need time to adapt to water quality thresholds and other requirements.

Issue 2: Fragmentation and Conversion of Farmland

Will policies on the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land be fair to producers?

Fragmentation of agricultural land occurs when that land becomes divided into smaller parcels isolated from each other by non-agricultural land uses such as residential, oil and gas, and so on. Conversion of agricultural land refers to a change from an agricultural to a non-agricultural land use. Both fragmentation and conversion reduce agricultural productivity.

Issues around protecting agriculture from non-agricultural development are very complex, with many differing perspectives. Producers must have input into decisions on which agricultural lands should be protected from development and how those lands should be protected.

The AEPA believes policies on the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land should:

- Protect and respect the private property interests of landowners.
- Ensure that intergenerational transfer of agricultural land is not restricted.
- Ensure the agriculture industry retains the right to operate and the opportunity to grow in a sustainable manner.
- Provide fair compensation to agricultural landowners who are economically impaired by regional plans and land use policies.
- Ensure that non-agricultural development within agricultural areas is strategic in terms of where and how the development happens.
- Be clear, consistent, credible and fair.



Issue 3: Introduction of a Market to Trade Ecosystem Services

Should there be a net financial advantage for producers who deliver ecosystem services?

Alberta's agriculture industry recognizes the importance and value of ecosystem services. The AEPA would like to see voluntary market-based approaches to enabling producers to financially benefit from sustaining ecosystem services on their lands.

The AEPA wants the agriculture industry to have input into development of these market-based approaches to ensure fair and effective systems for the valuation and trading of ecosystem services.

Ducks Unlimited Ecosystem Services pilot project

Pilot project examines economic and ecological benefits of wetlands in agricultural landscapes.

Wetlands provide some of the richest and most diverse habitat in Canada. They also act as water filters by removing many contaminants from surface runoff, and serve as sources of domestic, livestock and industrial water.

DUC is leading an Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S) pilot project in the South Tobacco Creek watershed near Miami, Manitoba to better understand the ecological and economic benefits provided by wetlands maintained by producers in the agricultural landscape. By understanding the linkages between wetland conservation and the benefits wetlands provide, governments can develop policies that improve water quality while providing benefits to landowners and land managers.

This project is one of the EG&S pilot projects being carried out across the country that will assist in measuring the feasibility of various approaches to environmental stewardship.

www.ducks.ca/conservation/research/projects/egs/index.html

Issue 4: Conservation and Stewardship Tools

How will conservation and stewardship tools play a role in the Regional Planning process?

Alberta's Land Stewardship Act expands the tools available to governments and others for encouraging land conservation and stewardship. These tools include conservation directives, conservation easements, conservation offsets, transferable development credits and conservation exchange. For example, a conservation



easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation agency that limits the type and amount of development that can occur on a property. Previously, easements were aimed at conserving the ecological integrity of a piece of land. The Act expands that purpose to also include conservation of agricultural land.

The agriculture industry needs to have input into development of these tools provincially, regionally and locally to make sure the tools contribute to the industry's sustainability.

Issue 5: The Cumulative Effects Management Approach

What role should agriculture take in the development of the Cumulative Effects strategy?

Cumulative effects management (CEM) is one of the LUF's basic principles. It is an approach to land use decision-making that considers the potential impacts of all activities within an area, rather than the impacts of development on a project-by-project basis. CEM involves establishing desired outcomes and targets or limits for various land uses.

The AEPA strongly supports good land and water management. It recognizes that CEM could bring some benefits to the agriculture industry, including increased transparency of land use decisions, management of growth pressures, streamlining of regulations and approvals, and reduction of land use conflicts. The agriculture industry needs to have input into the CEM's approach provincially, regionally and locally to avoid being excluded from the big picture decisions. As well, the industry needs to be included in the process to prevent unintended negative consequences for agriculture that could possibly occur from this approach.

More information is needed about the process on how agriculture will be balanced with other land uses. The AEPA supports education and incentives rather than increased restrictions to guide balanced land use.

Agricultural producers need to be fully engaged in the development of outcomes and any targets that might be set for air, land, water, and biodiversity constraints because of the potentially profound effects on the industry's sustainability.

Seeking Sustainability

Agriculture is a renewable industry. Agricultural producers strive to ensure their lands remain healthy and productive by using practices such as tillage, sustainable grazing management, and nutrient management that conserve and protect soil, water and air resources. As well, agricultural products are playing a growing role in greening the economy, with innovative approaches to water conservation and renewable energy cycling.

Alberta's agricultural land utilizes 52.1 million acres, about one-third of Alberta's total land base. The demands to relent land to other industry interests, developments, and recreation uses provide both pressure to protect and preserve farm land and opportunities to diversify and develop the land for non-agricultural uses. This places considerable social, economic, and environmental pressure on agriculture businesses.

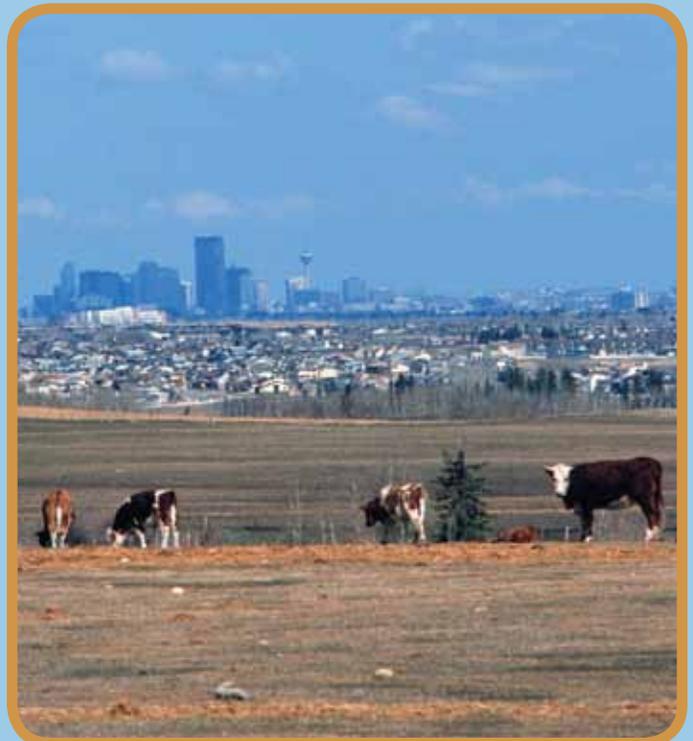
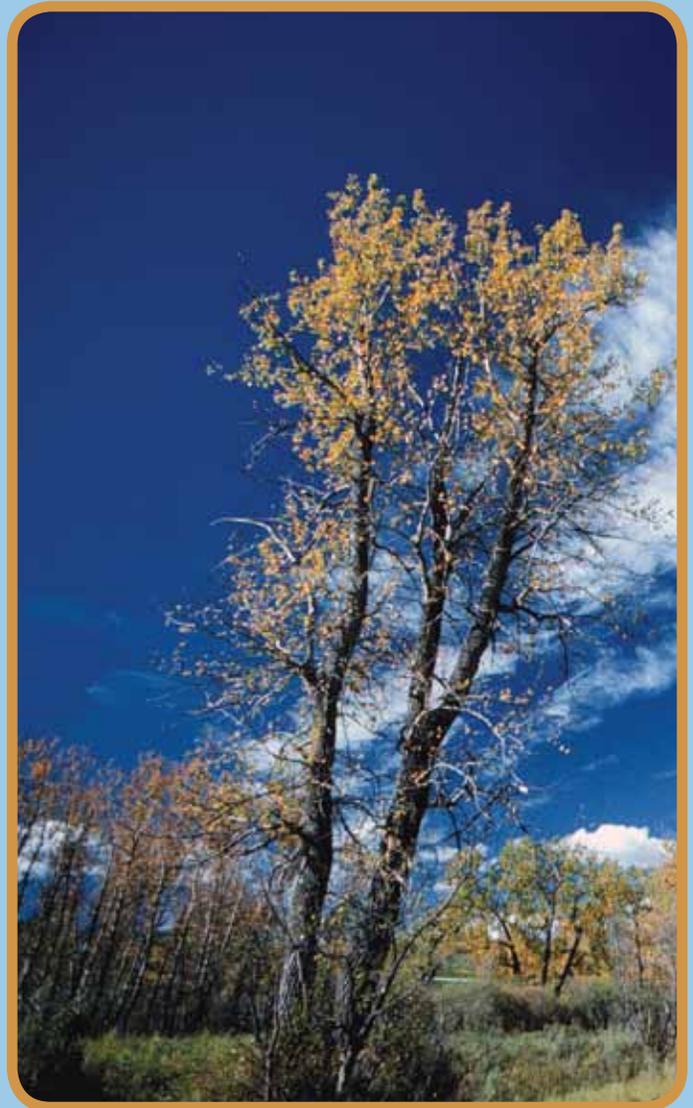
Taking Part in the Land-use Framework Consultations

The Land-use Framework (LUF) is a comprehensive approach to land use planning in Alberta. It is aimed at enhancing the management of public and private lands and natural resources to sustain a healthy economy, healthy ecosystems and people-friendly communities.

Under LUF each of the seven regions in Alberta is developing a long-term plan to guide provincial, municipal and other decision-making agencies on land use planning and management. Each regional plan is being created with input from a regional advisory council and other stakeholders.

The decisions made under LUF and the regional plans will affect all land managers, including agricultural producers. Producers need to be actively engaged in developing the regional plans to ensure that agriculture is able to operate in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner in the coming years.

Your input is required so that agriculture can make a difference.



For More Information

About the Land-use Framework

Visit landuse.alberta.ca for information about Alberta's Land-use Framework.

The AEPA's Key Messages about Land-use Framework Issues

Alberta's agriculture industry needs to play an active part in the development of LUF policies and regional plans:

- In the review of provincial water allocation policy, and the development of water quality objectives as they affect the viability of the agriculture sector.
- In the development and implementation of policies on fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land.
- In the creation and building of voluntary markets for ecosystem services which provide real opportunities and a net financial advantage for agricultural producers.
- In the development and implementation of conservation and stewardship tools.
- In the creation and implementation of cumulative effects management, including prevention of unintended negative consequences for agriculture.

The result must be that agriculture is able to operate in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

About the AEPA

The Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) is an inclusive partnership of the agriculture industry, government and environmental stakeholders. This diverse group provides a unique forum for developing balanced policies and programs to encourage a vibrant, profitable agriculture industry and a healthy, sustainable environment.

Using a consensus-based approach, the AEPA identifies its agri-environmental priorities, sets broad policy directions and coordinates resources to address priority issues. It takes a strategic, proactive approach in achieving its goals, which are:

- Healthy agricultural landscapes that maintain or optimize both their agricultural productivity and ecological integrity.
- A safe and secure water supply for agricultural production.
- Optimal agricultural producer use of technology and nutrients, by adding value, saving costs and minimizing negative impacts on air, land and water.
- Energy-efficient farming systems, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and maximized profitability and productivity.
- Recognizing that Alberta's agricultural producers are environmental stewards.
- Improving relationships between partner members and key stakeholders.
- Allowing partners to have an impact on policy direction.

Visit www.agpartners.ca to learn more about the AEPA.

