



# Strathcona County Agriculture Master Plan *A Time to Choose*









May 8, 2015

Ms. Diana Laviolette Brown  
Supervisor, Agriculture Services  
370 Streambank Avenue, Strathcona County  
Sherwood Park, AB T8A 3W7

**Re: Agriculture Master Plan – Final Report**

Dear Diana,

We are pleased to submit the final report – Agriculture Master Plan for Strathcona County. We trust that the plan will provide the required framework for Strathcona County to assess and develop the agriculture opportunities for which it is most suited.

The Plan is the result of much consultation and could not have been completed without the direction, guidance, and assistance of the Agricultural Services Board and the Transportation and Agriculture Services Department. We wish to extend our sincere thanks.

We appreciate your commitment to agriculture in Strathcona County and wish you every success in determining and developing the detailed tactics necessary for success in the coming years.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to work with you and your team. It has been a very rewarding experience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'J Bouma'.

Jerry Bouma, Project Manager  
Toma & Bouma Management Consultants

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# 1 Executive Summary

## Introduction

Strathcona County is a specialized municipality within the Capital Region, and one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in North America. Within it, agriculture has historically been a major economic activity. However, in recent years as Strathcona County experienced rapid residential, commercial and industrial growth, agriculture is perceived by most residents as having a lower priority. Nevertheless, agriculture continues to be the largest land user within Strathcona County. Although relatively small in terms of area in comparison to other agricultural counties in Alberta, Strathcona County continues to be a highly productive agricultural municipality ranking 6<sup>th</sup> (out of 69 municipalities) in terms of revenues generated per acre.

More than just an economic entity, agriculture offers a degree of local food security; it provides an alternative lifestyle for those who desire this; it helps establish the community character of Strathcona County; and it contributes a set of environmental goods and services such as cleaner air, water, as well as fostering a diversity of wildlife habitat.

The purpose of the Agriculture Master Plan is to address two key questions: **(1)** what is the future of agriculture in Strathcona County? And: **(2)** what strategies and policies are required to enable this future to be realized?

## Setting the Stage

The development of the Agriculture Master Plan followed a process of extensive consultation with stakeholders as well as the analysis of trends, statistics and a review of comparable municipalities. The conclusions are threefold:

1. Numerous opportunities specific to agriculture do indeed exist for Strathcona County.
2. While opportunities and good agricultural land exist, the agriculture industry in Strathcona County faces an array of challenges that are inherent to its location within a fast growing metropolitan region.
3. The most critical factor facing the future of agriculture within Strathcona County lies with the commitment of Strathcona County itself – with its current and future Councils, Administration as well as the supporting stakeholders and residents. Without this strong commitment, agriculture will certainly diminish.

## A Definition of Agriculture

The Agriculture Master Plan begins with the provision of a definition for agriculture that is fitting for Strathcona County:

***The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, foods, horticulture and agri-food related value added enterprises including education, motivated either by profit or lifestyle.***

## Vision

***Strathcona County as 'Canada's most livable community' is distinguished by its agricultural heritage that builds on history and responds to opportunities as a leader in the Capital Region in the provision of a broad range of agricultural and food opportunities as well as services to one of Canada's fastest growing metropolitan regions.***

## Planning Principles

The Agriculture Master Plan will be guided by the following broad principle:

**Agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic and environmental heritage.**

Additionally, the Plan will be supported by the following operating principles:

1. **The long term success of agriculture in a metropolitan context can only be assured with strong supporting and integrated land use, food and agriculture sector development and infrastructure policies.**
2. **The conversion or fragmentation of large tracks, primary or unique agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth (residential, commercial, industrial) will only be done as a last resort.**
3. **The advancement of agriculture requires *shared leadership* including the municipality, residents and stakeholders within Strathcona County, and the Capital Region.**
4. **Changes in agriculture are both continuous and considerable, requiring monitoring and a dynamic and proactive response to emerging trends and opportunities both urban and rural.**

## Priority Areas

The opportunities for agriculture in Strathcona County and hence the priorities areas identified within the Agriculture Master Plan include the following:

1. The continuation of field cropping for the long term—particularly on Class 1 and 2 soils in the northern part of Strathcona County.
2. A strong presence of acreages comprising a mix of specialty production operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, specialized livestock (sheep, goats, bees, llamas, poultry, etc.).
3. A thriving equine sector with related activities such as stables, training, trail riding, community engagement and emerging opportunities in the field of recreation and therapy in the field of autism and post-traumatic stress. Strathcona County has the opportunity to be the "Horse Capital" for the Capital Region and potentially the province.
4. The base for numerous value added operations including primary and secondary processing; related technical and professional services; agricultural research; and the development of unique local markets and market channels for Strathcona County based food, agricultural products and services.
5. Urban agriculture including both individual undertakings (gardens, roof tops, bees, etc.) and community initiatives such as community gardens or related projects.
6. Destination/experience and agri-tourism opportunities such as food festivals; major equine events; trail riding; one day or multi-day outings.
7. Taking a leadership role in the Capital Region specific to the conservation of agricultural land, the development of local food initiatives and related promotional activities.



### Proposed Actions Specific to Governance (Key Points)

Detailed recommendations are presented in Section 7. However, several key recommendations specific to governance are summarized as follows:

1. That current and future Councils and Senior Administration strongly support (and be seen to strongly support) agriculture and the acceptance of the Agriculture Master Plan.
2. That Strathcona County establish a senior leader within the administration that is tasked with and committed to the implementation of this Plan as a high priority.
3. That Strathcona County facilitate and/or establish a Strathcona County Food and Agriculture Institute comprised of interested and motivated stakeholders committed to advancing food and agriculture within Strathcona County.

### Proposed Actions Specific to Food & Agriculture Sector Development (Key Points)

1. Develop an equine strategy with a detailed business plan that identifies priorities, objectives, key initiatives, facility requirements, staffing, resource requirements and timelines.
2. Develop a local food strategy with a detailed business plan that identifies priorities, objectives, key initiatives, facility requirements, staffing, resource requirements and timelines. The feasibility of a greenhouse industry utilizing waste heat that may be available from industry should also be considered.
3. Establish the agri-food value added sector as a business development and attraction priority to be led by an experienced agri-food development officer.



### Proposed Actions Specific to Land Use and other By-Laws (Key Points)

1. That all further development for the purposes of industrial, commercial or residential be considered in a manner whereby the impact on agriculture and lands used for agriculture is minimized or enhanced.
2. That any application to re-zone lands currently zoned agriculture will require the undertaking of an Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) and that the results will be a key consideration in the final zoning decision.
3. That Strathcona County establish an agricultural easement and development credit transfer strategy.

### Proposed Actions Specific to Urban Agriculture (Key Points)

1. Review bylaws etc. related to the establishment of agri-business/opportunities (e.g. food processing, urban/acreage agriculture) and make them more supportive to this type of development/initiative.
2. Develop a strategy and policies to foster urban agriculture.

### Proposed Actions Specific to Agri-Tourism (Key Points)

1. Develop strong marketing and communications programs for each priority area, both individually and in concert with Strathcona County's communication objectives. These will be necessary to create awareness among Strathcona County's residents and attract them to local markets, local food opportunities and events.
2. Encourage rural stakeholders to develop a Strathcona County Agri-Tour – a multiple 'stop' route with a range of experiences and offerings.



### Proposed Actions Specific to Infrastructure (Key Points)

1. Identify the specific requirements of the priority areas identified above in capital plans for future infrastructure. We are aware that Strathcona County is currently evaluating the feasibility of a Multi-Purpose Agricultural Facility that could serve as a centre for the equine sector.
2. Ensure that Strathcona County transportation, roads planning, capital projects and maintenance in rural areas provide the ability to easily access agricultural land, move large agricultural equipment, and ship products to market.

### Proposed Actions Specific to Monitoring Evaluation and Adjustment (Key Points)

1. Be vigilant in monitoring trends and new development in agriculture with specific attention to local food initiatives.
2. Develop a set of indicators and report annually on the success of the implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan. This would include addressing a range of planning measures (land conversions, etc.), business measures (market development achievements, etc.), and progress specific to a Capital Region Agriculture and Food Strategy.

In summary, agriculture does indeed have a future in Strathcona County. However its future is not an extension of the past but a future that is shaped and responsive to the opportunities due in large part to Strathcona County's location in the Capital Region. It is also a future that requires strong leadership and the support of an integrated set of policies.









## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 The Value of Agriculture

Essential to the Agriculture Master Plan for Strathcona County are two questions: **(1)** what is the value of agriculture? and **(2)** how can agriculture contribute to Strathcona County as a municipality and perhaps more importantly, as a community?

There is a multiplicity of contributions to consider when considering these questions. To be sure, agriculture is the major user of land in Strathcona County; it creates jobs and economic wealth for farmers and businesses; it offers a degree of local food security; it provides an alternative lifestyle for those who desire this; it helps establish the community character of Strathcona County; and it contributes a set of environmental goods and services such as cleaner air, water, as well as fostering a diversity of wildlife habitat.

This Agricultural Master Plan aims to integrate these dimensions and benefits into the diverse and complex community that Strathcona County is in a way that is aligned with its strategic plan and sustainability pillars. It attempts to find the right balance in the context of multiple comprehensive planning goals—all competing for the same land and resources in a rapidly growing metropolitan region.

### 2.2 Strathcona County as a Specialized Municipality

Strathcona County holds a unique place in Alberta. As a specialized municipality, the leadership—both Council and Administration, is responsible to balance an increasingly complex array of urban and rural interests unlike most of its municipal counterparts who typically have either a distinctly urban or rural orientation, not both.

To this end, Strathcona County is guided by numerous statutory and functional policies and plans including an over-arching Municipal Development Plan (MDP) supported by residential, industrial, transportation or environment policies to name some. However, no plan is currently in place to specifically guide agriculture—which is by far Strathcona County's largest land user and has been historically one of Strathcona County's major economic sectors.

In response to growing concerns about the role and future of agriculture, Strathcona County commissioned a study in 2002 entitled *The Future of Agriculture*. At that time, two central questions stood before Strathcona County Council:

- What is the future potential of the agriculture and food industry in Canada, in Alberta, and specifically in Strathcona County?
- What strategies and land use policies would allow agriculture to flourish and fit in Strathcona County as well as protect the environment and conserve its unique agricultural heritage?

That study addressed a number of elements including the changes in agriculture both nationally and within Strathcona County itself; an assessment of the best opportunities for agriculture within Strathcona County; and the identification of a set of planning policies and tools that could be implemented to support and promote agriculture. The study was received for information and did not result in any commitments or new policy directions by Council.

Since then, the pressures continue and the questions facing agriculture in Strathcona County have only increased. Consequently in mid-2014, Strathcona County issued a *Request for Proposals* calling for the development of an Agriculture Master Plan. The call for such a plan is a response to the growing recognition by Council that agriculture requires a clear plan with distinct goals and supporting policies if it is to remain an integral part of Strathcona County's fast growing metropolitan economic, social and cultural life.

## 2.3 Background

Strathcona County faces an array of opportunities and growth pressures like few other municipalities in North America. Within its 1,265 km<sup>2</sup>, it is subject to a multiplicity of forces including:

- A large and growing energy and industrial sector;
- A steadily growing population and the location for two designated Priority Growth Areas for residential development within a major and fast growing metropolitan area known as the Capital Region;
- Growing pressures for the protection of agricultural land and sensitive environmental areas; and
- A desire to maintain rural character and aesthetics;

all the while being situated within one of the fast growing metropolitan regions in North America.

Not surprisingly, the forces of both actual as well as prospective growth are leading to considerable pressure on the agricultural sector and the large land base it currently occupies. These forces, their complexity and the ambiguity of how agriculture will evolve pose a particular challenge for Strathcona County with respect to how to plan for this important sector.

Overall, the central questions remain the same:

- What types of agriculture truly have a future in Strathcona County, can actually work, and why?
- What is the vision for agriculture within Strathcona County? In other words, what does Council, with the support of citizens and landowners, want to accomplish with respect to the presence, look and 'feel' of agriculture in Strathcona County and at the same time protect the environment and conserve Strathcona County's unique agricultural heritage?
- What planning policies and tools facilitate, or at the very least support, those types of agriculture that have the best fit and future in Strathcona County?

In summary, the fundamental purpose of the Agriculture Master Plan is to provide long term clarity for Strathcona County as well as its residents, land owners, and the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the Plan should both enable and facilitate the increasing and evolving diversity of agriculture into the future.

## 2.4 Objectives

The Agriculture Master Plan is developed in response to the following objectives:

1. Determine the types of agriculture and/or related agricultural activities that have realistic potential for success in Strathcona County over the long term.
2. Develop a vision that defines the role of agriculture and associated resources required for Strathcona County. This vision must have broad community support and be approvable by Council.
3. Develop an Agriculture Master Plan that outlines the vision for agriculture, details the policies, and has the implementation and governance tools required to:
  - a. direct the continued conservation, growth, and development of agriculture within the Strathcona County's diverse land use and development context.
  - b. raise the public profile of agriculture in order to promote the importance of agricultural stewardship and the protection of heritage farmland.

In addition the Agriculture Master Planning process abides by the following information and process objectives that are outlined in the Request for Proposals:

1. To develop a detailed understanding of Strathcona County's current and historical agricultural capacity, its constraints and opportunities.
2. To identify emerging and future trends in the agriculture and food industry with potential opportunity in Strathcona County.
3. To provide agriculture policy that fits within the context and is consistent with Strathcona County's strategic plan and sustainability pillars.
4. To comprehensively consult with the community at all stages of the process—one that includes the general public and the diversity of other interests that have a stake in agriculture.
5. To identify and develop realistic and measurable strategies and governance that will lead to the implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan's vision.

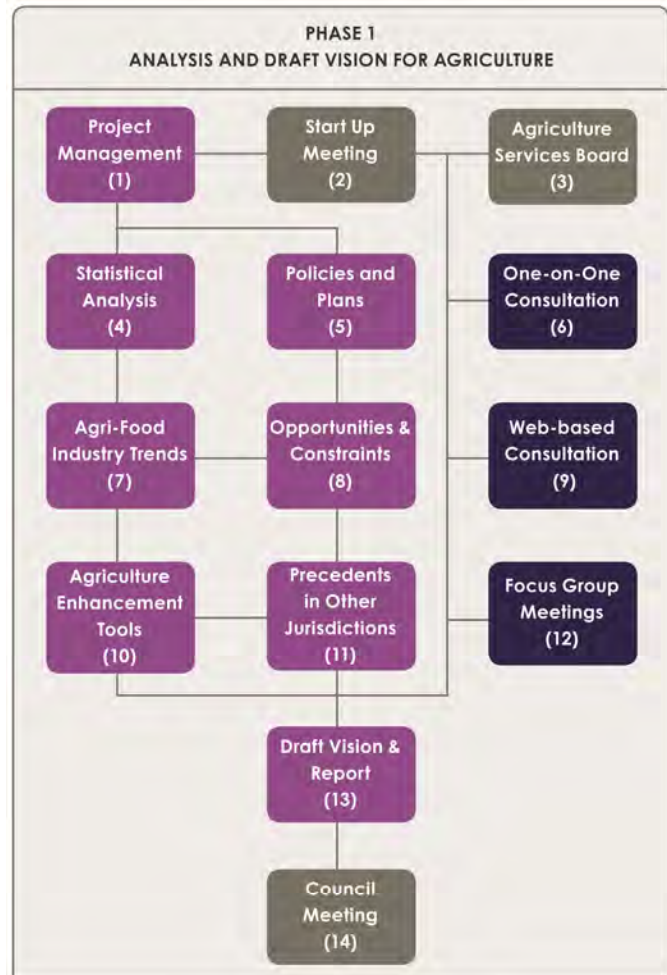




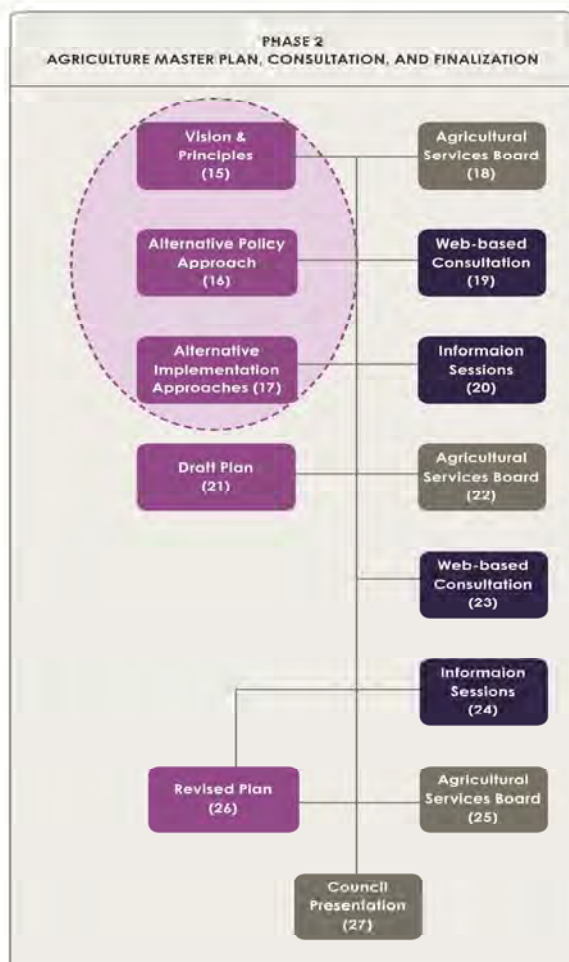
## 2.5 Work Plan

The work plan comprised two phases:

**Phase 1** built on previous work by updating information and analysis; reviewing current plans; consulting with the administration and key stakeholders; developing alternatives and reviewing their applicability to Strathcona County, and developing a draft vision. This phase also involved extensive consultation with stakeholders and leaders within Strathcona County including one-on-one interviews (22 in total) and a series of focus group discussions with defined sectors within the agri-food community. The focus interviews were held with four defined groups: commercial farmers, acreage owners, the equine sector, and a representative sample of urban residents. In addition, personal interviews were conducted with eight value-added businesses.



**Phase 2** focused on developing the draft plan which builds on the vision, a set of principles, and the selection of strategic priorities as well as governance and implementation details. This phase involved two iterations of public meetings: first, to gain input and direction to the draft vision and principles (held in early February 2015); and second to gather input and direction to the final draft plan (April 2015). Stakeholders also participated in web-based consultation.



In summary, the process of developing the Agriculture Master Plan included considerable consultation, input, and analysis. Phase 1 consultation was designed largely to obtain input, perspective and direction specific to the array of opportunities and issues facing agriculture. Phase 2 consultation was more iterative in nature: initially an overview of findings was presented complete with a definition for agriculture, a vision and a set of principles for planning purposes (completed in early February 2015); this was followed by the preparation and presentation of the Draft Agriculture Master Plan when input and direction was again sought.

Details of the consultation process are outlined in **Appendix 1**.







# 3 Strathcona County in Context

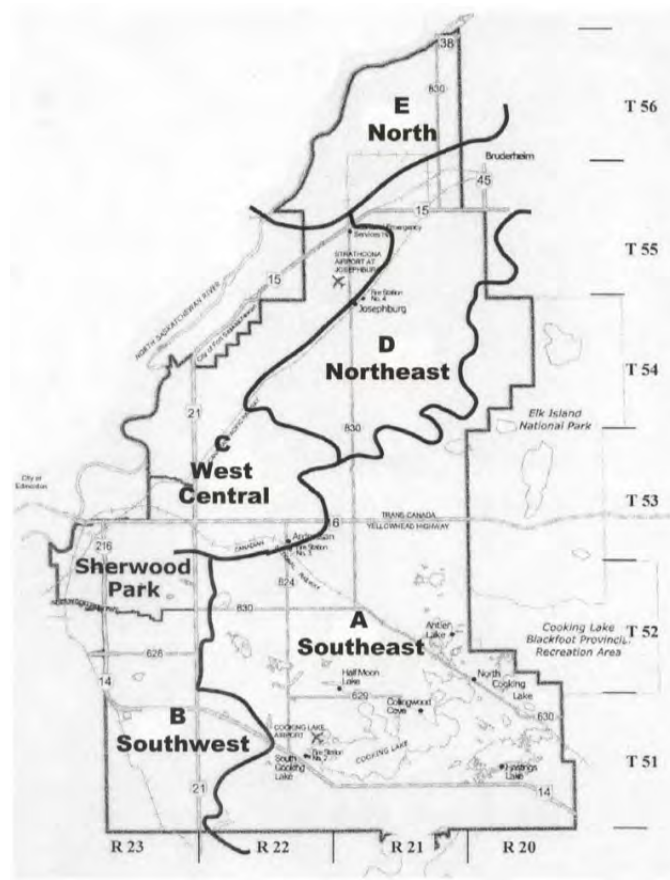
## 3.1 Introduction

The development of an agricultural plan for any municipality requires a solid understanding of the context in which the plan is to be formulated and ultimately implemented. To this end, we provide a contextual background comprising several levels including:

- An overview of the major trends within the agri-food sector at large.
- A review of the agricultural trends within Strathcona County itself.
- A comparison of agriculture in Strathcona County to Alberta and other selected counties.
- Recommendations and implications for the development of an Agriculture Master Plan for Strathcona County.

## 3.2 Agricultural Land Potential

Strathcona County covers land on the west flank of a glacial upland called the Cooking Lake Moraine. The agricultural capability of the land in Strathcona County is a result of a combination of climate and land conditions (soil, form, elevation, etc.). There are five general areas in Strathcona County with respect to land capability, as shown on **Figure 1: Strathcona County Land Capability Areas**.



**Figure 1: Strathcona County Land Capability Areas**

### **Southeast**

The southeast portion of Strathcona County, mostly south of Highway 16 (but including a small area north of the highway to the eastern boundary of Strathcona County), are mostly lower CLI Classes<sup>1</sup>, generally Classes 3-6. It has Mixed-wood Forests at higher elevations, grading to Parkland vegetation to the southwest. Land quality generally improves to the west.

The terrain is hummocky with some slightly hilly upland areas, many wet depressions, and the higher elevations here have a shorter and cooler growing season. With a frost free period often less than 90 days, this area is restricted to forages and coarse grains. The hilly area and wet depressions make it more difficult to manage annual cropping, but it does support hay and pasture land suitable for beef cattle and other grazing livestock. The area is also suitable for horticultural uses and small livestock holdings.

### **Southwest**

This area is similar to the southeast except that it has a slightly better climate and topography. Soils are generally CLI Classes 3, 4, and 5. This area is better suited for arable agriculture than the southeast, but it still has some limitations. Pasture, hay and grain production are commonly grown to support beef and dairy operations.

### **West-central**

West-central Strathcona County, from just south of Highway 16 to just north of Highway 15, is an undulating landscape between the North Saskatchewan River and the upland area to the east. This area has excellent organic soils with good moisture retention: primarily CLI Class 2, but with large areas of Class 1. It has silty and clayey lake deposits originally under Parkland vegetation. They are mostly under cultivation.

With moderate heat, moisture, and a relatively consistent climate, this area contains some of the best soil landscapes in Alberta, some ranking in the top 5% in the province<sup>2</sup>. The area is capable of supporting a wide range of field crops such as barley, wheat and canola as well as a wide range of specialty crops such as peas, lentils and vegetables.

### **Northeast**

This area, generally of fine-loamy glacial deposits, shares many of the very good characteristics of the west-central area. Most of the lands are CLI Class 1, with only minor areas of Classes 2 and 3. It is good to excellent land for common grains and oilseeds.

### **North**

The smallest sub-area, the northern sector of Strathcona County, from just north of Highway 15 to the North Saskatchewan River, is generally comprised of CLI Classes 4 to 6 formed under grassy Parkland vegetation. If not too sandy, these lands are good for some common grain crops. They are particularly well suited for growing potatoes and other hardy root crops, though supplemental irrigation is sometimes needed. However, some of the soils in this area, often with a duned surface expression, are very sandy, droughty, and subject to wind erosion if exposed.

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<sup>1</sup> CLI (Canadian Land Inventory) classes are one measure of measuring soil capability, but they have been designated on a fairly broad-brush basis. Farmland assessment practices may provide a more site-specific indicator.

<sup>2</sup> *The Future of Agriculture*, 2003

### 3.3 Prime and Unique Farmlands

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and compositional characteristics for producing food, fibre forage, oilseed and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fertilizer, pesticides, and labour. The assessment of climate and consideration of 'prime' depends on the context. Considering Canada as a whole, the climate of the Edmonton area must be considered a slight limitation to agriculture production. For example, Strathcona County farmers cannot grow high heat requiring crops like soybeans, corn, tobacco, or peanuts.

However, considering the Alberta context, the local climate and soils can produce all the provincially and locally important crops like wheat, barley, oats, canola, and peas. Prime in this context, based on CLI ratings, would indicate about 28,000 ha (Class 1) as prime, with another 19,000 ha (Class 2) and 19,000 ha (Class 3)<sup>3</sup>.

Unique farmlands are those, apart from prime farmlands, that can be used for the production of specific high-value food and fibre crops because of particular characteristics. There are about 2,500 ha of unique sandy soil well suited for the production of vegetables and other specialty crops.

In this context, Strathcona County has about 47,000 ha (116,000 acres) of prime and unique soil landscapes (Class 1 & 2) with another 19,000 ha (47,000 acres) of land suitable for cropping. In total, about 25% of Strathcona County lands would fit in the categories of 'prime' or 'unique.' All these lands are found in the northern third of Strathcona County at elevations below 675 m where the heat units are higher.

### 3.4 Major Trends within the Agri-food Sector

Numerous strategic reviews<sup>4</sup> have been undertaken by the authors of this plan which involve the identification of major trends and forces that are impacting the nature and direction of agriculture. Based on these, six major trends are identified that are at play within the agri-food industry and have relevance to Strathcona County. These are listed and described as follows:

#### TREND 1: Consolidation is taking place on all fronts.

The changes in the numbers and scale of operations within the agri-food sector are profound. At the farm level, there is a clear trend to fewer but larger farms (**see Table 1: Changes in Agriculture in Alberta: 1981 to 2011**). For example, for the period from 1981 to 2011, farm numbers have declined by more than 25% while average farm size has increased by almost 44% and average revenue by 370%.

**Table 1: Changes in Agriculture in Alberta: 1981 to 2011**

	1981	2011	Change (%)
Number of Farms	58,056	43,234	- 25.5%
Average Size of Farm (acres)	813	1,168	+ 43.7%
Average Revenue per Farm	\$56,236	\$264,518	+ 370.4%

<sup>3</sup> Canada Land Inventory (CLI). Source: *The Future of Agriculture*, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Major reviews include *Changing Course, A Value Added Strategy for Alberta Agriculture* (1996); *The Pursuit of Quality – Priorities for Agriculture in Alberta* (1998); and *The Way Forward – A Strategic Plan for the Alberta Pork Industry* (2008); *Business Template for a Value Based Beef Enterprise* (2010).



These aggregate changes, while significant, understate the full measure of consolidation that is actually taking place. Nowhere is this more evident than in the livestock sector where Alberta now has a handful of specialized operations that include 553 dairy farms, 380 hog farms, 240 poultry farms and an estimated 30 beef feedlots that represent the largest proportion of cattle that are marketed for processing each year.

A similar degree of consolidation is also occurring within the cropping sector. Twenty years ago, a 3,000 acre operation would have been considered large. Now a small but very skilled group of farm operators have emerged who typically oversee farm businesses that are between 10,000 to 15,000 acres.

The level of consolidation within the processing sector is even more concentrated. For example, in Alberta there are two large beef processors; one large pork processor and two major dairy processors. The grains and oilseed sector are equally concentrated with three to five major buyers in both cases.

**Implications for Strathcona County:** Intensive livestock operations in particular will continue to consolidate and have a diminishing presence. Cropping and grazing operations will continue.

## **TREND 2: There is strong and growing interest in local food and local food production across the USA and Canada.**

Local food, food security, 'healthier' food including where food comes from and who produces it, is driving considerable interest on the part of consumers and citizens on the subjects of 'local food,' sustainability strategies and urban agriculture. Many jurisdictions are examining the issue to assess their current situations and are in the process of considering what actions should be taken.

Many cities including Edmonton (in 2013) have responded by forming Food Policy Councils. Within Canada, Toronto led this process more than 20 years ago; Vancouver established its Council in 1995. While objectives among councils vary, the primary focus is to draw attention to the local food system, address issues of food security and access to healthy foods, and to enhance opportunities for local food suppliers.

Retailers and restaurants have responded by building major campaigns featuring local food. Indeed sourcing locally has become a central strategy for most major retailers and wholesalers.<sup>5</sup>

To this end, all are seeking to differentiate their product offerings—Safeway USA, for example, now posts signs in each aisle which actually lists the number of local items that can be found in each aisle. We recently tracked the number of articles appearing in publications across Canada and the USA specific to local food. Over a 5-month period, we identified more than 400 articles of interest.

**Implications for Strathcona County:** Strong and growing interest in local food represents an opportunity for Strathcona County in view of its high quality land base and proximity to a large urban market.

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<sup>5</sup> These intentions were confirmed by a recent project conducted by Toma & Bouma Management Consultants who interviewed all the major retailers and food service companies operating in Alberta. Their major complaint was a lack of local supplies when it comes to fresh produce.

### TREND 3: The demand for food continues to grow.

The growing demand for food globally is perhaps self-evident. Nevertheless it is a significant trend that should not be overlooked and will have profound implications on food systems and international trade. The increase in demand is being driven by two key factors:

- A growing population—world population is forecast to reach 9 billion by 2050 (a 30% increase over current levels).
- A rapidly expanding middle class—most notably in countries such as China, India and Indonesia who in turn are demanding higher quality protein rich foods such as red meats and dairy products.

Significantly, the ability to supply this demand is exacerbated by two main factors:

- A diminishing supply base and number of suppliers. Firstly, the available land on which to produce food is in decline—the result of expanding urban populations as well as erosion; as well only a handful of countries in the world are forecasted as net food exporters (one of whom is Canada).
- Increased volatility in weather conditions—whatever the cause, extremes in weather are increasingly common. The most notable recent occurrences include the extended droughts in California and Australia. Flooding and excessive amounts of rain are common in China, Indonesia and India.

**Implications for Strathcona County:** Land conservation is an important issue in some jurisdictions (such as the Provinces of Ontario and British Columbia) and is becoming a major public concern in Alberta as well. Concerns are driven by the overall growing global demand for food combined with a declining land base, food security and the irreversibility of development.

### TREND 4: Cost management is the critical factor for competitiveness in the commodity markets.

Much of agriculture production trades on the basis of world prices for commodities. In Canada, for example, all the major grains, oilseeds and red meats function in markets and prices that are set beyond our borders<sup>6</sup>. Thus as exporters in all these commodities, Alberta producers are subject to a host of risk factors including exchange rate risks; trade policy risks; and the risk of over-supply on the part of competing countries leading to lower prices. In almost all cases, Canada is not the low cost producer and competes against suppliers who have lower labour, utility and construction costs.

Consequently producers of these commodities have no control over price. However, the one area over which they do have some control is cost. Indeed today's successful commodity producer has become a superior cost manager. Most producers in Alberta have been severely tested by very challenging markets—for example, the cropping sector endured a long period of low prices from 1998 to 2009 and while prices increased dramatically in recent years, they have softened considerably in 2014 and 2015. Hog producers have only recently experienced favourable prices after nearly a decade of break-even or below cost of production prices. Beef producers are currently enjoying the strongest prices in history, but the 2003 Mad Cow Disease (technically known as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy or BSE) crisis devastated this sector for years.

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<sup>6</sup> Canada's supply managed sectors (dairy, chickens, turkeys and eggs) operate in quite a different situation. These sectors are able to establish a 'made in Canada' price for their products since the borders for imports (excepting a small allowable import quota) are effectively closed.



Producers manage costs in two ways: **(1)** extremely detailed cost accounting practices—effectively knowing the exact cost of production; and **(2)** scale—increasing the size of their operations to achieve their net income objectives as well as spread their fixed costs. Simply, as margins narrow as they inevitably do, the only way to achieve a target income is by increasing the volume of production. This is the primary driver behind the growth toward larger farms.

**Implications for Strathcona County:** Managing costs and narrow margins are major factors driving the trend to larger farms. Expect more lands to be leased to large scale cropping operations and a shift by some farmers to seek out more intensive higher value and higher margin enterprises to offset costs and/or generate greater revenues.

#### TREND 5: Technology and innovation abounds.

Major ongoing technological advances in production agriculture in the areas of bio-technology; precision farming; GPS and related satellite technologies; surveillance; and most recently the use of drones for measuring and monitoring crop performance that can in turn direct such practices as herbicide and pesticide applications to precise locations and levels. The technologies, combined with advanced business management practices on the part of a highly skilled business class of farmers, are also contributing factors to increased farm size.

A recent presentation in Saskatoon entitled *No Molecule is Wasted*<sup>7</sup> outlined how today's producers are driven by economics but enabled by technology. This approach, known as *Precision Agriculture*, is being taken to a new level. In short order, most fields will be moving to zone management whereby each zone will have its own profile based on yield potential, soil properties, nutrient data, risk tolerance and economics. All of these measures are data driven using satellite imagery; drone surveillance; yields maps; imagery; monitoring; and bottom up based on data on soils, field conditions and topography.

It is not only common for today's farmer to utilize sophisticated technologies but to also employ a highly sophisticated set of professional services including agronomic, financial, and marketing which comprises both hedging and contracting. All of these have become vital to the management of the successful farming operation.

**Implications for Strathcona County:** Technology is an enabling factor to introduce new crops, manage costs, and expand the scale of operations. Expect the emergence of higher valued field crops such as corn and soybeans. Also expect more farm properties to be leased to large scale cropping operations.

#### TREND 6: Land use and the commitment to conserve agricultural lands is a 'hot' issue in Alberta lacking political will to change.

The agricultural community and rural municipalities at large have long awaited provincial direction specific to the protection or conservation of agricultural lands. This was expected to be forthcoming in the 2008 *Provincial Land Use Framework*.

However this direction has not been provided even though there was a commitment to do so in the *Framework*. Furthermore the recent South Saskatchewan Regional Plan affirms this lack of provincial direction with respect to the conservation of agricultural land. Rather, each municipality has been left to devise its own policies.

Consequently, there is no provincial legislative framework to conserve agricultural land solely on the basis of soil quality or agricultural use alone,

**Implications for Strathcona County:** The lack of a provincial policy with respect to agricultural land conservation will require the Capital Region and/or Strathcona County to forge its own set of policies and land use planning tools. There is the opportunity for Strathcona County to provide a key leadership role.

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<sup>7</sup> Farm Forum – presented by Agritrend and attended by J. Bouma.

### 3.5 Agricultural Trends in Strathcona County

A review of statistics and trends in **Table 2.1: Strathcona County Agricultural Profile** (refer to **Appendix 2**) illustrate the following:

1. There has been a precipitous drop in livestock numbers. For example:
  - Pigs and dairy cows have almost disappeared in Strathcona County. Only one hog operation and 5 dairy operations remain.<sup>8</sup>
  - A total of 6 poultry operations continue to operate. This is a marked decline from the 17 operations that were recorded in the 2006 census. Beef cow numbers have also dropped drastically from a high of 10,590 head in 2001, to 5,127 head in 2011 – a decline of more than 50%. Accordingly total cattle numbers have dropped from 32,879 head in 2001 to 14,780 head in 2011 – a decline of 55%.
  - By comparison, horse numbers have remained relatively stable but have dropped from 3,746 head in 2001 to 2,859 head in 2011.
  - Other livestock such as sheep and goats remain limited. Interesting, there has been a sharp decline in the goat population which stood at 1,909 head in 2001. Currently there are approximately 150 animals.
2. The number of farms is decreasing (1,053 in 1981; 658 in 2011). This is no surprise given the broader trends in agriculture although the rate of decline is slightly larger than the provincial average (see **Appendix 2: Table 2.9**).
3. The average age of farmers is on the increase. This is consistent with the provincial trend (see **Appendix 2: Table 2.14**).
4. Significantly overall field crop acreages are relatively stable (159,741 in 2001; 150,138<sup>9</sup>)—a decline of 9.4% or approximately 1% per year. By comparison the total area of crops and pasture stood at 256,270 acres vs. 220,184 acres in 2011—a total decline of 16%.
5. Modest increases in the number of fruit and vegetable operations are noted, but this sector remains very small (7 vegetable growers; 16 fruit, berry and nut growers).
6. The greenhouse sector measured in terms of ‘area under glass’ is declining (loss of 27,000 square feet from 2006 to 2011). It is our understanding, subsequent to the 2011 census, an additional two or three greenhouse operations may have closed.
7. Processing/value added enterprises remain a small economic sector. For example, Strathcona County is the home of a major poultry processing facility. In addition, there are 15 to 20 smaller food processing operations located in Sherwood Park and throughout Strathcona County. This number has not changed much over the past 10 years.
8. Overall, agriculture represents \$90.9 million in annual farm revenues (as per the 2011 Census); it provides employment to 990 farm operators and 692 employees for a total of 15,569 hours of work (average of 22 hours per employee).
9. The majority of farms (37% or 246 farms) are small with gross revenues of \$10,000 or less; another 227 farms (34%) generate annual gross revenues between \$10,000 and \$50,000 and are also quite small; 115 farms (17%) generate between \$50,000 and \$250,000; a total of 70 farms (11%) generate over \$250,000 in revenues each year.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on personal conversations, there may be only 3 dairy operations left as of 2015.

<sup>9</sup> The 2011 crop acreage statistic may be inflated. Several large crop producers, who are headquartered in Strathcona County, farm large acreages outside in other counties. These may be attributed to Strathcona County— the Census of Canada input form does not require the farmer to identify the location of the lands that are being farmed.



10. Strathcona County is a quintessential example of what is termed as the 'vanishing middle.' This refers to a phenomenon where growth occurs at both ends of the spectrum while a middle group or tier diminishes in size. For example, the number of smaller farms (under \$10,000 in gross sales has remained relatively stable from 325 producers in 2001 to 246 producers in 2011. During the same time, the large grower group (over \$250,000 in annual sales) has also been stable—68 farmers in 2001 to 70 in 2011. Meanwhile, the middle group (\$50,000 to \$250,000) has dropped from 189 to 115 farmers in 2011.

This phenomenon has been in motion within Canadian agriculture sector for the past 30 years. It is a reflection of the increased specialization of a smaller number of larger business-focused farmers while the mid-sized less specialized sector slowly retires or disappears. At the same time, there is a growing interest in agriculture expressed by a new generation of producers who begin with small holdings usually on a part-time or hobby basis.

### 3.6 Strathcona County Compared to Alberta and Selected Counties

In addition to the analysis of the trends within Strathcona County, the scale and characteristics of agriculture were examined relative to three comparatives: the province of Alberta as a whole; Lethbridge County which is Alberta's largest 'agricultural' county in terms of annual farm sales and livestock enterprises; and Rocky View County—a municipality that surrounds the City of Calgary on three sides and is subject to a similar range of urban growth pressures.

**Table 2.2 Strathcona County Compared to Alberta**, in **Appendix 2**, is summarized below.

1. Overall Strathcona County represents approximately 0.8% of the overall annual farm sales generated by Alberta farms. Furthermore, it represents 0.7% of the Alberta crop acreage and 1.5% of the number of farms.
2. In relative terms, Strathcona County has strengths (or has a relatively high proportion) in the following areas:
  - A relatively high proportion of fruit, vegetable and nursery farms (2.2%, 2.5% and 4.2% respectively). This is not surprising in view of its location.
  - A relatively high proportion of smaller operators (farms sales of less than \$10,000 per year – 3.2%; \$50,000 or less – 1.6%).
  - A high proportion of all farms with less than 10 acres (3.9%).
  - A relatively high proportion of poultry and horses (4.2% and 2.1% respectively).
3. In relative terms, Strathcona County is under represented (or has a relatively low proportion in comparison to the overall province) in the following areas:
  - Farms over 1,120 acres (0.3%)
  - Livestock—particularly beef and dairy cows, as well as pigs (all less than 0.5%).
  - Barley acreage (0.4%).
4. Perhaps most interesting is the relative intensity of agriculture in Strathcona County in comparison to other municipalities in Alberta. This index, which is a relative measure of the quality and/or the density of agricultural activity on a per unit basis, is calculated by dividing the total annual gross farms sales by the acres farmed (see **Table 2.3: Ag Intensity Index** in **Appendix 2**). Strathcona County ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the province which is led by Edmonton (while very small in terms of acreage, leads all municipalities due to its market gardening activities located in the northeast) followed by the major agricultural counties of Lethbridge, Taber, Lacombe and Wheatland. This measure illustrates that, while Strathcona County is smaller in terms of area, it does not take a back seat to other counties in terms of the quality of its agricultural enterprises.

**Table 2.4: Strathcona County Compared to Rocky View, Lethbridge, and Alberta** (in **Appendix 2**) is discussed below.

### Compared to Lethbridge County

Lethbridge County is Alberta's leading agricultural county. The most striking difference to Strathcona County is the presence and intensity of livestock enterprises. While Lethbridge County is only 3.4 times larger than Strathcona County in terms of overall crop acreage, it generates more than \$1 billion in annual farm revenues or 11.6 times the agricultural revenue than Strathcona County does. In addition, the average gross revenue per farm in Lethbridge County is 8.2 times larger than the average farm in Strathcona County.

Overall, it can be concluded that Lethbridge County exceeds Strathcona County by an intensity factor of 3.6—meaning that each acre farmed generates 3.6 times the revenue than what is being generated in Strathcona County.

Much of this difference can be attributed to intensive livestock production. For example, Lethbridge County has a beef cattle population of 427,602 head (more than 29 times the cattle population of Strathcona County); 8,840 dairy cows (15 times that of Strathcona County) and a hog population exceeding 65,000 head (a direct comparison cannot be made since Statistics Canada does not report numbers if there are fewer than 5 producers). Not surprisingly, a large proportion of Lethbridge County farms generate annual sales in excess of \$250,000 (350 out of 933 farms or 35.5%). This compares to 70 farmers in Strathcona County or 10.6%.

In summary, Lethbridge County has a decidedly different set of agricultural characteristics to those of Strathcona County. Most significant, is the size of the livestock sector—not surprisingly given the proximity of Strathcona County to a large urban population. Nevertheless, Strathcona County continues to have a sizeable crop land base and a large number of smaller farmers operating on smaller acreages that continue to generate farm revenues.

### Compared to Rocky View County

Rocky View County's proximity to Calgary has both similarities and some distinct differences from Strathcona County.

First, the similarities: in terms of annual farms sales, farms in Rocky View on average generate \$212,000 per year or approximately 1.5 times that of Strathcona County. Also, it is observed that Rocky View has very few dairy cows, hogs or poultry not unlike Strathcona County. It also has a significant horse population with over 6,000 head, or more than double that of Strathcona County. Finally, Rocky View is also home to a large number of small operators: there are 306 farms with less than \$10,000 in annual sales and another 444 will annual sales between \$10,000 and \$25,000.

The differences are largely a matter of scale: Rocky View is more than 4.5 times the size of Strathcona County. Additionally, average farm size is 761 acres which is double the average farm size in Strathcona County. The most significant difference is the large area of pasture land (over 423,000 acres) and the large cattle population of approximately 135,000—almost 10 times the number in Strathcona County.

Interestingly, the intensity factor for Strathcona County exceeds that of Rocky View. Total annual revenue for Rocky View is \$269.5 million. However it is 4.6 times larger than Strathcona County—thus if one were to extrapolate Strathcona County annual revenues by this factor, this would result in \$416 million. Rocky View, by comparison, has an intensity factor of 0.65, meaning that for every acre of production Rocky View generates two-thirds as much as Strathcona County in terms of dollar value.



### 3.7 Stakeholders Perspectives

The consultation process included input from the several groups and stakeholders. A detailed summary of the discussions including the dates on which these meetings were held is presented in **Appendix 1**. The highlights are as follows:

- **Agriculture Service Board:** very concerned about the future of agriculture in Strathcona County and the lack of a plan or strategy. This group is strongly committed to overseeing the continued presence of agriculture comprising a mix of enterprises supported by a clear policy and decision making framework to guide Council and Administration.
- **Non-agricultural Residents:** value Strathcona County as a great place to raise families. This group expressed a desire to see the clear and continued presence of green spaces to which agriculture contributes significantly; a balance between urban development and rural areas; and the presence of more locally produced food and local markets.
- **The Equine Sector:** regard the equine sector as an under-realized opportunity. The opportunity is seen as both economic as well as activity based. With respect to the latter point, a wide range of activities were identified including training, trial riding, other forms of recreation, therapeutic purposes with the overall objective of building a unique Strathcona County community defined by a strong thriving equine presence. There is a strong sense that Strathcona County has overlooked this sector and has shown little if any commitment to support events. Part of this commitment is the need for specialized show facilities that can serve as a platform to feature horse related events.
- **The Acreage Sector:** a strong sense that Strathcona County shows little if any interest in agriculturally based acreages and related businesses. This group cited numerous challenges specific to obtaining permits and the ability to operate. Overall, there is a sense that much can be done to develop local food opportunities but there are many market and business challenges to be overcome,
- **The Commercial Farm Sector (full time farmers):** regard Strathcona County Council and Administration as placing no priority on agriculture. Many see the 'writing' on the wall regarding the long term future for agriculture and that Strathcona County as a location will be difficult to farm in the future both financially and operationally. The major concerns are the price of land and the ability to move large equipment safely on narrow roads which are increasingly busy. Several large farms are currently expanding their acreage base in other counties. Others are uncertain about their future, seeking either the opportunity to sell at the best possible price and retire.
- **Food processing/Value Added Sector:** not aware of a vision for or support by Strathcona County for food processing or value-added businesses. Several businesses appreciate the ready access to good transportation corridors and the availability of labour given the proximity to Edmonton. In the case of smaller operations, permits are seen as difficult to obtain. In other cases, small independents are struggling with several issues including modest returns, difficulty in finding labour, considerable competition in the market place (particularly in the horticulture sector) and succession planning.
- **Others:** several stakeholders/leaders voiced concern about the future of agriculture in Strathcona County and see no plans to support it or any vision to maintain it into the future. There is a high level of awareness of the 2002/2003 *Future of Agriculture* study and expressed disappointment that nothing was done subsequently. Overall there is a sense of resignation and many hold the view that agriculture has been forgotten in Strathcona County and by Strathcona County Council in particular. Consequently, they have real difficulty envisioning how the current planning process will result in a different outcome.

## Further Discussion

The views of farmers regarding the future of agriculture in Strathcona County warrant further reflection. The major discussion points within the farming community revolve around two areas:

1. The economics of agriculture; and
2. The conservation of agricultural land.

Concerns regarding the economics of agriculture relate to the issue of financial sustainability. One producer put it this way:

*Agriculture has to be sustainable to be carried on. Profitability is an important factor and nothing will change that number one priority. Agriculture has to be self-sustaining to be worth the effort as a farming operation.*

Implicit in this issue are inherent costs associated with farming in an urban area. Several added costs were identified including the time and hazards associated with moving large equipment; the loss of efficiency in farming smaller fields or areas; and the cost of land itself. Thus, there is the perspective that the economics of traditional farming in Strathcona County is increasingly problematic. For all intents and purpose, intensive livestock has already largely exited Strathcona County and many feel that crop production may be soon to follow.

Furthermore, there are concerns that the economics of 'value added' enterprises such as market gardens or horticulture are equally challenging in view of labour cost issues and competition from big box retailers. Thus the assumption that a local food industry will readily emerge is viewed with considerable skepticism.

The issue of agricultural land conservation generates two diametrically opposing points of view:

1. Those who feel very strongly that land should move to the highest bidder. There are indeed farmers who own and farm land in Strathcona County who are vigorously opposed to any restriction preventing them from selling their land for non-agricultural use.
2. Those who feel very strongly that prime agricultural land should be conserved no matter what using such expressions as farmland must be "unequivocally protected."

Accordingly, the former group of producers are looking for an Agriculture Master Plan that acknowledges the inevitable 'end' of agriculture in Strathcona County, whereas the latter group are looking to the Agriculture Master Plan to lay out a new and revitalized future for agriculture. For example, any consideration to conserve land is regarded by one contributor as a "dictatorial communistic tactic requiring citizens to relinquish their civic rights and freedoms." In a contrasting view, another farmer voiced this opinion: "it is unacceptable to convert any more agriculture lands into any more non-ag uses!"

Clearly the farming community is sharply divided on this issue—an issue that will need to be balanced through the Agriculture Master Plan.



### 3.8 Learning from Other Jurisdictions

The experience from several jurisdictions provides a number of relevant insights:

- **Rocky View County:** recently developed an Agriculture Master Plan which identifies the need for flexibility specific to land use, the development of agricultural or rural related business as well as opportunities in local food/value added and the equine sector given the proximity of Calgary which effectively lies in the centre of Rocky View.
- **British Columbia Agriculture Land Reserve:** enacted by provincial legislation, 4.7 million ha of were designated starting in 1976. Since then and despite boundary changes, the Reserve remains approximately the same size (5% of the province, but most of the remaining agricultural lands). It is controlled by a provincially appointed commission to **(1)** to preserve agricultural land; **(2)** to encourage farming in collaboration with other communities of interest; and **(3)** to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies. It allows farmers to operate businesses with a minimal amount of interference as compensation for the land freeze.
- **Ontario Greenbelt:** enacted by provincial legislation in 2005 like the action taken in BC thirty years earlier. It is significant to note that this legislation was strongly resisted by the farming community. While development within the greenbelt has slowed considerably, there are signs of a 'leapfrog effect' – namely increased development both to the north and to the west of the defined area.
- **Lancaster County, Pennsylvania:** located less than 50 miles west of Philadelphia, Lancaster is a leader in the purchasing of development rights for the conservation of agriculture and just recently exceeded protecting 100,000 acres under this program. The program is funded in part by state tobacco taxes. It should also be noted that Lancaster is the heart of Amish country with a very strong cultural and historical heritage for which there is strong public support to preserve and protect agricultural land.
- **California:** California established the first agricultural lands trust in the US–the Marin Agricultural Land Trust in 1980. By 2002, there were 34 easement programs with a farmland focus. Despite tax incentives to easement donors, land trusts with funding that enables them to purchase easements from farmers have been most successful. Farmers may be receptive to selling easements that reduce market value in return for a lump sum that may be used to pay off debt or allow retirement. Many land trusts get public funding especially from county level agencies. The most successful local land trusts represent the principal vehicle for organizing local conservation. A county supporting a farmland conservation program would tend to be prosperous with an active local food movement, and experiencing growth pressures.
- **Washington County, Maryland:** efforts to preserve valuable farmland began in 1978 with the Maryland Agricultural Land Conservation Program (MALPP). Since that time, the land conservation effort has expanded to a total of 8 programs. To date, more than 25,000 acres have been permanently protected, with another 18,000 acres under temporary protection in 10-year Agricultural Districts. As a goal, Washington County intends to permanently preserve 50,000 acres of agricultural land and open space through its various easement programs.



- **Whatcom County, Washington:** Whatcom County has recognized the unintended consequences of prioritizing multiple comprehensive planning goals when these compete with one another during the implementation process. The County's stated goal is to maintain an agricultural base of at least 100,000 acres as the minimum needed to sustain agriculture's supporting infrastructure of supplies, equipment, services, and expertise. Further, the County recognizes that it is also necessary to maintain large contiguous areas to efficiently produce and process commercial agricultural products. It has programs for both transfer and purchase of development rights. It is pursuing performance indicators to measure plan implementation.
- **Southern Alberta Land Trust Society:** This is a charitable non-profit society, incorporated in 1998, with a mandate to protect environmental, productive, scenic and cultural values of southern Alberta's grasslands, woodlands, and wetlands. In total the Society has approximately 30 conservation easements protecting about 12,000 acres of native rangeland.
- **MD of Bighorn, Alberta:** There are no comprehensive Transfer of Development Credits programs in Canada designed to conserve rural, agricultural or environmentally significant landscapes.<sup>10</sup> The MD of Bighorn has been working on a potential TDC initiative since about 2007. A developer that owned both the sending and receiving lands was promoting it and they've been amending plans over time to facilitate it. However, it has not proceeded because of two issues: **(1)** a need for provincial regulations/policy and **(2)** Council is uncertain whether it wants to be involved by taking over the responsibility to enforce the agricultural conservation easement as they have had issues in the past over some environmental protection easements.

### 3.9 Strathcona County in Perspective

Strathcona County is a relatively small agricultural county as measured by the size of farming area and annual gross farm revenues. Within Alberta, which has a total of 69 municipalities in which agricultural activity is measured—Strathcona County ranks 64<sup>th</sup> in terms of the land area farmed (total land base of 220,184 acres); however it ranks 44<sup>th</sup> in terms of annual farm revenues (\$90.8 million or 0.8% of the provincial total). Thus, in relative terms, Strathcona County is not an insignificant player but it has a relatively high degree of intensity in terms of economic activity per acre farmed.

Overall, Strathcona County has several key characteristics that are germane to its agricultural potential:

1. Strathcona County is located in close proximity to a major metropolitan region that is home to over 1.3 million people and growing rapidly.
2. Strathcona County contains a major industrial base. However, the area in which major industry is currently located, is well demarcated and has considerable capacity for expansion without further impacting the remaining agricultural areas within Strathcona County.
3. As a member of the Capital Region, Strathcona County has been earmarked for a population growth of approximately 70,000 residents over the next 50 years. This represents an 80% increase over current levels. Without question, Strathcona County faces the planning challenge of where this growth will take place and how large a footprint will be required. Whatever the choice for this urban growth area, the vast proportion of the current agricultural land base will remain and continue to be available for agricultural uses for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>10</sup> Miistakis Institute, *Canadian Experience with Transfer of Development Credits*, 2008, p.2.  
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### 3.10 Implications

Clearly intensive livestock operations (dairy, beef, poultry and swine) are no longer a predominant form of agriculture in Strathcona County. The declining numbers are largely due to two major factors: **(1)** continued consolidation in the form of fewer but large farming operations—the case in all of these sectors; and **(2)** a preference to be situated in municipalities that are predominately agricultural—livestock operations require large blocks of land to produce feed and for the spreading of manure. Thus, the desire to be at a distance from non-farm residents. This is likely to continue. However several intensive livestock operations remain—most of these are located in the northeast or the southern extremes of Strathcona County. These operations should be encouraged to continue as long as they are committed to good agricultural practices and the meeting of environmental requirements. Strathcona County needs to be cautious of approving residential developments near these operations as nuisance complaints will likely result, potentially causing concerns for both the agriculture operators and the nearby residents.

The production of major field crops is Strathcona County's most significant agricultural enterprise. There are no reasons why large scale field crop production cannot continue, subject to field access and safety. A major concern is road access—both width in view of the ability to move large equipment, and safety (traffic commuting through to industrial areas). These issues will need to be addressed. Concerns with high land prices and ownership, thus making the economics of farming more challenging, are separate issues from what can actually be done on the land. To be sure, some of the land will be owned by farmers themselves; other lands will be owned by non-farming interests. Also, Strathcona County needs to consider the potential nuisance complaints that result from locating residents close to these operations (e.g. dust, herbicides, and pesticides from field operations). Nevertheless, as long as the lands are available for agricultural purposes, they can and will be cropped either by owners or large crop producers who typically rent large proportions of their production base.

Strathcona County has a significant horse population and an active equine sector which train, trail ride, compete and/or show horses in locations and events around the province and elsewhere. Yet Strathcona County has no major events or public facilities that can serve as a platform to showcase this sector and develop both economic and social opportunities.

Within the Capital Region, as with all major population centers in Canada and the USA, there are strong and growing interests in local food and the development of local food suppliers, processors, markets and events. By virtue of its location, Strathcona County is well positioned to be a significant player in the actualization of this opportunity. In this regard, Strathcona County has significant capacity—a productive land base and a large number of small to medium sized farming operations. However, location and capacity alone are not sufficient to stimulate the emergence of a local food economy. The relative lack of progress over the past number of years suggests that other barriers exist and that a focused strategy with supporting promotions and market infrastructure will be required.

Strathcona County's location, ready access to transportation infrastructure and a workforce presents an opportunity to develop/attract food processors and other value added businesses. To date, this sector has not been a priority for Strathcona County. It remains, nevertheless, an opportunity but will require a long term commitment, a development plan and sector expertise to achieve success.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing agriculture in Strathcona County is attitudinal. For many years, Strathcona County has focused on the growth of its industrial, residential and commercial base. Against these priorities, agriculture received and appeared to receive, little attention. Many members of the agricultural community voice strong views that agriculture has been forgotten and see little future for it no matter how well formulated the Agriculture Master Plan might be. Thus, the revival and prioritization of agriculture will require a very clear, consistent message of commitment from Council and senior Administration.

### 3.11 Opportunities

It is clear that there is strong support among most stakeholders for the continuation and the vibrant presence of agriculture in Strathcona County. Our analysis suggests that the following areas of agriculture are the best fit for Strathcona County: large field scale agriculture, acreages, equine enterprises, value added operations, urban agriculture and experience or destination opportunities. These are discussed further in the following sub-sections.

#### Large Scale Field Agriculture

- **Premise:** Large cropping areas remain. Large scale cropping operations are already the predominant form of agriculture in the north eastern areas of Strathcona County. Thus large scale crop agriculture can continue for the foreseeable future.
- **Requires:** Long term (stable) agricultural land use policy—critical not only to minimize speculative land holdings but also to provide the necessary conditions for farmers themselves to invest in their farm businesses as well as the long term care of land; new tools - transfer of development credits including the designation of defined sending and receiving areas—this mechanism would reduce development pressure on agricultural lands (focused on primary and unique) and mitigate the loss of ‘opportunity’ to current agricultural land owners; attention to roads (width and height)—consideration to designating specific rural roads to accommodate large scale slow moving farm equipment—safety is a primary concern both to farmers and users; ensure field access and minimum nuisance measures (buffers and right to farm)—farmers need to be assured that they can easily enter fields that they own or rent with large equipment as well as perform necessary operations (cultivation, seeding, herbicide and pesticide applications as well as harvesting) without fear of nuisance complaints from nearby residents. Strathcona County needs to be cautious about locating residences near these operations and potentially creating nuisance issues.

#### Acreages – Speciality Operations

- **Premise:** Acreages are the basis for a variety of specialty production operations including greenhouses, bedding plants, horticulture, vegetable and fruit production as well as small livestock enterprises (sheep, goats, poultry, bees, llamas, alpaca etc.). Development remains at an early stage, but these types of operations represent opportunity. There is considerable interest in local food, food related businesses and food experiences (agri-tourism). Strathcona County is well positioned to explore and facilitate opportunities within this sector as market signals strengthen and successful business models emerge.
- **Requires:** Emphasis by Strathcona County that local food and related enterprises are an area of priority. To this end, Strathcona County will need to take a leadership role in local food initiatives within Strathcona County and the Capital Region. This emerging sector will require economic and market development support; advocacy and expertise within administration to work with interested parties to facilitate opportunities and overcome perceived barriers such as regulatory requirements. Continual, ongoing promotions and communications as well as education support will also be required.



## Equine Sector

- **Premise:** This includes stables, event centres, training facilities, riding, trail riding as well as emerging opportunities in the field of autism and post-traumatic stress therapy. The equine sector represents a major under-realized opportunity. Strathcona County has a significant horse population and is home to several horse organizations and associations. It is noted that many current horse owners are currently attending events in other areas of the province.
- **Requires:** Commitment to assert Strathcona County as a 'horse' capital and a municipality that is dedicated to developing opportunities within the equine sector. Advancing the equine sector will require a well-developed integrated strategy that encompasses multiple breeds and interests. Also, a public facility to produce and/or host a wide range of equine centered events is essential. This is important to establish a 'centre' or stage for the Strathcona County equine community. Clarity with respect to tax implications and permit requirements is essential. Currently it does not appear clear that horses are considered an agricultural enterprise. This may be acting as a disincentive and even be cause for some owners to relocate or not report their equine interests.

## Value Added Businesses

- **Premise:** Strathcona County is well located to attract and support new business growth. Further, they may be opportunities to attract and/or develop new businesses targeted to supply interest in local food. This includes primary, secondary, services and research.
- **Requires:** Emphasis by Strathcona County that food production, processing, and value-added enterprises are a priority area. Strathcona County will need to take a leadership role in local food initiatives within Strathcona County and the Capital Region. This emerging sector will require economic and market development support; advocacy and expertise within administration to work with interested parties to facilitate opportunities and overcome unnecessary regulatory requirements. Continual, ongoing substantive promotions and communications as well as education will also be required.

## Urban Agriculture

- **Premise:** Sherwood Park is expanding and intensifying the density of its residential development. Many residents have a growing interest in local food production.
- **Requires:** Amendment of bylaws allowing specific/limited livestock to be raised under the same public nuisance, and safety bylaws, etc., governing pets. Identification, development, and security of municipal and other lands (short, medium, long term) for community gardens, etc. would also encourage urban/local food production.

## Destination Opportunities

- **Premise:** The market for 'agricultural and/or rural experience' on the part of a nearby large urban population is growing. Strathcona County lies within 30 minutes of 1 million people.
- **Requires:** Clear focus, strategy and execution. Possibilities in two key areas are: a) equine (events in a dedicated facility; a trail system that could attract multi-day rides); and b) food (Savour Strathcona County as a feature festival attracting a full array of local products, services and entertainment).

### 3.12 Implementation Issues

The identified areas of opportunity (best fit) will require a clear resolve on the part of Council to actualize and implement. Currently, there appears a strongly held public perception that agriculture is not a priority area for Strathcona County and receives little attention or consideration.

First and foremost, Strathcona County will need to strongly assert its commitment to agriculture and that agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County—both economically as well as continuing as a major land use. This will require a clear political strategy supported by strong food and agriculture sector development, communications and land use plans. For example, a business case for the support of the equine sector and the positioning of Strathcona County as a ‘Horse Capital’ would facilitate support for this area of focus.

Another key area revolves around the interest in local food and the nurturing of local food businesses and related services. Currently there is no clear blueprint for success in this emerging sector. Nevertheless, Strathcona County is well positioned both spatially and in terms of potential resources to take a leadership role in the Capital Region.

Finally, another key challenge will be the need to deal with owners of agricultural land who are expecting these lands to be used for non-agricultural purposes at some time in the future. Accordingly, their expectations with respect to the value of these lands vastly exceed their agricultural value. Thus, any measures or policies that are seen to limit or delay this expectation of value will be vigorously opposed by some.

Specific to this issue of value (or lost opportunity), a key tool that could be considered is the transfer of development rights. This requires the clear designation by Strathcona County of the *Sending Area* (agricultural land to be protected) and a *Receiving Area* (land to be developed). Such a program would require that development credits be purchased and transferred from the sending area to the receiving area. In effect, an owner of agricultural land would be able to sell their development rights as defined by the number credits Strathcona County allocated to the property. In turn, a developer who has purchased land for development but without the required zoning would be required to purchase the zoning rights in the form of development credits.

This tool has been enabled by the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and is being considered by two municipalities in Alberta: Wheatland County and the MD of Bighorn. At the broader level, this tool has been used extensively in other rural municipalities in the United States, as well in urban municipalities within Canada to deal with ‘density’ re-allocations. For example, Vancouver has a program to transfer density to preserve heritage buildings.









# 4 Existing Policy

## 4.1 Introduction

To understand the current planning framework, it is important to consider the factors that influenced its evolution. Following decades of regional planning, the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission's Metropolitan Regional Plan was approved in 1984. The plan reflected a snapshot of conditions, history, policy, and municipal intentions up to that time.

The land use pattern and policies in the 1984 plan were driven by three main factors: **(1)** Provincial policies in favour of the conservation of 'better' agricultural land and other policies such as the first parcel out; **(2)** development patterns and their potential future expansion based on logical servicing and planning expectations fostered the continued growth of Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, and the industrial areas nearby regardless of soil conditions; and **(3)** soil quality and the dividing line between Classes 1 & 2 and Class 3 in 'rural areas' was a major determinate. Land use policies were to minimize land use conflicts.

Since this time, new initiatives have influenced the planning regime in Alberta, the Edmonton Capital Region, and Strathcona County. This section outlines relevant provincial and municipal policy.

## 4.2 Provincial Land Use Policies

In 1996, the Provincial Government adopted Provincial Land Use Policies (PLUPs) pursuant to the Municipal Government Act. These policies outline provincial interests and the role of municipalities in implementing them—by ensuring municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, and planning decisions and actions are consistent with the PLUPs.

With respect to land use patterns, PLUPs generally call for an appropriate mix of agricultural and other land uses in an orderly, efficient, and compatible manner; embody sustainable development, and provide for a wide range of food and agricultural sector development opportunities.

With a goal to contribute to the maintenance and diversification of Alberta's agricultural industry, four policies were adopted:

- Municipalities 'are encouraged' to identify areas where extensive and intensive agriculture and associated activities should be a primary land use.
- Municipalities 'are encouraged' to limit the fragmentation of agriculture lands and their premature conversion to other uses.
- Municipalities 'are encouraged' to direct non-agricultural development to areas where they will not constrain agriculture.
- Municipalities 'are encouraged' to minimize conflicts arising from intensive agricultural operations through the use of setbacks and other mitigative measures.

The policies address the issues of identifying and designating agricultural lands, discouraging their fragmentation and premature conversion, and avoiding conflicts between uses. However, they are not regulatory in these regards. These policies are to be incorporated into Regional Plans as they are developed under the Land Use Framework with or without changes/additions.

### 4.3 Provincial Land Use Framework and ALSA

The Land Use Framework (LUF), released in 2008, outlined a new Provincial approach to managing land and resources. The LUF established seven planning regions, and called for the development of a regional plan for each.

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA), proclaimed in 2009, established the legal basis for the development of the regional plans. The regional plans are applicable to both private and Crown lands, and contain portions that are enforceable by law, as well as sections that are intended as statements of policy to guide the Crown, decision makers, and local governments.

ALSA enables, not only regional planning, but it also provides tools for the implementation of those plans. These tools include conservation directives by the province, and potential programs for conservation easements and transfers of development credits. These schemes may be aimed at the protection, conservation, and enhancement of agricultural lands and lands for agricultural purposes.

### 4.4 North Saskatchewan Regional Plan

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, the first provincially approved regional plan, merely repeats the PLUPs as its agricultural policies. The second regional plan, that for the South Saskatchewan, includes general policy objectives for agriculture: **(1)** maintaining an agricultural base by identifying contiguous blocks and smaller areas of agricultural lands and limit their fragmentation and conversion—including the use of conservation easements; **(2)** supporting a diverse and innovative irrigated agriculture and agri-food sector; **(3)** maximizing opportunities for value added agriculture; **(4)** recognizing the local market; **(5)** supporting the transition to the next generation of agriculture and food producers; and **(6)** encouraging the use of voluntary market-based instruments for ecosystem (natural capital) services.

Strathcona County is in the area to be covered by the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan. This plan area is large, 13% of Alberta, stretching from British Columbia to Saskatchewan. This plan is currently under preparation, but the Terms of Reference for the planning process state the plan is to ‘provide advice on maintaining a viable agricultural land base to support growth and diversification of the agricultural industry.’ In its discussion of biodiversity, the ToR notes that ‘The trade-off discussion related to the settled area revolves around the value of the land in terms of its agricultural productivity and the ecosystem services that the private land base provides versus the value of the land if used for other purposes (e.g. residential development).’ The plan is required to address the use of the various conservation tools.

In summary, the language of these Regional Plans to date have moved from the term “encouraged” to “expected” to limit fragmentation and the premature conversion of agricultural lands. Although there is no requirement per se in these first two plans, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan may be more directive in the conservation of agricultural lands if desired by stakeholders and municipalities. The hierarchical nature of Alberta’s system requires the Regional Planning directions, as they are finally adopted, to be considered in the preparation of plans by both the Edmonton Capital Region Board and Strathcona County.

## 4.5 Capital Region Board Growth Plan

The primary purpose of the Capital Region Land Use Plan is to manage sustainable growth in a manner that protects the region's environment and resources, minimizes the regional development footprint, strengthens communities, increases transportation choice and supports food and agricultural sector development. The Capital Region Growth Plan: Growing Forward was approved by the Government of Alberta on March 11, 2010. The plan had the following acknowledgement:

*Agricultural land is a limited, non-renewable resource which is competing with other forms of development. If the land is not protected in the long-term for food production, the land will be converted to another use and lost forever. Agricultural land has significant value, both at the local and regional levels, beyond its pure economic capacity, including green space, aesthetics, community character, lifestyle, air quality, wildlife habitat, as well as a risk management measure in the event of future food shortages. In order to ensure agriculture lands are complementary with policies to reduce the regional footprint, further collaboration on implementing agricultural land policies is required.*

Specific to agriculture, the Plan does little else other than to identify those areas that have been designated for agricultural purposes by municipalities. This is not to say it lacked complete support for agricultural conservation as it did have policies that, to a degree, sought to direct growth to priority areas and minimize the regional development footprint. However, the Capital Region Board, as a result of the potential controversy, took the position that they would wait until the Province took further policy decisions relative to issues such as agricultural land fragmentation and management strategy.

Since that time, the Alberta Government wrote the Capital Region Board in August 2014, stating that "they determined that the economic, environmental and social evidence did not currently support the need for a provincial-level policy on agricultural fragmentation and conversion, though we recognize the issue as a growing concern throughout Alberta, particularly within the Edmonton-Calgary corridor." Most commentators noted that this probably reflected the will of the ruling party's political constituency. The letter goes on to state that "municipalities are now expected, rather than encouraged, to follow the direction provided through the PLUP on this important issue."

The plan is now undergoing a review and update. As a result, it is opportune for Strathcona County to ensure that its agriculture policies are incorporated across the Capital Region so there is a level playing field.

## 4.6 Strathcona County Strategic Plan

The introduction to the Strathcona County Strategic Plan, 2014 contains very clear language with respect to agriculture and the priority areas. To quote:

*Strathcona County is an energetic and thriving community... and a champion for advancing diverse agricultural business. We strive to be a model of ecological integrity, protecting our environment and preserving our agricultural heritage... We are Canada's most livable community.*

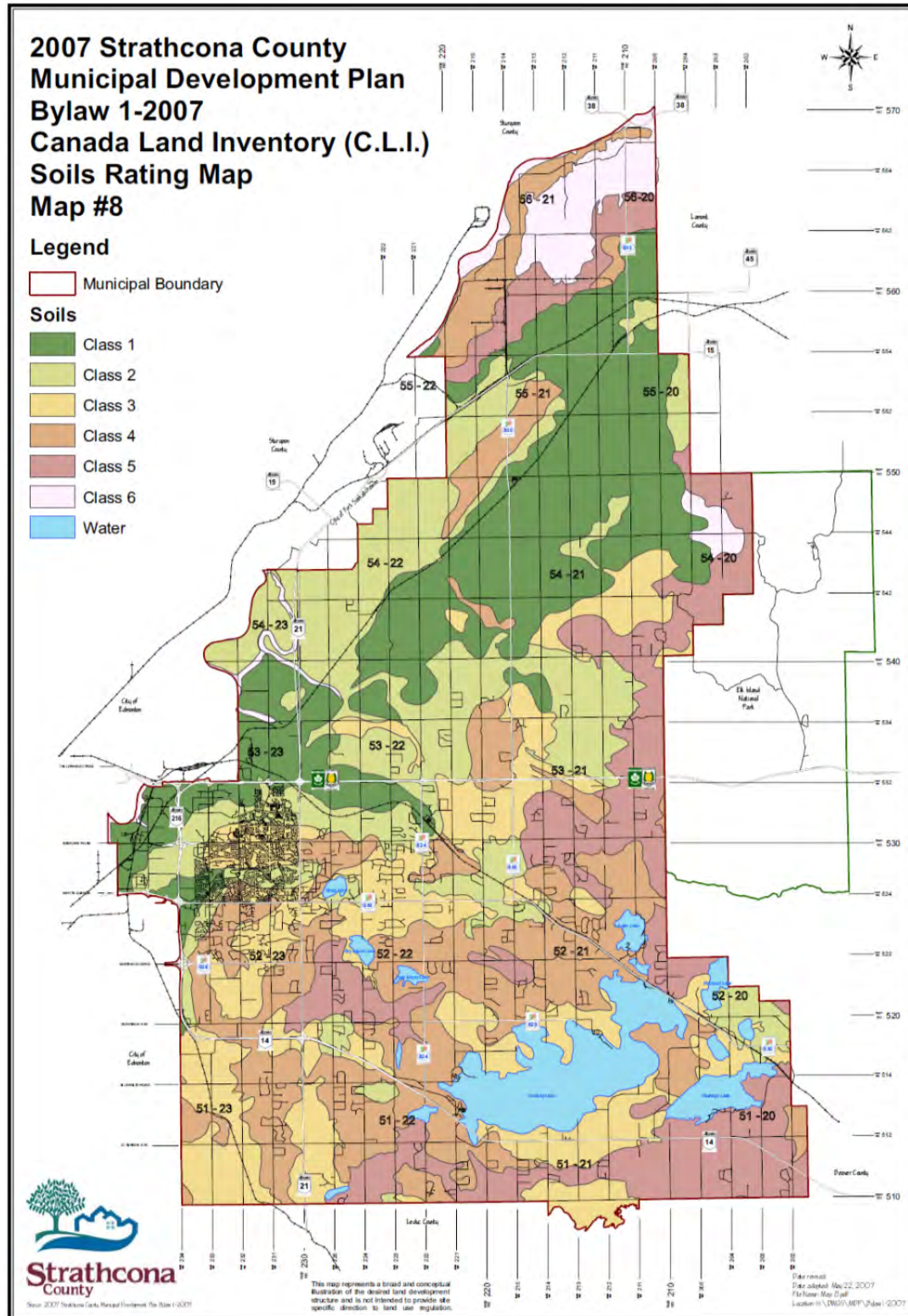
Clearly the strategic plan recognizes Strathcona County's "strong agricultural roots" as part of community culture.

As part of its initiatives for a diverse economy, Strathcona County has a strategic goal to "increase and diversify agricultural business." It also includes three indicators on which it is to track performance towards this goal: **(1)** number of new agri-businesses established; **(2)** % increase of diversified agricultural activity; and **(3)** % of tax base derived from agricultural business.



## 4.7 Strathcona County Municipal Development Plan

An earlier section had a general description of soil quality for agriculture throughout Strathcona County. The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) includes **Figure 2: MDP Soils Rating Map: Map #8**. It is reproduced here as it is important to illustrate how the soil quality has, or hasn't, shaped the land use pattern in Strathcona County.



The MDP has an objective to promote the rural/urban character of the Strathcona County and to support a mixture of tourism, agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

### **General Agricultural Objectives**

1. Maintain and enhance the viability of the existing agricultural community and agricultural industry;
2. Protect, wherever possible, agricultural land which has a Canada Land Inventory (C.L.I.) soil class ranking of 1 or 2;
3. Minimize non-agricultural development within areas where the focus is on promoting agricultural development;
4. Reduce the fragmentation of agricultural land within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area;
5. Accommodate the diversification and intensification of agricultural activities, such as intensive horticulture, in suitable areas;
6. Minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses;
7. Encourage the practice of agriculture in an environmentally responsible manner;
8. Limit the potential for conflict between confined feeding operations and other land uses within the County;
9. Identify criteria for consideration in the development or expansion of confined feeding operations; and
10. Pursue the protection of High and Medium Priority Environment Management Areas, as development of smaller sized, specialty agricultural initiatives occurs. Development must be in accordance with the principles contained within this document as well as the requirements of the appropriate Land Use Bylaws designations.

General policies related to agriculture include the promotion of value added agricultural and industrial agricultural uses, encouraging facilities or agricultural operations that utilize waste streams from industry or confined feeding operations, the promotion of agricultural practices that are sustainable and environmentally responsible, and discouraging non-agricultural development in areas where agriculture is the predominant land use. The MDP has, as an objective, to “reduce the consumption of agricultural land for non-agricultural (i.e. residential) purposes”. This is achieved chiefly through limiting subdivision in agricultural areas and promoting higher density development in designated urban expansion areas.

The general pattern of land use designated in Strathcona County’s MDP is shown by **Figure 3: MDP Policy Areas: Map #12.**







Strathcona County has three main policy areas that relate specifically to agricultural land: **(1)** a large holdings area; **(2)** small holdings area; **(3)** and an agri-industrial transition area. Other areas do have some implication for agriculture. These areas are discussed below.

#### **Agriculture: Large Holdings Policy Area**

The purpose of this policy area is to promote the development of extensive/large traditional agricultural operations, and to minimize the fragmentation of agricultural land by limiting subdivision. This area includes most of the area of better soils (Classes 1 and 2) north of Highway 16.

Subdivision for residential purposes is generally limited to the first parcel out of an unsubdivided quarter section for an existing or new residence; or to split an unsubdivided quarter section into two equal parts. There are other policies covering unique geographical situations.

A secondary residence is permitted to support an agricultural operation, and collective communal residences are a discretionary use.

#### **Agriculture: Small Holdings Policy Area**

The purpose of this policy area is to promote agriculture, conserve environmentally sensitive areas, and allow the development of large rural residential land uses. These lands form a band generally surrounding Sherwood Park and its adjoining country residential area.

New residential developments within this policy area are to conform to conservation design-based principles, whereby environmentally important areas are to be preserved wherever possible, and residential development is directed to areas of lesser environmental significance.

Subdivision of agricultural land for the development of small agricultural operations is permitted where compatible with adjacent uses. The MDP sets out a number of criteria dealing principally with access, servicing, and environmental preservation. The maximum parcel density is generally limited to eight parcels per quarter section, but may be increased to ten under certain circumstances.

#### **Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area**

The Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area, a strip along Highways 21 and 15, is intended as a transition between the Heartland heavy industrial complex in the north of Strathcona County and the agricultural lands to the south. Agricultural production is permitted, providing a buffer between industrial land uses and other, more sensitive land uses. Agri-business uses (e.g. primary and secondary agricultural production and processing) are encouraged within this area. Examples of agri-businesses include seed cleaning plants, greenhouses, and food processing plants. It has primarily better soils.



### **Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area**

Agriculture is also permitted in the Beaver Hills Moraine policy area, although ecological preservation is the main objective in that area. It covers the east and southeast portions of Strathcona County and has primarily Class 4 and 5 soils.

Within the Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area, agricultural uses are permitted on lands that are not identified as High Priority Environment Management Areas. The subdivision of land within this policy area is restricted in order to help conserve and enhance natural areas. Strathcona County has proposed a transfer of development credit (TDC) program for this area.

With approximately 50% of its land base located within the Beaver Hills/Cooking Lake Moraine, Strathcona County, in partnership with the Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI) has launched a pilot project to test TDC program options within the Beaver Hills area. The Project is being developed by Alberta Innovates Technology Futures, Miistakis Institute, the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, and Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation. It is to establish a market-based model for TDC's that allow preservation of the area's natural capital by expanding and creating sustainable business opportunities. The vision is that market based instruments will help balance economic development with the conservation of valuable natural assets of the Beaver Hills/Cooking Lake Moraine.

### **Country Residential Policy Area**

The Country Residential Policy Area south and east of Sherwood Park is already highly fragmented on generally Class 3 and 4 soils. Existing agricultural operations are permitted to continue and new country residential developments are required to address potential conflicts with existing agricultural operations.

### **Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area**

Existing agricultural operations are permitted to continue within this policy area—approximately nine square miles located to the south of Sherwood Park. A Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area Growth Management Strategy is meant to address potential conflicts with existing agricultural operations within the Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area and adjacent Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area. However, the area is now being studied as a possible urban expansion area, called Colchester, as Sherwood Park reaches capacity. It includes primarily Class 3 and 4 soils.

### **Transition Urban Reserve Policy Area**

This area, primarily Class 1 soils north of Sherwood Park, was recently approved for urban development.

### **Urban Reserve Policy Area**

This area, generally known as the Bremner area, is primarily Class 1 and 2 soils northeast of Sherwood Park across Highway 16. Strathcona County has recently completed a planning study of this area for potential urban development. Focusing on the area south of Point-aux-Pins Creek, it is now in abeyance until the Colchester area is studied to see which of the two might be a preferred site for the 'new Sherwood Park.'

## 4.8 Strathcona County Land Use Bylaw

While the Land Use Bylaw is one of the major tools used to implement the MDP, it generally reflects existing detailed plan approvals and existing land use conditions. There are several land use districts and provisions that are relevant to agriculture in Strathcona County.

### **AG Agriculture - General**

This district now covers the vast majority of the rural area of Strathcona County. Its general purpose is “to foster agriculture and conserve agricultural land... by providing a compatible range of agricultural uses with regulations that maintain large parcel sizes”. It is generally consistent with the parcel sizes in the MDP (80 acres), with smaller parcels for intensive agriculture, first parcels out, natural severances, etc.

Permitted uses are agriculture (general, intensive horticulture, minor intensive agriculture, minor equestrian centres) and dwellings (single, secondary, and minor uses like minor home businesses).

Discretionary uses (which may be permitted depending on specific site circumstances) include some agriculture (garden stands, major intensive agriculture, greenhouses and plant nurseries, major equestrian centres), some associated agricultural uses (veterinarians), and other uses such as agricultural dwellings, collective communal dwellings, religious assemblies, and private airports.

This district will be replaced by other districts in large parts of Strathcona County where use or density will eventually change according to approved MDP policies. For those areas, the agricultural use is considered temporary—more of a holding zone for other future uses. This can be seen by comparing areas now designated for agriculture in the Land Use Bylaw with the future uses shown in the Municipal Development Plan. Substantial areas now zoned for agriculture will be eventually rezoned for non-agricultural uses in the long run according to the MDP.



### **AD Agriculture - Future Development**

This is an 'interim' or 'holding' district for agricultural areas in Sherwood Park, the hamlets, and country residential policy areas that are slated for future development. It could be used to protect a future urban growth area if and when one is designated.

It allows only general agriculture as a permitted use and has only a restricted range of other compatible uses

### **RA Rural Residential/Agriculture**

Its general purpose is "to foster agriculture and a rural lifestyle of properties larger than 20 acres. This includes a range of more intensive agriculture and agriculture related uses that would be compatible in the area in certain situations." The RA district is generally consistent with the parcel sizes in the MDP- 20 acres for new parcels (existing 10 acre parcels are not uncommon).

This district is currently interspersed with AG (Agriculture - General) and RC (Country Residential) in the areas generally east of Sherwood Park beyond the country residential area.

Permitted uses are agriculture (general, intensive horticulture) and dwellings (single detached dwellings and minor uses like minor home businesses). Discretionary uses include some agriculture (garden stands, minor intensive agriculture, animal breeding and boarding, greenhouses and plant nurseries, equestrian centres), some associated agricultural uses (veterinarians), and bed and breakfasts.



## **AG-HI Agri-Industrial**

This district is applied to a band of land south of the Industrial Heavy Policy Area, and is to provide a buffer between heavy industry and populated areas. The purpose of this district is to “foster the development of primary and secondary agricultural processing with uses compatible with adjacent heavy industrial land uses in Strathcona County’s Heartland Industrial area.”

Permitted uses include agricultural and garden stands, agricultural product processing, agriculture (general, intensive horticulture), agri-industrial support service, greenhouse and plant nursery and minor utility service. Discretionary uses include aggregate extraction, agriculture (major and minor intensive livestock), emergency service, government service, and recreational vehicle storage.

## **Other Districts**

There are other districts, such as the industrial and commercial districts, that may be used for agricultural processing and support uses (either in hamlets, Sherwood Park, or other appropriate areas).

## **Use Definitions**

There are definitions that seem to cover the wide range of agricultural uses: abattoirs, agricultural and garden stands, agricultural support service, general agriculture, intensive horticultural, agriculture, major intensive livestock agriculture, minor intensive livestock agriculture, animal breeding and boarding, agricultural dwelling, collective communal dwelling, secondary dwelling, major and minor equestrian centre, greenhouse and plant nursery.

## **Permitting & Regulations**

There are regulations that affect agricultural uses: yards, heights, setbacks, etc. There are other regulations, such as setbacks from watercourses, which affect all property in Strathcona County, including agriculture.

Permits are not generally required for agricultural and accessory agricultural uses (except dwellings, barns, large greenhouses, intensive agriculture, etc.), but are required for agricultural and garden stands (i.e., retailing). Site grading and tree clearing is not as stringently regulated in agricultural areas.

The Land Use Bylaw has specific regulations for intensive agriculture and for setbacks from it, etc., but this has been replaced by provincial regulation of CFOs.

## **Right to Farm**

The Land Use Bylaw contains a provision that applicants for permits or certificates of compliance for non-agricultural uses in or within 50 m of agricultural areas be notified about potential adverse impacts on their proposed development from existing or future agriculture in the vicinity.

## Recent Changes to the Land Use Bylaw

An update to the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) has been ongoing since 2012. A Bylaw was approved by Council, which will come into effect in May 2015. It included the following changes relative to agriculture.

- **Equestrian Centres:** after consultation with Agriculture Service Board, the definition of equestrian centres was simplified to a facility on a lot equal to or greater than 8.0 ha used for the training of riders or horses or for the boarding of horses, not owned by the property owner. There is one class of use proposed, generally as a permitted use, but will be a discretionary use where proposed adjacent to an existing country residential subdivision, within the Country Residential Policy Area of the MDP; or to include a new accessory building greater than 20,000 ft<sup>2</sup>.
- **Agriculture:** one proposed change was to replace Agricultural and Garden Stand with Agricultural Product Stand as a use. This would be a permitted use within AG, AG-HI, AR, RA, and RS Zoning Districts. Also, Agriculture, Minor Intensive Livestock is proposed to change from a discretionary use to permitted use within the AG-HI and RA Zoning Districts; and be introduced as a discretionary use within the RS Zoning District. Agriculture, General definition was clarified to include the rearing of livestock and raising of crops. Lastly, the Agriculture, Major Intensive Livestock use has been discontinued as Confined Feeding Operations are now a provincial responsibility.

For the most part, the Strathcona County LUB reasonably addresses issues about agricultural use and subdivision. The concerns raised in the stakeholder consultation process appears to be more related to a lack of understanding (and patience) with the process around permitting as well as such issues as building code requirements.





## 4.9 Strathcona County Agricultural Governance

Strathcona County Council appoints an Agricultural Service Board. Its mission is to act as an advisory body to Council on agricultural matters, while promoting and developing agricultural policies to meet the needs of the municipality.

Duties and Responsibilities of the Agricultural Service Board Act are:

- To act as an advisory body, and to assist Council and the Minister of Agriculture in matters of mutual concern.
- To advise on and to help organize and direct weed and pest control and soil and water conservation programs under Provincial legislation.
- To assist in the control of livestock disease under the Animal Health Act.
- To promote, enhance and protect viable and sustainable agriculture with a view to improving the economic viability of the agricultural producer.

There are three agricultural societies in Strathcona County. These are:

1. Josephburg Agricultural Society
2. Ardrossan Recreation and Agricultural Society
3. Colchester & District Agricultural Society.

Each society has its own Board of Directors and offers a range of events and programs to service the community within which it operates. These range from 4-H beef shows, horse related events and clinics, fundraising dinners, picnics and parades. Funding for each society is provided by the Province of Alberta in the form of a grant program administered by the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies.

In some cases, societies take the responsibility for the booking or the operating of facilities. For example the Colchester & District Society is responsible for bookings at the Fultonvale Outdoor Arena; the Ardrossan Recreation Agricultural Society operates the Ardrossan Memorial Hall; the Josephburg Agricultural Society originally formed to expand the community hall operates the Josephburg Community Hall - it also uses facilities such as the Moyer Recreation Centre that are now operated by Strathcona County.

An analysis of the extent and scope of the three agricultural societies was not done. However, it would appear that each society is largely focused on developing activities of interest within their own communities and do not collaborate to undertake what could be termed as larger cross-county events that typically do not meet their local community mandate. Each society finds the attraction of members and volunteers to be a challenge.

Interestingly, over the course of our interviews and focus group meetings, there was no mention of these agricultural societies as leaders or a voice for agricultural concerns or issues within Strathcona County. Thus, it might be concluded that no definitive voice for agriculture is currently recognized within Strathcona County.





# 5 Setting the Stage

## 5.1 A Definition for Agriculture

Agriculture is far broader and far more complex than the traditional ideal of a farm family, once common to rural Canada that managed a mix of livestock and cropping enterprises. Indeed, modern agriculture is multifaceted and very diverse. For example, some agricultural enterprises require large tracts of high quality land for the production of crops. Other enterprises require only a location and no soils at all for production within a controlled environmental facility.

For the purposes of this study, agriculture should be viewed in its broadest sense. Thus, a wide range of enterprises must be considered, including large acreage field cropping operations growing wheat, barley, canola and field peas to small plots of specialty herbs, spices or organic vegetables. The range also extends from the large-scale livestock production of poultry, dairy, hogs or beef cattle to bee-keeping or small acreage hobby farms and the equine and agri-tourism sectors. It should include value-added enterprises and the services and support facilities for agriculture.

We propose the following definition of agriculture for Strathcona County to guide the planning process:

***The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, foods, horticulture and agri-food related value added enterprises including education, motivated either by profit or lifestyle.***

Our intent is to define agriculture as broadly as possible to be inclusive and maximize opportunities as agriculture continues to evolve over time. While the objective of many agricultural activities is to produce food for human consumption and to do so profitably over the long term, agriculture should not be limited to these activities alone. It should be broad enough to include activities that are motivated by personal interests (hobby) or recreational purposes. It can occur in both urban and rural settings. This definition has been supported by stakeholders through the community consultation program.

## 5.2 A Vision for Agriculture

Agriculture will be an integral part of Strathcona County's strategic vision to build Canada's most livable community. Essential to the Strathcona County's unique character, agriculture will continue to contribute to Strathcona County's economic and social life, as well as to the environment and natural capital. The vision is as follows:

***Strathcona County as Canada's most livable community is distinguished by its agricultural heritage that builds on history and responds to opportunities as a leader in the Capital Region in the provision of a broad range of agricultural and food opportunities as well as agri-food related services to one of Canada's fastest growing metropolitan regions.***

The Vision for Agriculture in Strathcona County builds on "Our Vision" articulated in *Strathcona County County 2030 Powering our New Tomorrow*. It affirms that agriculture is and will be central to Strathcona County's character and economic life. Further, it recognizes that Strathcona County is uniquely located within a dynamic metropolitan region. As such, agriculture in the 'shadow' of a large urban area will be quite different than agriculture in a more traditional rural county that is not home to a major and rapidly growing population centre.



Strathcona County's location presents both opportunity and challenge. The opportunity pertains to its proximity to a ready market and to supply a range of agricultural and food products and/or services that are in demand as well as being economically sustainable. The challenge also pertains to the proximity factor and the competition for land for non-agricultural purposes whether these are for residential, commercial or industrial growth. Given this inherent tension, the Vision must not only strive to provide direction for realistic opportunities but also commit to a regular review process to assess the continued viability of agriculture in the light of continuous change.

This vision has been supported by stakeholders through the community consultation program.

### Elements of the Vision

- The continuation of significant large scale field cropping areas for the long term.
- A strong presence of acreages comprising a mix of specialty production operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, specialized livestock (sheep, goats, bees, llamas, alpacas, poultry, etc.).
- A thriving equine sector with related activities such as stables, training, trail riding, community engagement and emerging opportunities in the field of recreation and therapy.
- Home to numerous value added operations including primary and secondary processing; related services; research and the development of unique local markets and market channels for Strathcona County based food and agricultural products and services.
- Urban agriculture—both individual and collective undertakings (gardens, roof tops, bees, etc.) and community gardens.
- Destination/experience and agri-tourism opportunities such as food festivals; major equine events; trail riding; one day or multi-day outings.
- Leader in the Capital Region specific to agriculture and food related promotional activities.

## 5.3 Principles for Planning

The Phase 1 findings outlined the multitude of pressures in which agriculture currently operates. In the interim report, the following conclusion was presented:

***Agriculture (and related enterprises) in Strathcona County is under extreme pressure and will require strong County support to persist and thrive.***

Within this context, five principles are relevant: one overriding or guiding principle that is far reaching in both commitment and intent; supported by four operating principles that provide a framework for specific policies, plans and implementation strategies.

### The Overriding Principle

- **Agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic and environmental heritage.**

### The Operating Principles

- **The long term success of agriculture in a metropolitan context can only be assured with strong supporting and integrated land use, food and agriculture sector development and infrastructure policies.**
- **The conversion or fragmentation of large tracks, primary or unique agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth (residential, commercial, industrial) will only be done as a last resort.**
- **The advancement of agriculture requires *shared leadership* including the municipality, residents and stakeholders within Strathcona County, and the Capital Region.**
- **Changes in agriculture are both continuous and considerable, requiring a dynamic and proactive approach in response to emerging trends and opportunities both urban and rural.**









# 6 The Agricultural Strategy

## 6.1 Introduction

This section is intended as a bridge between the principles outlined in Section 4 and the recommendations in Section 7. As such, it provides a general summary of the major policy and implementation thrusts for each of the key areas.

In the process of preparing the Agriculture Master Plan, it became obvious that a degree of skepticism exists within Strathcona County towards agriculture. Indeed, there are those who say: why bother—agriculture no longer has a place in Strathcona County! This skepticism has multiple sources: those who see that the agriculture has had little or no priority and have lost hope; those who see the inevitable urbanization of the entire area in view of its location within the Capital Region; those who are cynical about market opportunities and the economics of production; and those who are motivated by the potential sale of agricultural land for development purposes.

Nevertheless, there are a number of realities: **(1)** agriculture has been and continues to be a major economic enterprise within Strathcona County; **(2)** new opportunities are emerging particularly in a metropolitan market where consumer interests and demands continue to gravitate toward local suppliers; **(3)** Strathcona County continues to have a large land base—it is able to accommodate considerable development with careful planning and without disrupting the major proportion of lands being used for agriculture; and finally **(4)** there is the benefit of time. Strathcona County is in a position of having the time in addition to its location and resources to explore new opportunities for its agricultural base. Should some of the initiatives proposed by this strategy not prove successful, there will time to evaluate and adjust with little or no downside risk to Strathcona County's growth potential. Thus, we present an agricultural strategy that is built on history, future trends, and the uniqueness of Strathcona County and driven by opportunities.

## 6.2 The Overriding Principle

**Agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic and environmental heritage.**

### Policy Approaches

- Council must be seen as fully and strongly committed to this principle. Therefore, the MDP should make a strong statement of commitment to adopt the Agriculture Master Plan and implement its policies.

### Implementation Approaches

- Strathcona County should lead the way. Success depends on an integrated multi-pronged approach to implementation led by Strathcona County but involving other stakeholders as well. The implementation strategy needs to be broad, including a wide range of activities from building broad community support for agriculture to the dedication of municipal effort and resources.

## 6.3 Operating Principle 1

**The long term success of agriculture in a metropolitan context can only be assured with strong supporting and integrated land use, food and agriculture sector development and infrastructure policies.**

### Land Use

#### Land Use Policy Approaches

- The main thrust of agricultural-supportive land use policy and regulation should be to include the broad range of agricultural opportunities (including large scale field crops, more intensive and specialized operations on smaller parcels, the equine sector, value added enterprises, urban agriculture, agri-tourism, etc.) into Strathcona County's overall land use pattern. This includes the long term protection of a large contiguous agricultural area, as well as prime and unique agricultural lands that can support highly productive agriculture.
- Land use policies should minimize land use conflicts, support good agricultural development and maximize the diversity of agricultural opportunities.
- Long term support for agriculture should be provided through policies that minimize the urban development footprint, direct growth to areas less desirable for or with less impact on agriculture, and reduce the fragmentation of large tracks or primary and unique agricultural lands.

#### Land Use Implementation

- Strathcona County should use its MDP and zoning to reduce conflict between agricultural and non-agricultural land.
- Strathcona County should ensure that the assessment of impact on agriculture be a significant on-going requirement in its ongoing decision making processes.
- Strathcona County should help shape Capital Region Board policies to provide a regionally-consistent approach to providing long term support and certainty for agricultural uses.

### Food & Agriculture sector Development

#### Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy Approaches

- Food and agricultural activities should be elevated as priority areas for economic development.
- Policies that allow for and encourage a wide range of commercial agricultural activities on agricultural land to allow for on-farm sales and other activities that draw people (services, events) should be pursued by Strathcona County—particularly for sectors such as equine where there seems to be considerable promise.

#### Food and Agriculture Sector Development Implementation

- Strathcona County needs to invest resources (staff, infrastructure, facilities, and money) to lead and assist in a focused agriculture investment attraction strategy. This would require the hiring of an experienced agri-food economic development officer(s) charged to encourage and develop priority areas.
- Strathcona County should identify and support infrastructure and facility requirements for the production and marketing of local foods and products (such as a permanent year round market or an agri-food commons which can be the base where emerging and small agri-food businesses can locate and develop).

## Infrastructure

### Infrastructure Policy Approaches

- Decisions about capital and operating budgets should specifically support agriculture as a priority area.

### Infrastructure Implementation

- Infrastructure (for example, suitable accesses, multi-purpose agricultural facility, enhanced farmers markets, etc.) required for a thriving agricultural sector should be provided.

## 6.4 Operating Principle 2

**The conversion or fragmentation of large tracks, primary or unique agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth (residential, commercial, industrial) will only be done as a last resort.**

### Policy Approaches

- A permanent long term agricultural land base should be identified, followed by strengthening the protection of agricultural lands within this area.
- All things being equal (*ceteris paribus*), growth should be directed to areas that have less negative impact on agriculture and primary/unique agricultural lands.

### Implementation Approaches

- Strathcona County should go beyond just zoning controls for agricultural land conservation and provide a framework for the purchase of agricultural easements and/or transfer of development rights associated with agricultural lands. This may include both market-driven and public funded components. The MDP should address this in a manner that is predictable, fair and cost effective.
- Strathcona County should play a leadership role to facilitate Capital Region Board policies for a harmonized regional approach to protecting land for agricultural uses.

## 6.5 Operating Principle 3

**The advancement of agriculture requires shared leadership including the municipality, residents and stakeholders within Strathcona County, and the Capital Region.**

### Policy Approaches

- Support of agriculture should be raised to a higher ongoing priority within Strathcona County's administration.
- Strathcona County should encourage the Edmonton Capital Region Board to specifically address agricultural issues like land conservation and food strategy that will be applied regionally.



## Implementation Approaches

- Strathcona County should establish a senior position within Strathcona County's Administration to lead the agriculture and food priority. To advance agriculture and be a leader in the Capital Region requires a high level commitment such as an Associate Commissioner for Food and Agriculture.
- Strathcona County should facilitate the establishment of the Strathcona County Food and Agriculture Institute, by bringing together a representative from each of the three agricultural societies as well as representatives from crop; equine; horticulture; and processing and local food sectors. This Institute will be established as a leading voice for food and agriculture in Strathcona County.
- Strathcona County should take a leadership role in developing an Agriculture and Food Strategy for the Capital Region that outlines a vision for a sustainable food system for the region and create an action plan that looks at the food system as a whole and that:
  - builds awareness of the value of a sustainable food system
  - includes production, processing, distribution, access, consumption and food waste recovery and specific coordinated actions for each.

## 6.6 Operating Principle 4

**Changes in agriculture are both continuous and considerable, requiring a dynamic and proactive approach to planning in response to emerging trends and opportunities.**

### Policy Approaches

- The Agriculture Master Plan should be updated regularly to ensure it continues to be relevant.
- Progress with respect to implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan related to outcomes for the agricultural sector should be monitored regularly.

### Implementation Approaches

- Strathcona County should be vigilant in monitoring trends and new development in agriculture with specific attention to local food initiatives.
- Strathcona County should develop a set of indicators and report annually on the success of the implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan. This would include addressing a range of planning measures (land conversions, etc.), business measures (market development achievements, etc.), and progress specific to a Capital Region Agriculture and Food Strategy. What gets measured gets done.
- Strathcona County should hold an annual forum for stakeholders on agriculture and food in Strathcona County to comment on the progress of the Plan and suggest changes if needed.

## 6.7 The Need to Act

The *Future of Agriculture*, completed in 2003, noted that Strathcona County residents take pride in being part of a diverse, multi-faceted, and 'specialized' community. There were two key components to this that are important to agriculture: **(1)** the agricultural landscape is a major contributor to the environment, character, and cultural ambience of Strathcona County; and **(2)** agriculture is an important part of the vitality of Strathcona County's economy. That study suggested that, following from a commitment to these two key components, Strathcona County should then develop a long term policy including implementation strategies that recognizes the opportunities as well as the reality of the situation. These directions included a commitment to character and agriculture; an agricultural institute; advocacy in the administration; agriculture supportive planning; agricultural easements & taxation; agricultural education; and the development of the food and agriculture sector.

Those directions from 2003 are really not much different than the components of the policies and strategies noted above, except that over a decade has passed and the metropolitan pressures have only magnified. This may be the last chance for Strathcona County to address these challenges and opportunities. The resolve of Council and the senior administration will be the key to the path forward. But, now it is a time to choose. The following section provides the potential actions necessary for agriculture to be a successful part of Strathcona County's future.

Strathcona County has little to lose, and much to gain, by trying to shape and direct a new future. There is little down side risk in the short and medium term other than the expenditure of effort. Effectively, Strathcona County can still accommodate significant industry and residential growth without having to negatively impact agriculture in a significant way. Strathcona County can make further assessment of the successes and challenges after 5, 10 or 15 years and set new directions if needed.









# 7 Implementation Strategy

## 7.1 Introduction

There are three fundamental principles that underlie the current set of planning practices: **(1)** planning is conceptually simple, **(2)** planning [regions] is complex, and **(3)** planning implementation is difficult.<sup>11</sup> *The Future of Agriculture*, prepared in 2003, was a study. While it discussed possible directions, there was no follow-up over the last decade to develop a fully articulated implementation strategy. To be successful, this time, there is a need to clearly determine and define realistic and measurable tactics for governance, communication, land use planning, food and agriculture sector development, infrastructure and a program for future monitoring, evaluation and adjustment.

Some of the proposed actions listed in this section will be straightforward and easy to implement at little cost, but others will be more complex, involve a variety of stakeholders, take longer to implement, and will require more resources. With this in mind, Strathcona County must approach each potential action uniquely – exploring and evaluating them in more detail to develop appropriate tactics for future Council consideration.

## 7.2 Governance

Strathcona County Council must send a strong message so everyone clearly understands its commitment to agriculture, the value of agriculture and the role of agriculture as important part of Strathcona County's character, economy, and environment—past, present and future. As a specialized municipality, Strathcona County has the responsibility to balance both urban and rural interests. This is not an easy task particularly when the agricultural population and indeed the agricultural voice is small. After all, agriculture is the largest user of land in Strathcona County. Thus these agricultural interests and the advancement of the Agriculture Master Plan require focused leadership and follow through.

To accomplish this, Strathcona County needs to address several governance issues as well some program initiatives.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Council adopt the Agriculture Master Plan to clearly demonstrate its commitment to a broad base of agriculture in Strathcona County.
2. That Council include a commitment to these recommendations in the next update to its *Strategic Plan: Strathcona County 2030—Powering our New Tomorrow*.
3. That Council direct the Administration to include appropriate recommendations from the Agriculture Master Plan in the new MDP, for which a planning process is now just initiated.
4. That Strathcona County Administration review and revise its organizational structure to ensure that implementation of the Master Agriculture Plan will be led by a senior leader (with a supportive team) with the responsibility and authority to implement the Plan.
5. That Strathcona County consider the impact on agriculture as a central element in the scope of work for all plans to be developed for or on its behalf.
6. That Council direct the Administration to update its evaluation and reporting processes to ensure that 'Agricultural Impact Assessment' (AIA) is specifically considered at all levels of Strathcona County's decision making processes.
7. That Strathcona County facilitate the formation of an Agriculture and Food Leadership Institute that is representative of the range of agricultural interests within Strathcona County and to provide ongoing leadership, advocacy, and direction both to the Council and to Strathcona County at large.

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<sup>11</sup> Lisle Mitchell, "Characteristics of Recreational Planning."

## 7.3 Communications

It is important to communicate the important role of agriculture, and the steps being taken to support it, to the broader community to build an informed base of support for the long term.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Strathcona County develop a strong, and ongoing, communications and public relations program that outlines Strathcona County's commitment and vision for agriculture. In addition, the supporting communications plan should address the key initiatives recommended by the Agriculture Master Plan.
2. That Strathcona County commit to a long term program of education specific to the meaning, opportunities and the diversity of agriculture and food. This program will be designed for citizens at large but with a specific focus on Strathcona County youth via the education system.
3. That Strathcona County, as a municipality with a blend of both urban and rural lands, take a leadership role in the emerging opportunities for agriculture in the urban shadow and commit to a regular forum or conference, with the Agriculture and Food Leadership Institute, that brings subject matter experts to Strathcona County.

### Agricultural Forum: An Example

#### Halton Region Agricultural Forum

This annual Agricultural Forum provides the Region with a great opportunity to connect directly with the local farming community and engage in open dialogue about important and emerging issues. Close to 50 farmers, food processors, agri-product processors and elected officials attended the free 2014 event, which was held at Country Heritage Park. The 2014 Forum focused on innovation and was designed to provide information on some of the latest trends in agriculture, including new research, funding opportunities and the advantages of developing niche products.

In addition to providing networking opportunities, the 2015 Halton Region Agricultural Forum addressed such topics as:

- What's Growin' On at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre: Michael Brownbridge, Research Director, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre
- Developing Niche Markets (Part 1): Mark Hayhoe, Owner, k2 Milling
- Developing Niche Markets (Part 2): Stemmler Meats and Cheese: Kevin Stemmler, Co-owner, Stemmler Meats and Cheese
- Government Funding: Cash Flow Planning Options to Innovation & Accelerate Growth: Alex Barlow, Business Development Executive, Mentor Works

## 7.4 Land Use and Development Planning

While the strategy for enhancing agriculture must be multi-faceted, land use and development aspects are an integral part of a multi-pronged effort to support agriculture. This strategy must be based on informed decisions in a manner that provides equity and certainty. Planning tools, of course, are limited to those allowed by the enabling legislation.

### Potential Actions:

1. That any application to re-zone or re-designate lands currently zoned or designated agricultural will require an Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) and that the results will be a key consideration in the final planning decision.

### Agricultural Impact Assessment: An Example

- The Regional Municipality of Halton is in the southwest part of the Greater Toronto Area. The Town of Oakville and the City of Burlington are largely urban, while the Towns of Milton and Halton Hills to the north are significantly more rural. In 1985, they adopted Agricultural Assessment Guidelines.
- The purpose of the agricultural impact assessment process is to determine if a development proposal will adversely affect existing and future agricultural activities on-site and in the surrounding area. This process supports the view Halton's farm lands are a natural resource of major importance to the economic viability of agriculture.
- The assessment describes the proposed development, the on-site and surrounding land uses, and the physical and socio-economic components of the agricultural resource base; identifies the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed development on existing agricultural operations and on the flexibility of the area to support different types of agriculture; considers methods of reducing any adverse impacts; and makes recommendations in that regard.
- The completion of the agricultural impact assessment does not assure the approval of a development proposal, but rather, is one source of information considered in evaluating the merits of the proposal.



2. That all further development for the purposes of industrial, commercial or residential be considered in a manner whereby the impact on agriculture and lands used for agriculture is minimized or enhanced.
3. That lands be appropriately reclaimed and revert to agricultural function and zoning after resource extraction is complete.
4. That the MDP and land use bylaw allow the discretionary use of community food growing programs on community shared lands, MRs and common properties.
5. That Strathcona County develop processes for educating its rural and/or agricultural land owners regarding permit and regulatory requirements specific to agricultural related initiatives that are either new or an expansion of a current enterprise.
6. That Strathcona County review its current approach to rural land owners with the view to develop a more customer-focused permitting process for agricultural uses.
7. That future community plans include provisions for farmers markets in public or private space areas in new or existing communities. Strathcona County will also identify potential public and private lands within urban centres and support their development as temporary or permanent community gardens, etc.
8. That Strathcona County allow for 'Agriculture Commercial' in selected areas to accommodate 'agricultural businesses.' A specific example would be the proposed Multi-purpose Agricultural Facility that would allow for adjacent uses such as an agricultural supply business and/or an equestrian supply business; as well as allow for trailers/campers for overnight stays.
9. That Strathcona County review its bylaws etc. related to the establishment of agri-business/opportunities (e.g. food processing, urban/acreage agriculture) and make them more supportive to equine and local food development/initiatives.
10. That Strathcona County take an active role, working with its municipal partners, to shape Capital Region Board land use and development policies to provide a regionally-consistent approach that provides long term support and certainty for agricultural uses. As the CRB is currently reviewing its plan, it is important to engage in this process as soon as possible.
11. That Strathcona County establish a mechanism for the purchase of agricultural protection easements through different sources. This could be in conjunction with the system for administering environmental credits envisaged for the Beaver Hills Moraine. There are options for funding, such as a special levy, a land conversion fee, or donations, etc.

## **Agricultural Easements: American Farmland Trust**

Among advocates of farmland protection efforts, agricultural easements are now regarded as the most promising tool for dealing with urban conversion trends. Largely because of their non-regulatory and landowner compensation features, easements have become a widely popular technique for the express purpose of protecting farmland over the past quarter of a century—and it is estimated that about 1,100,000 acres of farmland across the US have been put under easements at an approximate cost of \$2.3 billion.

Most local programs are found in the suburban and semi-rural parts of major metropolitan areas, with county populations of more than 100,000 and rapid population growth. The direct cost of purchasing easements—generally the difference between market and farming values—averages to about \$2,000 an acre. But in many cases the development rights are worth more, with the added value contributed as full or partial donations by landowners for tax benefits. State governments provide most easement funds, with lesser amounts coming from local taxes, federal funds and nonprofit sources.

In order to protect large contiguous blocks of farmland, no one specific model or combination can be applied across the board given the great differences in agricultural landscapes, commodity requirements, the rate and pattern of urbanization, and program resources. Rather, easement programs are best advised to customize their acquisition practices to local needs and circumstances based upon a clear set of conservation goals and priorities.

Suggestions for effective acquisition strategies include setting clear purposes and goals for the program based upon thorough knowledge of local needs and considerations. There is a need to create a transparent, defensible process for selecting parcels based upon factors such as funding sources and availability, the nature of the local landscape, the type of agriculture in the area and associated parcel sizes and the type and extent of urban threat in the area.

12. That Strathcona County establish a development credit transfer strategy. This could be a program that requires developers in a designated receiving area (i.e., an area to be developed or redeveloped) to purchase development rights from a designated sending area (the agricultural area to be protected).

### **Transferring Development Credits – How they work**

The Alberta government, through the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) has provided the enabling legislation for this type of scheme. The Province's report "Efficient Use of Land Implementation Tools Compendium" describes this tool as follows:

Transfer of development credits (TDCs) works by directing development away from areas of environmental, aesthetic or agricultural value and redirecting it into higher density clusters. To achieve this, two types of areas are identified: Sending Areas and Receiving Areas. The Sending Area is the area that the municipality wishes to protect from development, such as an agricultural area or natural area. The Receiving Area is a location where additional density could be accommodated. The goal of the TDC program is to "send" development from the Sending Area to the Receiving Area. To do this, development credits are sold or transferred by landowners in the Sending Area while increasing it in the Receiving Area. The credits that are gained from the Sending Area can be used in the form of development bonuses in the Receiving Area. The owner of agricultural land in the sending area would be compensated for not having the ability to convert their land (e.g. to residential) by having the opportunity to sell their development rights (credits) by a land developer in the receiving area.

A TDC program can be used as a standalone tool for achieving more efficient use of land, but it can also be used in conjunction with other tools... greenbelts or Agricultural Reserves can be identified as Sending Areas in order to direct development away from them... TDCs are also typically used in conjunction with conservation easements to permanently protect lands in the Sending Areas.

In order to have an effective TDC program, there needs to be a program administrator and system in place to track where credits are coming from and where they are being applied on a property-by-property basis... typically a conservation easement would need to be registered on title with the TDC program administrator as a concerned party.

Although the number of development credits assigned to each agricultural parcel in the sending area and the number of credits required for a developer to zone to a higher density in the receiving area would be determined by Strathcona County, the actual cost of purchasing the credits would normally be established by the market place. If the developer was able to purchase the required number of credits specified by Strathcona County, Strathcona County would approve the new zoning for the development or redevelopment.



## Transferring Development Credits: An Example

### Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program; King County, Washington

The TDR program is a voluntary, incentive-based, and market-driven approach to preserve land and steer development growth away from rural and resource lands into King County's Urban Area. The Program is based on free-market principles and prices that would motivate landowner and developer participation. Rural landowners realize economic return through the sale of development rights to private developers who are able to build more compactly in designated unincorporated urban areas and partner cities. To date the Program has protected 141,500 acres of rural/resource land.

This market in development rights allows rural landowners to receive financial compensation without having to sell or fully develop their land. Developers are financially motivated to purchase development rights from the TDR market as they are able to put additional dwelling units in their projects.

You can also buy and sell TDRs on the TDR Exchange using information provided in the TDR market information section on the website.



## 7.5 Food & Agriculture Sector Development

The commitment to agriculture as a priority for Strathcona County will be greatly strengthened with the support of focused food & agriculture sector development initiatives. Furthermore, these initiatives require clear business strategies that identify achievable objectives, leadership and the necessary resources for implementation.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Strathcona County make resources available to conduct detailed economic development and business plans for two priority areas: **(1)** the development of local food opportunities; and **(2)** the equine sector (see text boxes below). The plans will need to identify key priorities, objectives, key initiatives and/or events, facility requirements, staffing, financials and milestones to measure progress.
2. That the two priority business plans be guided respectively by a group of knowledgeable and committed stakeholders who are representative of the sector. This would require the establishment of two Steering Groups:
  1. Strathcona County Food and Agriculture Steering Group;
  2. Strathcona County Equine Industry Steering Group.
3. That the local food initiative include a feasibility assessment of establishing large scale greenhouses that access waste heat and CO<sub>2</sub> from the Heartland; the development of market channels for local produce in Strathcona County as well as the Capital Region; and the building of unique Strathcona County events or festivals that feature and celebrate food and agriculture within Strathcona County;
4. That Strathcona County identify and support the expansion and/or attraction of the food and agriculture value added/processing sector. One example would be seed research. Strong marketing and communications programs shall be developed for each priority area both individually but also in concert with Strathcona County's communication objectives. These will be necessary to create awareness among Strathcona County residents and attract them to local markets, local food opportunities and events.

## What does an Equine Strategy Look Like?

One of the more interesting overviews of the equine sector is entitled: Rural Ontario's 'Hidden' Sector': The Economic Importance of the Horse Industry – 2009. The study conducted by Dr. Wayne Caldwell, University of Guelph, emphasizes the considerable level of activity generated by the equine sector and as the title suggests, a contribution that is often overlooked. Three significant findings are noted: (1) the number of horses reported by the Census of Agriculture has a high level of inaccuracy and is perhaps 3 to 4 times higher than 'official' numbers; (2) annual spending per horse for supplies and services is on the order of \$6,900; and (3) on average, an equine property owner spends \$30,000 in annual capital improvements.

Two equine strategies (one from Australia; one from the United Kingdom) address similar elements including the central purpose which is to foster a robust and sustainable horse industry, increase its economic impact, and to develop the sector's contribution to the cultural, social, educational, health and sporting life of its community. To this end, the plans typically comprise the following elements:

- to bring the horse industry together – it is observed that the many differing interests within the equine sector seldom have much contact with each other
- to boost the economic contribution of equine businesses
- to address barriers to investment in the equine sector—often bylaws and regulations are designed for traditional agricultural purposes and are not suited for equine
- to address infrastructure requirements such as indoor equestrian centers, training facilities and trails
- to increase participation in equestrianism and the social contribution of the equine sector including events
- to create awareness of the equine sector through communications, education, as well as raising equestrian skills, training and standards
- to increase access to off-road riding, trail riding and in some cases carriage driving
- to achieve equine excellence with plans such as aspiring to be the "Equine Capital" of the region, state or province in question.

Key to the success of each plan is the stakeholder engagement and a complete understanding of the local opportunities, strengths and weaknesses.



## 7.6 Urban Agriculture

Public interest in urban agriculture is growing rapidly. This is driven by personal interest of individuals who are motivated by the opportunity to grow some of their own food. There is also interest on the part of distinct communities to develop projects such as community gardens. These groups may be either cultural, a neighbourhood or an organization brought together by a common interest.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Strathcona County review bylaws etc. related to the establishment of agri-business/opportunities (e.g. food processing, urban/acreage agriculture) and make them more supportive to this type of development/initiative.
2. That bylaws be amended to allow appropriate specific/limited livestock to be raised under the same public nuisance, and safety bylaws governing pets.
3. That Strathcona County develop a strategy and policies to foster urban agriculture.

### Urban Agriculture: An Example

Based on a desire to provide better access to fresh and healthy food, to increase food security, and to leverage underutilized urban spaces for food production with a goal of increasing community well-being, Hamilton, ON completed a report "Urban Agriculture Policy, and Practice" in 2013.

The Hamilton strategy defined 'urban agriculture' as the practice of cultivating, processing, and distributing food and other products in and around cities; it can be accompanied by a variety of complementary activities in its pre- and post-production phases; and it serves a variety of social, environmental, economic, nutritional, and recreational needs.

What makes a best practice in urban agriculture, according to this report, is suitability to context—different forms and scales of urban agriculture fit and functions more effectively in particular urban contexts than others. This includes horticulture, arboriculture, and supportive practices like resource cycling, animal husbandry, aquaculture, etc. "Urban agriculture will need to function in a balance with the needs of citizens in the municipality." The report outlines best practices for promoting urban agriculture taken from numerous North American cities (including Guelph, Seattle, Portland, Vancouver, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, etc.):

- Planning policy: urban agriculture is recognized as a key element of a city's future growth and development.
- Zoning: urban agriculture activities are formally sanctioned, legitimizing and encouraging their practice (include as a permitted use, include as a zoning category, or create a zoning overlay); defines uses by scale and whether or not sales are allowed, etc.
- Food strategy: a high level plan that expresses the City's commitment to improving the elements of the urban food system; guides decision making and recommends specific courses of action.
- Land inventory: determine which lands would be suitable for urban agricultural use.
- Supportive policies and programs: a document that outlines the framework, actors, and operational cost of a program, including any necessary staffing.
- Other bylaws: there may be a need to address other bylaws that deal with compost, pesticides, drainage, manure, animals, nuisance, food handling, business licenses, fences, site alteration, signs, etc.

## 7.7 Agri-tourism

Strathcona County is well situated to attract a large urban audience interested in a 'rural' or 'country' experience that an agricultural community can offer. These may be short outings or a multi-day experience.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Strathcona County develop strong marketing and communications programs for each priority area, both individually and in concert with Strathcona County's communication objectives. These will be necessary to create awareness among Strathcona County's residents and attract them to local markets, local food opportunities and events.
2. That rural stakeholders be encouraged to develop a Strathcona County Agri-Tour – a multiple 'stop' route with a range of experiences and offerings.

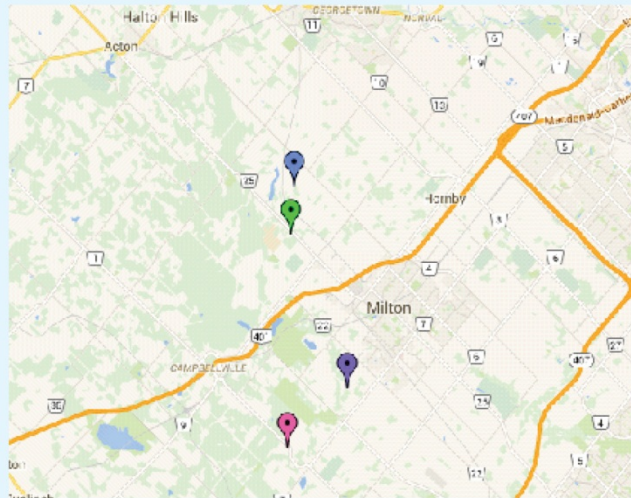
### Local Farm Tours

#### Farm Fresh Food & Fun

Halton Region is home to an active and vibrant farming industry that includes a wide range of farming types, including livestock operations, cash crops, fruit and vegetable growers, horse farms, nurseries and more.

You can pick your own fruit or produce, drop by a farmer's market, pet a farm animal or head out to one of Halton's many farm festivals and agricultural fairs. If you're coming in the fall, enjoy the changing colours and the many planned harvest events, including the Pumpkin Trail and Harvest Halton.

Agriculture is at the heart of Halton. Visit [Simply Local](#) for a list of over 55 farms and what they offer.





## Local Food Initiatives

Interest in local food, food security, and 'healthier' food is growing exponentially. Two key measures affirm this observation: the number of farmers markets in Canada and the USA have grown from 2,000 in 1994 to a current estimate of 8,000; the number of food policy councils are estimated to be over 200, starting with the first one in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982.

Vancouver has been committed to developing local food strategies for more than 20 years. The Vancouver Food Policy Organization (VFPO) was formed in 1995. By 2002, the Lower Mainland Food Council was established and, by 2003, the commitment to create an Action Plan for forming a community-based food policy was made. Vancouver's recent food strategy (issued in 2013) has the following objectives:

- enabling all forms of urban agriculture (individual plots; community gardens; urban farms)
- empowering residents—facilitating the establishment of community food networks including those populations that are isolated and/or vulnerable
- increasing the number of local food retail outlets—farmers markets; community food markets; pilot projects with retailers
- addressing gaps in food processing and distribution including infrastructure requirements such business incubators and food hubs
- addressing food waste through reduction and re-cycling, including collection for composting

Food policy councils may address any number of objectives that cross a mix of economic, social and health interests. Some councils are more focussed on economic objectives such as establishing local markets and market infrastructure; others are more focussed on social objectives such as increasing the availability of and access to locally grown fresh produce. The key is establishing priorities. This requires extensive stakeholder engagement and an iterative process of discovery, the identification of opportunities and issues, and agreement of what is to be addressed. Thus each food policy council develops a unique strategy that reflects the character, needs and priorities of its own community.



## 7.8 Infrastructure

Decisions about infrastructure capital planning, operations, and maintenance must be consistent with other strategies for enhancing agriculture.

### Potential Actions:

1. That capital plans for future infrastructure identify the specific requirements of the priority areas identified in the previous recommendations. Strathcona County is currently evaluating the feasibility of a Multi-Purpose Agricultural Facility that could serve as a central facility capable of serving a wide range of interests including the equine sector.
2. That Strathcona County transportation and roads planning, capital projects and maintenance in rural areas ensure the ability to easily access agricultural land, move large agricultural equipment, and get products to market.
3. That Strathcona County pursue funding opportunities for agricultural community development projects. Such funds are typically available from either provincial or federal programs.

### Agricultural Community Development Fund: Example

Halton Region, ON has an Agricultural Community Development Fund, the purpose of which is to support and develop the agricultural industry and community in Halton.

This program is open to agricultural organizations that have projects with a need for assistance. The projects should deliver Regional objectives and policies, as set out in the Regional Official Plan, and promote the sharing of information and expertise with other organizations.

Applicants must provide a budget for projects or initiatives. To ensure accountability, recipients applying for additional funding in subsequent years will need to provide financial details on the use of monies previously received, and explain how the project successfully delivered Official Plan objectives.



## 7.9 Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment

Agriculture, as a sector, continues to undergo changes due to technology, planning decisions and global market conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor changes and respond quickly. In addition, the implementation of any plan should be monitored as to successes and the need to adapt.

### Potential Actions:

1. That Strathcona County be vigilant in monitoring trends and new development in agriculture with specific attention to local food initiatives.
2. That Strathcona County develop a set of indicators and report annually on the success of the implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan. This would include addressing a range of planning measures (land conversions, etc.), business measures (market development achievements, etc.), and progress specific to a Capital Region Agriculture and Food Strategy.
3. That Strathcona County hold an annual review with stakeholders on agriculture and food in Strathcona County to comment on the progress of the Plan and suggest changes if needed.

(Note: See **Appendix 3** which presents a proposed order of implementation. All of the recommendations are grouped in terms of those that can be implemented in the short-term; medium term and long term.)



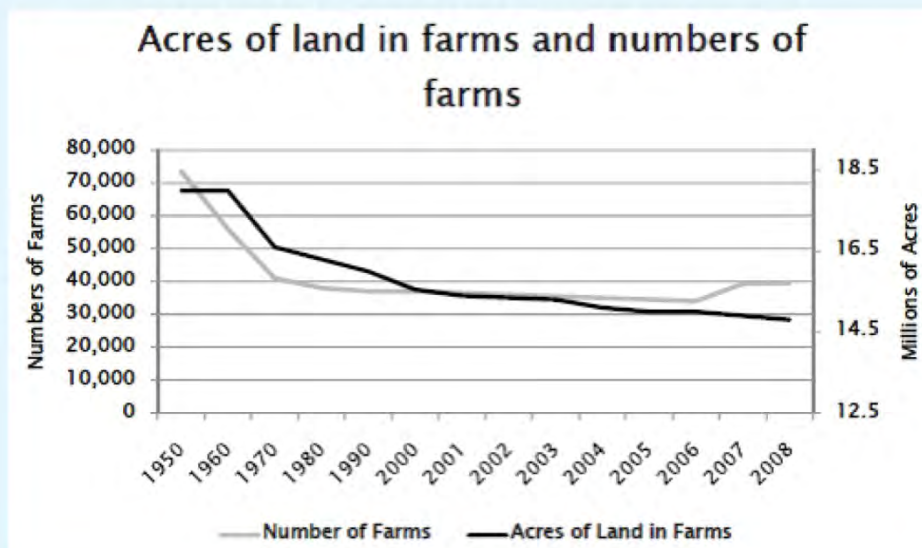


## Agricultural Indicators: Example

The Washington State Land Commission was created because the legislature determined the retention of agricultural land to be desirable, not only to produce food, livestock, and other agricultural products, but also to maintain the state economy and preferable environmental conditions. Several indicators were identified to begin charting the overall condition of agriculture as it relates to farmland conservation.

An indicator is a tool that helps you know how far your project is from achieving your goals and whether you are headed in the right direction. Choosing the right indicator is essential for effectively evaluating your progress. The right indicator should be relevant to the project, be easily understandable, be easily measured, and provide reliable information. The data used for these indicators may come from a wide variety of sources, including local government agencies, state government agencies, academic institutions, trade groups, and large government databases.

These farmland indicators deal with the current state of our area's resources. They help answer the question, "Are our activities helping to improve the condition and availability of farmland in Washington?" These indicators target specific concerns that affect the viability and future of agriculture. Some of Washington's indicators are as follows: competition of land use and conversion; characteristics of principal farm owners; number of food processors; farm and farm related employment; open space enrollment; farm size diversity; farm contiguity; actual acreage in production; current or potential working land converted to non-working public land; prime agricultural soils; farm viability; value added potential; number of farmers markets; energy use on farms; consumer price index for food; working lands with easements; and agriculture related degrees.









# 8 Conclusions

## 8.1 The Value of Agriculture

Agriculture is the major user of land in Strathcona County; it creates jobs and economic wealth for farmers and businesses; it offers a degree of local food security; it provides an alternative lifestyle for those who desire it; it helps establish the community character of Strathcona County; and it contributes a set of environmental goods and services such as cleaner air, water, as well as the fostering of a diversity of wildlife habitat.

This Agricultural Master Plan aims to integrate these dimensions and benefits into the diverse and complex community that Strathcona County is in a way that is aligned with the its strategic plan and sustainability pillars. It attempts to find the right balance in the context of multiple comprehensive planning goals—all competing for the same land and resources in a rapidly growing metropolitan region.

## 8.2 A Commitment to Implementation

If agriculture is to continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic and environmental heritage, Strathcona County Council must be seen as fully and strongly committed to this principle. The MDP should make a strong statement of commitment to adopt and implement the policies and recommendations in this plan. The long term success of agriculture in Strathcona County's metropolitan context can only be assured by developing specific tactics to support and integrate land use, food and agriculture sector development, and infrastructure policies.

Simply put, without the clear and visible commitment of Strathcona County Council, the Agriculture Master Plan will not be able to effectively reverse the trends and the attitudes that are currently stacked against agriculture within Strathcona County.

Strathcona County is in a position to lead the way to demonstrate how agriculture in metropolitan setting can be not only conserved but encouraged to thrive. Success depends on an integrated multi-pronged approach to implementation led by Strathcona County but involving other stakeholders as well. The implementation strategy needs to be broad, including a wide range of activities from building broad community support for agriculture to the dedication of municipal effort and resources.

Strathcona County has little to lose, and much to gain, by trying to shape and direct a new future. There is little down side risk in the short and medium term other than some solid efforts to do something. Effectively, Strathcona County can still accommodate significant industry and residential growth without having to negatively impact agriculture in a significant way. Strathcona County can make further assessment of the successes and challenges after 5, 10 or 15 years and set new directions if needed.







# 9 Appendices

## Appendix 1: Consultation Input

### 1. Consultation Process

The consultation process involved the following:

1. Input and on-going direction from the Agricultural Services Board (3 meetings).
2. Individual Interviews with 22 leaders/stakeholders.
3. Four focus groups (urban residents; acreage; equine; full time farmers) - average of 12 per group; 46 total.
4. Review of statistics, agri-food trends, regional plans, and comparative jurisdictions.
5. Interviews with 8 value added businesses.
6. Individual meetings with Strathcona County Councilors.
7. Three open houses in early February 2015 to present Draft Vision and Principles - average attendance - 35; 103 in total.
8. Meetings with Strathcona County staff including: Planning Department; Environmental Committee; and the Economic Development Committee.
9. Input from Web: 370 unique visitors; 2,227 page views
10. Three open houses in early April to present draft Agriculture Master Plan – average attendance 38; 115 in total.

### 2. Toward a Vision for Agriculture in Strathcona County

At each of the Focus Groups, we asked the respondents to address the following question:

*Imagine that you have been away for 20 years and return in 2034. In the meantime, a highly successful Municipal Plan has been adopted by Strathcona County. What would you see? What would the County 'look and feel' like?*

The results of this inquiry for each group are presented in the following section.

### 3. Summary of Input Received

#### Agriculture Services Board

Vision of Agriculture in 20 years	Theme
Prime #1 and #2 soils have been preserved and utilized to the max using the most modern farming techniques on large farmland areas	Preserve Land
The public and all elected officials acknowledge the value of maintaining the best prime farm soils for agriculture	Value land agriculture and land
Strathcona County is a world class model for efficient use and presentation of prime farmland and diversified farm operations. We demonstrate to the rest of Alberta that we know how to manage agriculture	A plan to preserve and protect
Large agricultural holding untouched in the north east end of the County	Preserve Land
Good co-existing relationship between acreages and farms. Great understanding of each other	Agriculture is valued
Subdivision of lands for acreages limited to lands south of Highway 16	Clear plan
Intensive (not factory) alternative livestock – goats, rabbits	Diversity
Waste heat utilization in greenhouses	Diversity
Agri-tourism – berry patches, U-Pick gardens	Diversity
Respect by urban sector for rural land owners for land	Agriculture is valued
Harmony of citizens (urban/rural) over development	Agriculture is valued
Agriculture and its uses are profitable business ventures; sustainability of highly productive soils for the future generations of farmers	Preserve Land
Diversity in crops and livestock. Not just wheat and canola but an increase in specialty crops	Diversity
Increase in farm gate sales and size of farmers markets	Diversity – increased on farm business
Production of all sizes of land. Increased use of small holdings	Diversity
Large open fields of crops and grazing animals	Preserve Land
Any rural developments such as houses, business etc. are well shielded with trees to prevent visual disturbance	Clear Plan
Urban residents and children are well aware of agriculture and impact on them	Agriculture is valued
Very little fragmentation of large tracks of prime ag. lands	Preserve Land
Diversified agriculture operations (lots of value added and local food initiatives)	Diversity
Growth and development that takes into consideration the importance of preserving prime ag. soils	Preserve Land

Large areas of agricultural land with pockets of development	Clear Plan
Many farm markets and farm gate sales opportunities	Diversity – increased on farm businesses
Contract farming for large restaurants and hotels	Diversity – increased on farm businesses
Areas of quality soils would be alive with crops	Preserve Land
Small ag. Holdings – bee keeping; greenhouse production	Diversity
Farmers markets in every community	Diversity

## Residents

Vision of Agriculture in 20 years	Theme
<p>Green walkways, cycling paths; access to schools, healthcare, education, laughing children, people gathering at community pubs or bistros; lively and energetic; access to transportation to work and play; parks for sports and picnics, shopping, ways to engage in community activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local farming businesses can supply our needs; economies of scale allow for sustainable businesses</li> <li>Agriculture and the support of agriculture is considered holistic and supported by policy along with finance, social services, education and infrastructure</li> <li>Greater integration of agriculture in regional planning. Also citizens are educated and engaged</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Agriculture is valued</p>
<p>First you need a government that would set aside a pool of money to buy the best farmland. Then find the people to farm it.</p>	<p>Preserve Land</p> <p>Clear Plan and Supporting Policies</p>
<p>Strathcona County will look much greener – more trees and green spaces. There would be many more community gardens dotted around Sherwood Park and the villages in the County. There would be larger farms in the rest of the County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More food processing plants</li> <li>More smaller stores selling produce</li> <li>More larger Farmers Markets</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Clear Plan</p>
<p>An equal balance between urban development and existing agricultural areas</p>	<p>Agriculture is valued</p>



<p>A balance of what is necessary to sustain the community. Integrated greens space, housing, industry and agriculture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local!! Local produce integrated in our grocery stores</li> <li>• Field trips with schools so kids understand</li> </ul>	Agriculture is valued
<p>The MDP would support the conservation and development of agriculture by protecting prime farm land in the same way that the County promoted industrial/residential development. Clearly agricultural development would be a prime concern to the County government to ensure food development and production:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A policy to protect good farmland and promote agriculture</li> <li>• Agricultural land seen as an asset to be preserved for posterity</li> <li>• Develop of a mechanism to ensure the consistent policy of agricultural land conservation (and a government body or law to oversee this)</li> </ul>	<p>Preserve Land</p> <p>Agriculture is valued</p>
<p>It would have many independent grocery stores, butcher blocks and markets (the Safeways, Superstores, IGA's would be less):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We would have out laying farms which are large; small and hobby farms closer to residential areas</li> <li>• Many lots/acreages would have production garden areas</li> <li>• We would become a self-sustaining area</li> </ul> <p>Slower residential expansion that provides for space for commercial agriculture. A connection with small landowners and their role in land management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserved large tracts of land</li> <li>• Small scale production on residential land bases.</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Clear Plan</p> <p>Agriculture is valued</p>
<p>Cows, factories, water, boats, houses, smaller communities, corridors for walking everywhere = "urban mix":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture needs to become an industry – we are too busy with oil &amp; gas</li> <li>• The farming sector needs to come together. Suggest input from countries that have done so</li> </ul>	Agriculture is valued
<p>Urban mix that provides good transportation, retail, green space, - all of the modern conveniences .... Maybe more eco-friendly, sustainable community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year round Farmers Market for citizens and business owners to purchase locally grown food</li> <li>• New housing developments that are encourage to participate in a community garden</li> <li>• More land dedicated to growing new fuel generating plants i.e.) bio-fuel production</li> </ul>	<p>Agriculture is valued</p> <p>Diversity</p>

## Equine Sector

Vision of Agriculture in 20 years	Theme
<p>Balanced mix of urban, industry, agriculture and green spaces – facilities to host events such as conventions, sports events, agriculture events (cattle shows, horse shows etc.) arts and entertainment. Seniors housing and related facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facility dedicated to year round events (horse shows, cattle penning, rodeo, etc.)</li> <li>• Reasonable bylaws for keeping livestock i.e. manure handling, animal density etc.</li> <li>• Open door to anyone who wants to build facilities</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Equine as an important contributor</p> <p>Need for a specialized facility</p>
<p>Going to the rural areas would have staging areas with cafes, small hotels and multi-use trails connecting them. They would be separated – snowmobiles and quads/bikes could use one side; a few meters over would horse and walking dirt trails. Look into Sask. Manitoba, Quebec, Northern Ontario with self-sustaining trail systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We would have about 3 large dual barn facilities for shows, competition etc.</li> <li>• Trails between major staging areas</li> <li>• Eco-tourism would prevail</li> <li>• Costa Rico has many horse trails for tourism where ride one day/sleep then move to the next place – repeat for a week</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Equine as an important contributor</p> <p>Need for a specialized facility</p>

Every weekend there would be an event of sorts at the local 'facility'	Diversity
User groups would have their fair time booked for use of the 'facility'. Would be called the nicest facility in western Canada. Sherwood Park would itself remain with a small home feel	Equine as an important contributor
Indoor arenas -2; outdoor – 2; a quarter section with parking, concession, trails – a Spruce Meadows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Busy, rich continuing to grow. Facility built that attractions competitors year round for its use and attract the viewing public</li> <li>• Population from Edmonton would board and ride their horses and stables located in the county as it is so horse friendly</li> </ul>	Need for a specialized facility
I would see an agriplex which would service both urban and agricultural purposes. Outside sand areas/indoor covered complex, covered stabling, RV Parking, wash bays for livestock and recreational vehicles (including quads); cross country courses and trails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many small 20-40 acre hobby farms</li> <li>• Manure recycle facility</li> </ul>	Diversity  Equine as an important contributor  Need for a specialized facility
I see the County has expanded. There will be smaller communities surrounded by small land holdings. Farmland as we know it would be basically extinct and farther away from the urban centers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be an "agriculture building." It will be busy with horses, cattle and other livestock</li> <li>• 4-H and pony clubs will thrive with a facility that can be used year round.</li> <li>• Teaching urban children about the agriculture component</li> <li>• A sense of "community" – Green Hectares.</li> </ul>	Loss of commercial large scale agriculture  Diversity  Need for a specialized facility



Restrict urban growth area – no sprawl.	Clear Plan
A large multi-purpose agricultural facility – that is hugely successful with local, regional and provincial competitions, meeting rooms, clinics, workshops, education, 4-H, pony club all can use the facility	Equine as an important contributor
A system of bridle paths connecting rural areas to Blackfoot and Elk Island Park.	
Development of rural equine centered subdivisions with arenas and bridle paths.	Need for a specialized facility
Conservation of natural areas for recreational use including riding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful agricultural facility development with arenas, stabling, parking presenting shows, clinics, meetings. Clubs, education</li> <li>• Development of rural equine centered sub-divisions with arenas, bridle paths, preserving natural areas, trails etc. – connected to the Blackfoot or the Ag. Facility.</li> </ul>	
A quarter section of land developed into a horse showing facility. Two large indoor arenas with outdoor warm up areas. Barns (heated) with 200 permanent stalls, wash racks. Administrative offices. Landscaped with riding paths and a campsite <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breeding farms and riding schools</li> <li>• A School of Veterinary Medicine or a Livestock Research Facility</li> </ul>	Clear Plan  Equine as an important contributor  Need for a specialized facility
Bigger – population wise. Still has its own identity – <b>not</b> amalgamated with Edmonton. Looks like a small city. Huge horse/agriculture facility. Indoor arenas, barns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a show facility – a place for people to hold horse shows, rodeos etc.</li> <li>• The County would be more “on-board” with horses as part of agriculture as they now see the financial benefit to businesses as a spin-off – hotels, trucks, horse trailer sales, people shop when they are in town so stores and restaurants benefit from it. New hotels may have to be built</li> </ul>	Diversity  Equine as an important contributor  Need for a specialized facility

<p>Many small unique farms – greenhouses, specialized growing facilities supporting the restaurant/Farmers Markets in the Edmonton Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miles of white fences – horse farms</li> <li>• Large multi-purpose ag facilities accommodating major competitions and events</li> <li>• Research facilities adjoining this facility – veterinary science, research related care training and crop service facilities operating under the Strathcona County Agriculture umbrella – side by side</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Equine as an important contributor</p> <p>Need for a specialized facility</p>
<p>Overall the path between urban and rural would be less due to the highly successful plan and would facilitate the growth of the agricultural community sector. The agricultural community would encompass many facets and be a leader not only the province but also the country</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level shows/clinicians as well as a continuation of grass roots components due to a facility that was capable of hosting and housing</li> <li>• A leader in providing quality, safe and functional education and resources</li> <li>• Greater support to existing horse farms/clubs/associations in order to promote local talent and horses</li> </ul>	<p>Clear Plan</p> <p>Equine as an important contributor</p> <p>Need for a specialized facility</p>
<p>Our agricultural heritage would be protected and supported. We would not just be an affluent urban community. Residents would recognize the value of agriculture and we would attract more of it. World class equine events would be a large part of that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A World Class Facility to support and accommodate the equine business in our County</li> <li>• Realistic taxation and parameters for permits for equine businesses and their facilities</li> <li>• A sense of pride for creating and sustaining a widely recognized equine community</li> </ul>	<p>Preserve Land</p> <p>Agriculture is valued</p> <p>Equine as an important contributor</p> <p>Need for a specialized facility</p>

## Acreage Sector

Vision of Agriculture in 20 years	Theme
<p>An atmosphere of encouragement and support for ag businesses – reasonable rules and enforcement recognizing that ag businesses are different than retail or commercial enterprise</p> <p>Urban development limited so that acreages and farms are not completely overrun</p> <p>Open spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of small boarding/riding stable operations</li> <li>• Small holdings with ag business operations</li> </ul>	<p>Clear Plan</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Agriculture is Valued and supported</p>
<p>County would have committed resources for agriculture and infrastructure to support agricultural development within the County lessening the rules and expectations for Ag development and business operations so agriculture can flourish in this County</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horse sharing resource building</li> <li>• Rural based housing for adults with autism and disabilities through an agri-tourism model</li> <li>• Organic local product operations for this community</li> </ul>	<p>Clear Plan</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Agriculture is Valued and supported</p>
<p>I envision a BC Lower Mainland – high density in areas; acreages intermingled with hobby farms. Minimal high intensive farming and virtually no farm land for agriculture, grazing or cropping – cost of farming large tracts will be economically infeasible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smaller parcels</li> <li>• Every quarter broke up into 8 or more acreages</li> </ul>	<p>Diversity</p> <p>Disappearance of large scale agriculture</p>



More acreages would have home businesses. Better soils locations would have market gardens and smaller holding businesses.	Clear Plan
Agricultural museum would display and promote the history of agriculture in the County.	Diversity
An agricultural facility to host Ag events – 4-H; Horse; Cattle	Agriculture is Valued and supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More home businesses that are agriculture related, promotion</li> <li>• City water made available to more acreages</li> <li>• Hosting ag-tourism and a central Ag Facility</li> </ul>	
Agriculture that is understood and supported by all residents. To understand the value of agriculture to urban centers – similar to ecological goods and services metrics.	Clear Plan
Business are attracted to the County for its agricultural opportunities	Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ag innovation – technology, agri-business, neutraceutical etc. Leverage the research being done in the Capital Region</li> </ul>	Agriculture is Valued and supported
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest return per acre in the country or North America</li> </ul>	Innovative and high value
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stigmas around acreages reduced by measuring the societal and economic benefits</li> </ul>	
Look at ag sector to determine the types of agriculture used and wanted	Preserve land
Colchester Area is the infill area (urban growth node) – it has access to 3 major highways and poor agricultural land	Diversity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agri-food business – supported by local agriculture</li> <li>• Acreages will be designated as either agricultural or personal living</li> </ul>	Agriculture is Valued and supported

Main centers are fully developed to support the county residence	Diversity
Surrounding area would be a mix of open space and high density acreages (1-3 acres)	Agriculture is valued
<p>Separate areas identified for industry and separate areas for agriculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher density development</li> <li>• More emphasis on a nurtured look and feel</li> </ul>	
I would love to see urban people respecting land and its value – that is the understanding that their very existence depends of the land and what it produces. I would like to see every agricultural land owner given special consideration for the stewardship they offer to their land and those special considerations comes in the form of lower taxes, assistance with keeping the land in useable shape. I would love to see young people going out to the country to see the vast fields of what/barley etc. and understanding how important the land is. I would love to see a ban on development of any land that would be considered excellent soils where production and feeding capacity are understood AND that County staff who influence decisions ONLY from a practical and farm background.	<p>Clear Plan</p> <p>Diversity</p> <p>Agriculture is Valued and supported</p>
<p>Ag research stations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest and relaxation stations that allow people to allow nature to “speak” sock into them and relieve stress</li> <li>• Small holdings with people growing their own food</li> <li>• Southlands, Vancouver kind of development</li> <li>• Recreational facilities</li> </ul>	
A free standing Ag Department with a mandate to nurture large and small agricultural enterprises	Agriculture is Valued and supported

## Commercial Farm Sector

This group did not do a written exercise since the introductory discussion clearly indicated that the vision for the future among this group was very clear.

Most of the farmers in this group are from the northern part of the County near Josephburg. Furthermore, this group feels quite strong that Strathcona County as a specialized municipality which is predominately urban and focused on an industrial tax base has abandoned agriculture.

Vision of Agriculture in 20 years	Theme
See the same future for the Josephburg area as what we experienced when we were farming on land that is now Sherwood Park (40 years ago)	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
See little future for commercial farming – land is too expensive to be bought by farmers	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
The end is in sight – roads are increasingly narrow and busy. It is becoming more and more difficult to move big equipment around	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
Anyone who is offered a good dollar for their land is crazy not to sell – take the money and buy three or four times as much land in an agricultural county	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
Livestock is virtually gone – two barns in the north east of the county (one dairy; one turkey) are relatively new. But don't expect these to be replaced when they are past their useful life about 20 years from now	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
Don't see much of a future for agriculture – big operations will keep farming the large tracts until there are no longer available or access becomes an issue. Most of this land will not be owned by farmers.	Disappearance of large scale commercial agriculture
Really question the sustainability of smaller specialized operations. They are a great deal of work! And where would you find the labour? Also the margins are challenging.	Diversity – but is it sustainable?



## **Appendix 2: Detailed Statistics**

See Tables and Charts on the following pages.

All data is sourced from the Census of Canada and Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development.

**Table 2.1: Strathcona County Agricultural Profile**

	<b>1981</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
Land in Crops	162,898	159,741	159,636	150,138
Land in Pasture	62,391	74,173	68,581	52,557
Land in other uses	48,375	22,356	22,720	17,489
Area: Crop & Pasture	273,664	256,270	250,937	220,184
Number of Farms	1,053	896	772	658
Average Farm Size	260	286	325	335
Farm Sizes < 10 acres	40	36	32	34
Farm Sizes 10-240 acres	654	598	514	447
Farm Sizes 240-559 acres	359	153	129	96
Farm Sizes 560-1,119	?	67	54	43
Farm Sizes > 1,120 acres	?	42	43	38
Gross Farm Receipts	\$ 79,519	\$ 98,070	\$ 113,480	\$ 138,138
Net Operating Income	\$ 15,729	\$ 23,764	\$ 22,201	\$ 21,698
Farm Capital	\$ 528,010	\$ 740,306	\$ 1,260,177	\$ 2,080,602
<b>Gross Farm Sales</b>				
Less than \$10,000	526	325	261	246
\$10,000 - \$49,999	331	319	277	227
\$50,000 - \$249,999	175	189	172	115
Over \$250,000	21	63	62	70
<b>Farm Type (Numbers)</b>				
Cattle	259	280	212	111
Grains & Oilseeds	229	123	109	103
Wheat	40	23	23	22
Fruit	1	3	4	8
Vegetables	1	8	6	7
Poultry	28	14	17	6
Dairy	72	12	8	5
Hog	24	3	3	0

Canola ( <b>acres</b> )	14,480	28,411	44,918	48,540
Wheat	22,793	37,332	39,525	43,456
Alfalfa	26,001	30,339	27,203	22,264
Barley	75,330	23,764	17,953	13,602
Other Hay	10,762	15,975	13,124	8,706
Oats	14,580	7,860	5,948	x
Dry Field Peas	x	4,332	3,818	4,357
Mixed Grains	1,314	1,243	1,420	1,147
Potatoes	x	819	842	x
Nursery Production	163	256	214	406
Vegetables	x	x	14	76
Fruits/Berries/Nuts	36	47	79	57
	<b>1981</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
Greenhouse Area (sq. ft.)	x	558,421	527,152	506,071
Hens/Chickens	459,400	554,797	367,599	506,071
Cattle and Cows	27,977	32,879	24,125	14,780
Beef Cows	7,932	10,590	9,703	5,127
Horses/Ponies	2,657	3,746	3,417	2,859
Sheep	2,201	2,259	1,081	1,126
Dairy Cows	3,937	1,109	588	587
Goats	x	1,909	359	150
Pigs	12,338	2,922	x	x
<b>Age of Farmers</b>				
Under 35 years	123	115	75	45
35-54	608	630	545	385
Over 54 (55+)	322	505	535	560
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>1,250</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>990</b>



**Table 2.2 Strathcona County Compared to Alberta**

	County of Strathcona County			Alberta		
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
Land in Crops (acres)	159,741	159,636	150,138	24,038,861	23,775,509	24,102,289
Land in Pasture(acres)	74,173	68,581	52,557	5,512,654	6,137,362	5,920,507
Land in other uses(acres)	22,356	22,720	17,489	22,507,383	22,214,986	20,476,038
Area: Crop & Pasture	256,270	250,937	220,184	29,551,515	29,912,871	30,022,796
Number of Farms	896	772	658	53,652	49,431	43,234
Average Farm Size (acres)	286	325	335	970	1,055	1,168
Gross Farm Receipts/farm	\$98,070	\$113,480	\$138,138	\$184,885	\$200,057	\$264,518
Ave Net Operating Income/farm	\$23,764	\$22,201	\$21,698	\$23,764	\$22,201	\$107,431
Farm Capital	740,306	1,260,177	2,080,602	1,029,903	1,452,150	2,210,573
Farm Sizes						
< 10 acres	36	32	34	1,118	1,063	879
10-240 acres	598	514	447	17,472	16,633	14,585
240-559 acres	153	129	96	12,285	10,595	9,048
560-1,119	67	54	43	10,225	8,786	7,255
> 1,120 acres	42	43	38	12,552	12,354	11,467
Farm Type (number)						
Cattle	280	212	111	22,939	20,474	12,022
Grains & Oilseeds	123	109	103	9,327	9,568	10,609
Wheat	23	23	22	3,718	2,733	2,083
Fruit	3	4	8	73	136	151
Vegetables	8	6	7	70	96	277
Poultry	14	17	6	446	375	339
Dairy	12	8	5	776	627	485
Hog	3	3	0	848	565	193
Canola (acres)	28,411	44,918	48,540	2,660,509	4,068,511	6,071,744
Wheat	37,332	39,525	43,456	6,852,596	6,467,628	6,703,703
Alfalfa	30,339	27,203	22,264	3,915,607	3,935,022	3,657,114
Barley	23,764	17,953	13,602	4,902,090	4,094,689	3,610,111
Other Hay	15,975	13,124	8,706	2,279,767	2,060,967	1,466,557
Oats	7,860	5,948	x	1,364,674	1,269,229	891,580
Dry Field Peas	4,332	3,818	4,357	608,217	587,263	706,726
Mixed Grains	1,243	1,420	1,147	404,174	373,005	201,511
Potatoes (acres)	819	842	x	58,341	54,759	53,440
Nursery Production	256	214	406	n/a	n/a	9,755
Vegetables	x	14	76	14,194	13,193	10,716
Fruits/Berries/Nuts	47	79	57	2,517	2,934	2,610
Greenhouse Area (sq. ft.)	558,421	527,152	506,071	11,029,753	12,582,590	12,986,416

	County of Strathcona County			Alberta		
	2001	2006	2011	2001	2006	2011
Hens/Chickens (number)	554,797	367,599	506,071	12,175,246	11,757,860	11,956,949
Cattle and Calves	32,879	24,125	14,780	6,615,201	6,369,116	5,104,605
Beef Cows	10,590	9,703	5,127	2,099,288	2,035,841	1,530,391
Horses/Ponies	3,746	3,417	2,859	159,962	155,533	139,410
Sheep	2,259	1,081	1,126	307,302	222,340	202,903
Dairy Cows	1,109	588	587	84,044	78,875	80,694
Goats	1,909	359	150	n/a	n/a	28,920
Pigs	2,922	x	x	2,027,533	2,052,067	1,397,534

Number of farmers by age:

Under 35	115	75	45	8,900	6,290	4,550
35-54	630	545	385	40,430	35,935	26,720
Over 54 (55+)	505	535	560	26,875	29,440	30,785
Total	1,250	1,155	990	76,205	71,665	62,055

Gross Farm Sales

Less than \$10,000	325	261	246	10,089	8,942	7,707
\$10,000 - \$49,999	319	277	227	17,900	15,441	13,913
\$50,000 - \$249,999	189	172	115	18,657	16,480	12,949

**Table 2.3 Agricultural Intensity Index**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total Gross Farm Receipts 2011</b>	<b>Total Acres Farmed 2011</b>	<b>Agricultural Intensity Index (\$ per acre)</b>
Edmonton	\$35,356,105	13,011	2,717.40
Lethbridge County	\$1,058,080,453	701,095	1,509.18
Taber	\$674,104,250	1,031,225	653.69
Lacombe County	\$311,827,528	668,102	466.74
Wheatland County	\$485,025,244	1,121,462	432.49
<b>Strathcona County</b>	<b>\$90,895,141</b>	<b>220,184</b>	<b>412.81</b>
Calgary	\$12,513,596	31,062	402.86
Sturgeon County	\$185,794,203	467,464	397.45
Vulcan County	\$534,826,356	1,354,405	394.88
Ponoka County	\$248,891,989	643,219	386.95
Westlock County	\$230,608,796	607,959	379.32
Kneehill County	\$301,741,391	832,411	362.49
Barrhead County No. 11	\$166,203,344	464,778	357.60
Red Deer County	\$331,093,123	973,968	339.94
Minburn County No. 27	\$212,292,483	717,764	295.77
Leduc County	\$162,680,091	564,865	288.00
Rocky View No. 44	\$269,453,933	967,828	278.41
Camrose County No. 22	\$224,398,954	820,147	273.61
Foothills No. 31	\$236,853,782	892,342	265.43
Mountain View County	\$245,142,082	933,882	262.50
Wetaskiwin County No. 10	\$159,214,051	611,410	260.40
Willow Creek No. 26	\$288,432,797	1,126,368	256.07
Smoky River No. 130	\$148,988,196	587,336	253.67
Parkland County	\$97,975,332	401,863	243.80
Spirit River No. 133	\$18,535,656	82,212	225.46
Warner County No. 5	\$243,166,536	1,112,336	218.61
Starland County	\$123,776,347	578,749	213.87
Flagstaff County	\$198,671,620	929,814	213.67
Beaver County	\$145,498,680	704,437	206.55
Lamont County	\$116,937,707	571,740	204.53
Vermilion River County No. 24	\$278,186,370	1,363,540	204.02
Newell County No. 4	\$286,986,982	1,458,695	196.74
Cardston County	\$162,733,191	842,994	193.04
Yellowhead County	\$91,270,656	480,869	189.80
Stettler County No. 6	\$185,320,567	987,859	187.60
Birch Hills County	\$103,056,542	560,111	183.99
Pincher Creek No. 9	\$145,457,789	800,070	181.81
Wainwright No. 61	\$153,169,323	865,627	176.95



County	Total Gross Farm Receipts 2011	Total Acres Farmed 2011	Agricultural Intensity Index (\$ per acre)
Fairview No. 136	\$52,404,463	304,190	172.28
Thorhild County No. 7	\$58,069,920	361,476	160.65
Two Hills County No. 21	\$99,240,963	647,951	153.16
Forty Mile County No. 8	\$253,907,405	1,703,217	149.08
Northern Sunrise County	\$42,436,846	286,913	147.91
Smoky Lake County	\$73,170,574	497,649	147.03
Provost No. 52	\$127,712,147	885,276	144.26
Mackenzie No. 23	\$79,317,738	550,419	144.10
Grande Prairie County No. 1	\$149,928,733	1,045,075	143.46
Athabasca County No. 12	\$84,437,776	599,295	140.90
Northern Lights No. 22	\$83,235,368	614,873	135.37
St. Paul County No. 19	\$107,679,940	800,307	134.55
Peace No. 135	\$27,171,635	207,215	131.13
Paintearth County No. 18	\$93,780,448	772,990	121.32
Saddle Hills County	\$72,718,362	610,801	119.05
Lac Ste. Anne County	\$70,357,850	596,437	117.96
Clearwater County	\$76,888,167	715,023	107.53
Woodlands County	\$20,924,095	206,132	101.51
Cypress County	\$236,366,183	2,335,795	101.19
Big Lakes	\$41,557,902	432,827	96.02
Bonnyville No. 87	\$69,016,957	743,405	92.84
Greenview No. 16	\$67,987,252	734,790	92.53
Brazeau County	\$26,140,315	289,674	90.24
Special Area No. 4	\$90,137,383	1,023,312	88.08
Clear Hills No. 21	\$47,057,692	585,129	80.42
Lesser Slave River No.124	\$9,496,184	125,019	75.96
Special Area No. 2	\$162,537,127	2,166,924	75.01
Lac La Biche County	\$20,420,884	277,752	73.52
Special Area No. 3	\$111,947,112	1,616,411	69.26
Bighorn No. 8	\$7,900,477	203,627	38.80
Ranchland No. 66	\$7,071,421	465,727	15.18

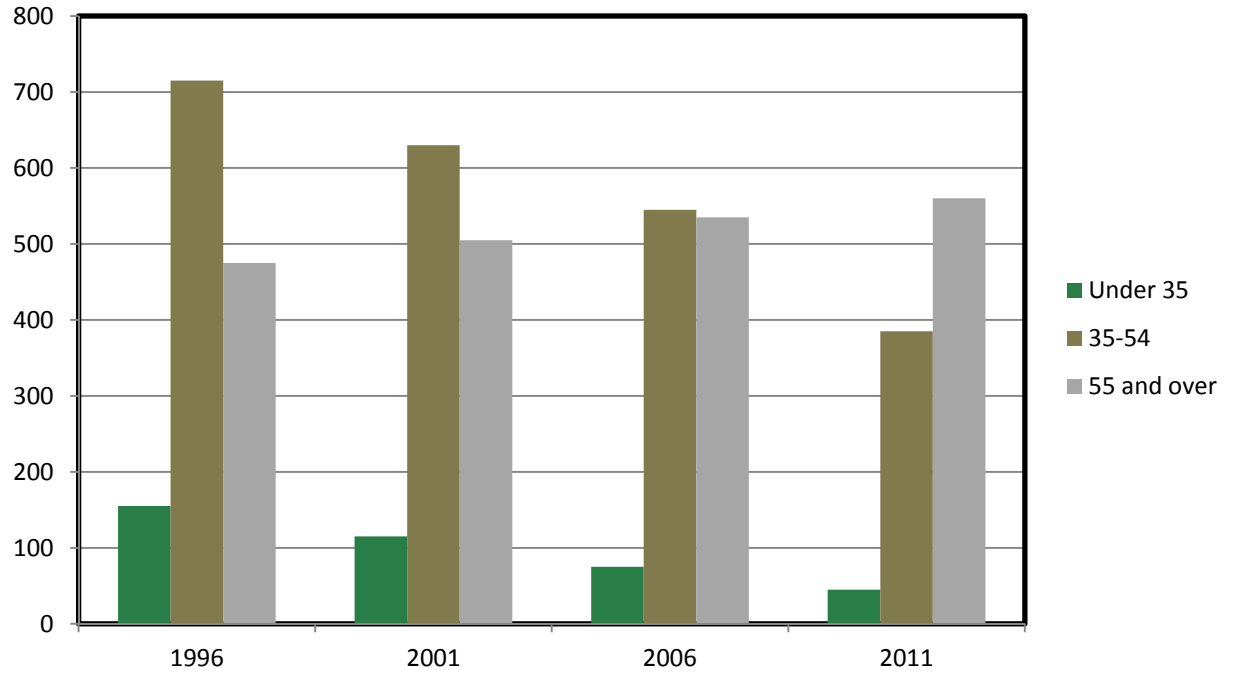
**Table 2.4: Strathcona County Compared to Rocky View, Lethbridge, and Alberta**

	Strathcona County	% of Alberta	% of Alberta average	Rocky View	Lethbridge	Alberta
Land in Crops	150,138	0.6%		503,427	514,337	24,102,289
Land in Pasture	52,557	0.9%		423,033	60,873	5,920,507
Land in other uses	17,489	0.1%		41,368	125,885	20,476,038
Area: Crop & Pasture	202,695	0.7%		926,460	575,210	30,022,796
Number of Farms	658	1.5%		1,271	933	43,234
Average Farm Size	335		28.6%	761	751	1,168
Gross Farm Receipts/farm	138,138		52.2%	212,002	1,134,062	264,518
Net Operating Income/farm	21,698		20.2%	25,921	88,624	107,431
Farm Capital	2,080,602		94.1%	4,184,540	3,389,147	2,210,573
Farm Sizes						
< 10 acres	34	3.9%	254.1%	27	47	879
10-240 acres	447	3.1%	201.4%	670	415	14,585
240-559 acres	96	1.1%	69.7%	221	193	9,048
560-1,119	43	0.6%	38.9%	131	133	7,255
> 1,120 acres	38	0.3%	21.8%	222	145	11,467
Farm Type						
Cattle	111	0.9%		355	230	12,022
Grains & Oilseeds	103	1.0%		219	237	10,609
Wheat	22	1.1%		35	88	2,083
Fruit	8	5.3%		2	4	151
Vegetables	7	2.5%		5	11	277
Poultry	6	1.8%		5	24	339
Dairy	5	1.0%		5	55	485
Hog	0	0.0%		1	11	193
Canola	48,540	0.8%		112,343	101,032	6,071,744
Wheat	43,456	0.6%		111,214	157,045	6,703,703
Alfalfa	22,264	0.6%		76,567	41,233	3,657,114
Barley	13,602	0.4%		134,726	115,228	3,610,111
Other Hay	8,706	0.6%		32,828	20,731	1,466,557
Dry Field Peas	4,357	0.6%		3,244	16,045	706,726
Mixed Grains	1,147	0.6%		11,157	x	201,511

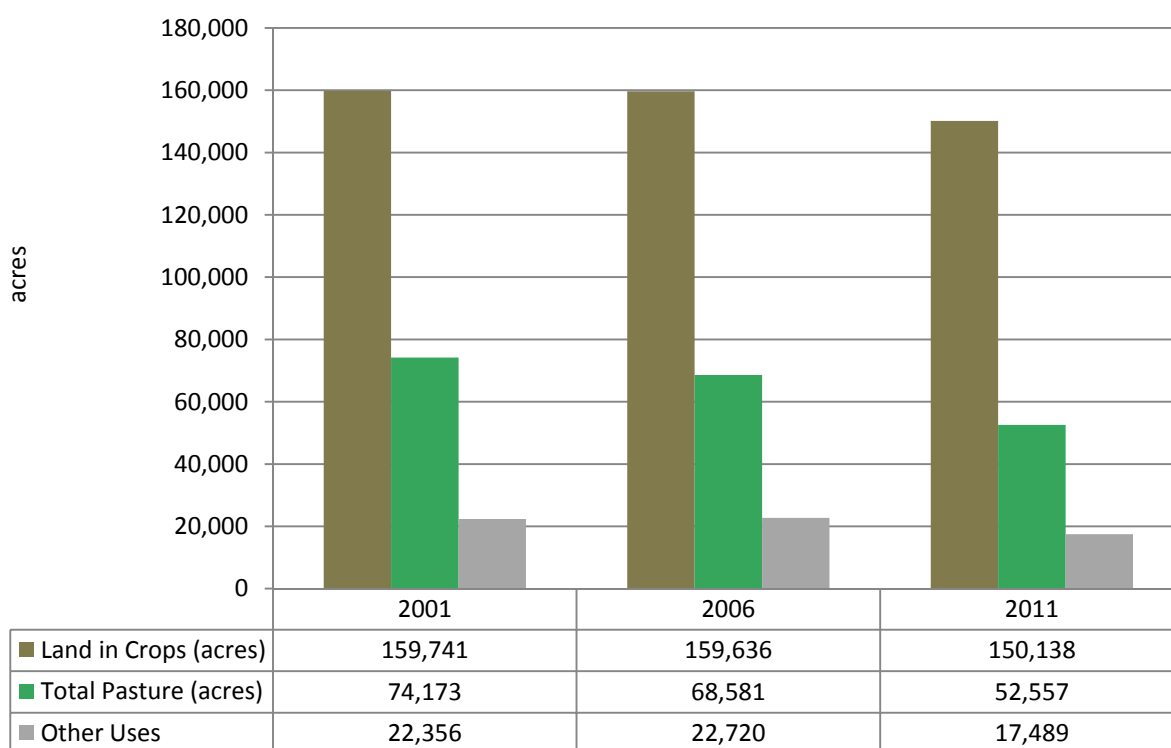
Potatoes	x			572	1,366	53,440
Nursery Production	406	4.2%		1,065	401	9,755
Vegetables	76	0.7%		x	807	10,716
Fruits/Berries/Nuts	57	2.2%		48	64	2,610
	<b>Strathcona County</b>	<b>% of Alberta</b>		<b>Rocky View</b>	<b>Lethbridge</b>	<b>Alberta</b>
Greenhouse Area ('000 sq. ft.)	506	0.0%		282	719	12,986,416
Hens/Chickens	506,071	4.2%		172,633	1,329,855	11,956,949
Cattle and Calves	14,780	0.3%		134,798	427,602	5,104,605
Beef Cows	5,127	0.3%		41,780	16,066	1,530,391
Horses/Ponies	2,859	2.1%		6,078	1,876	139,410
Sheep	1,126	0.6%		4,463	13,853	202,903
Dairy Cows	587	0.7%		700	8,840	80,694
Goats	150	0.5%		397	3,606	28,920
Pigs	x			17,182	65,673	1,397,534



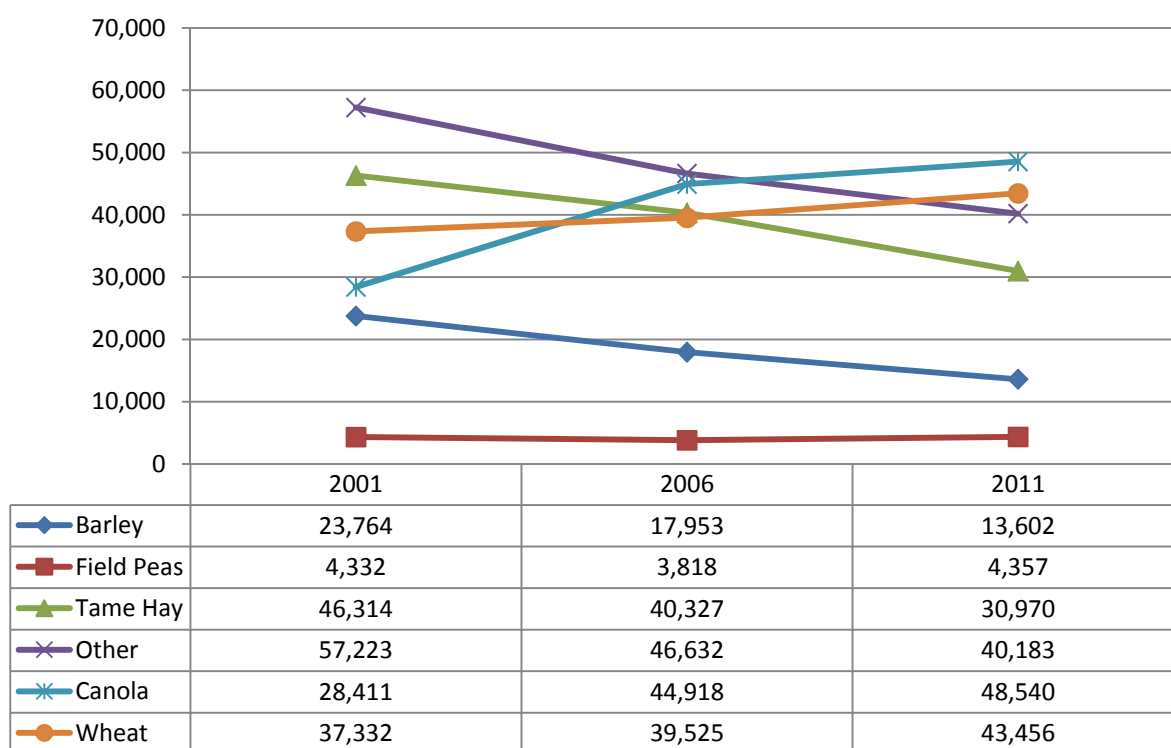
**Table 2.5 Number of Farm Operators, by Age Category  
Strathcona County 1996-2011**



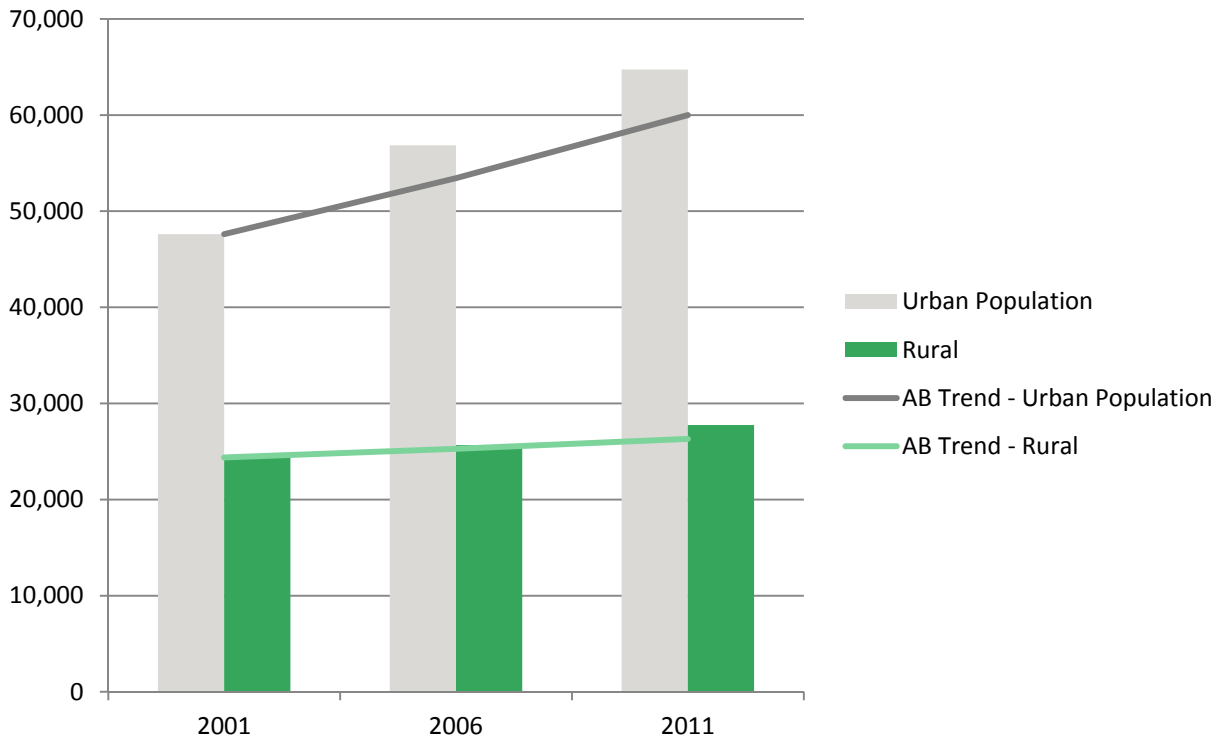
**Table 2.6 Farm Land in Crops and Pasture**  
Strathcona County 2001-2011



**Table 2.7 Acreage of Major Field Crops**  
Strathcona County 2006-2011

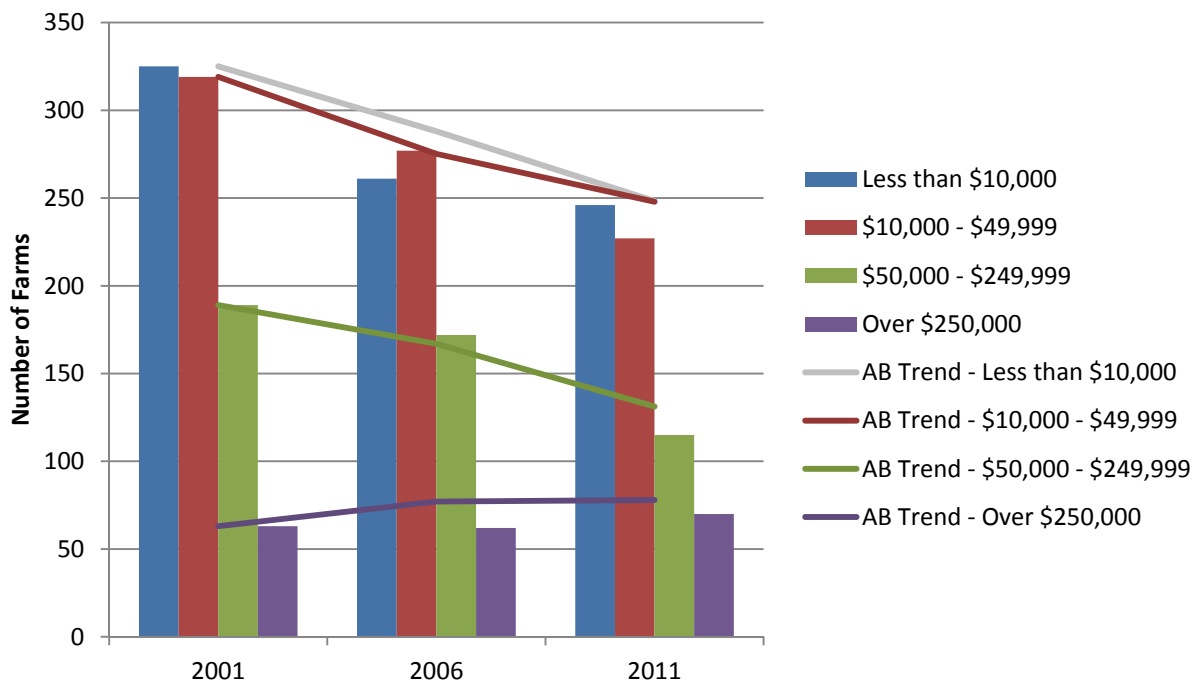


**Table 2.8 Urban and Rural Population**  
Strathcona County and Alberta Trend 2001-2011



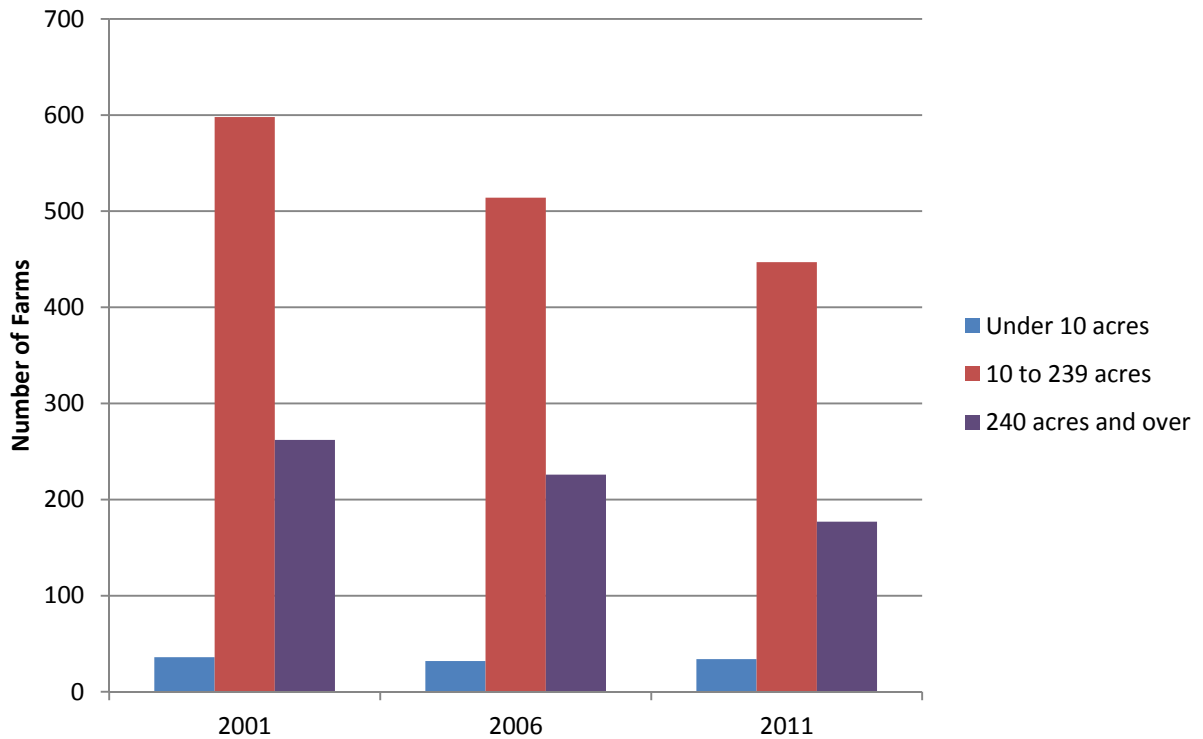
**Table 2.9 Number of Farms -- by Gross Farm Receipts**

Strathcona County and Alberta Trends 2006-2011

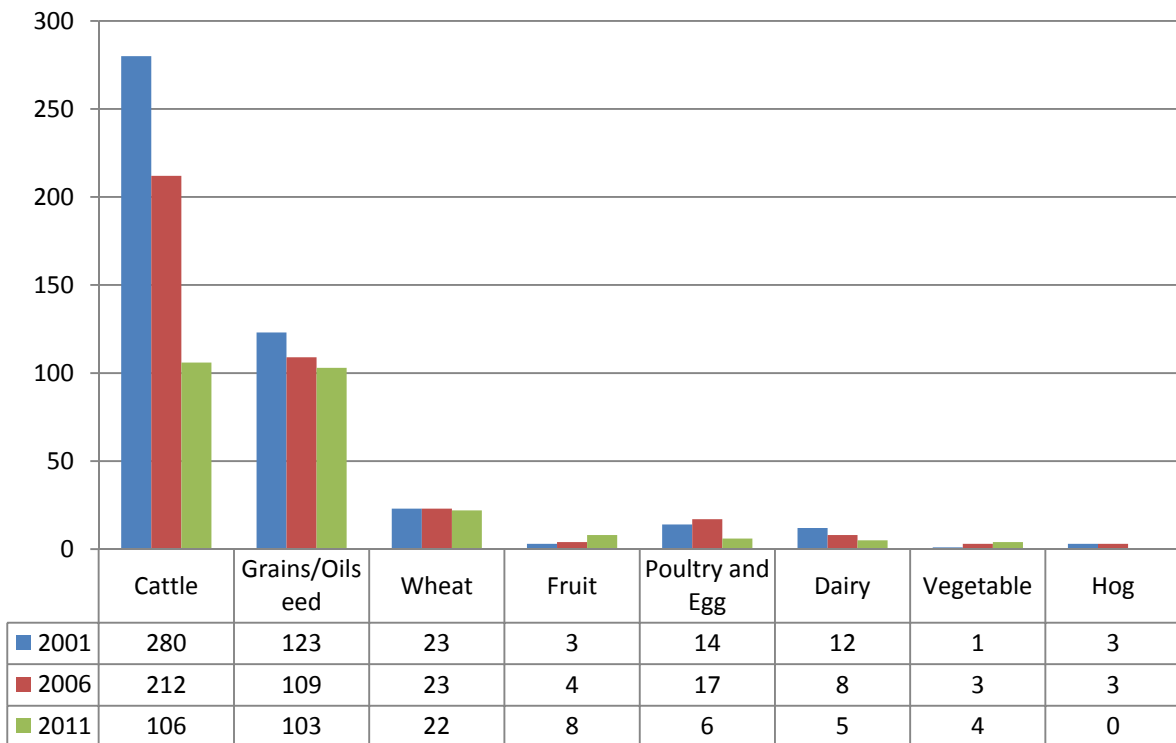




**Table 2.10 Number of Farms -- by Acres**  
Strathcona County 2001-2011

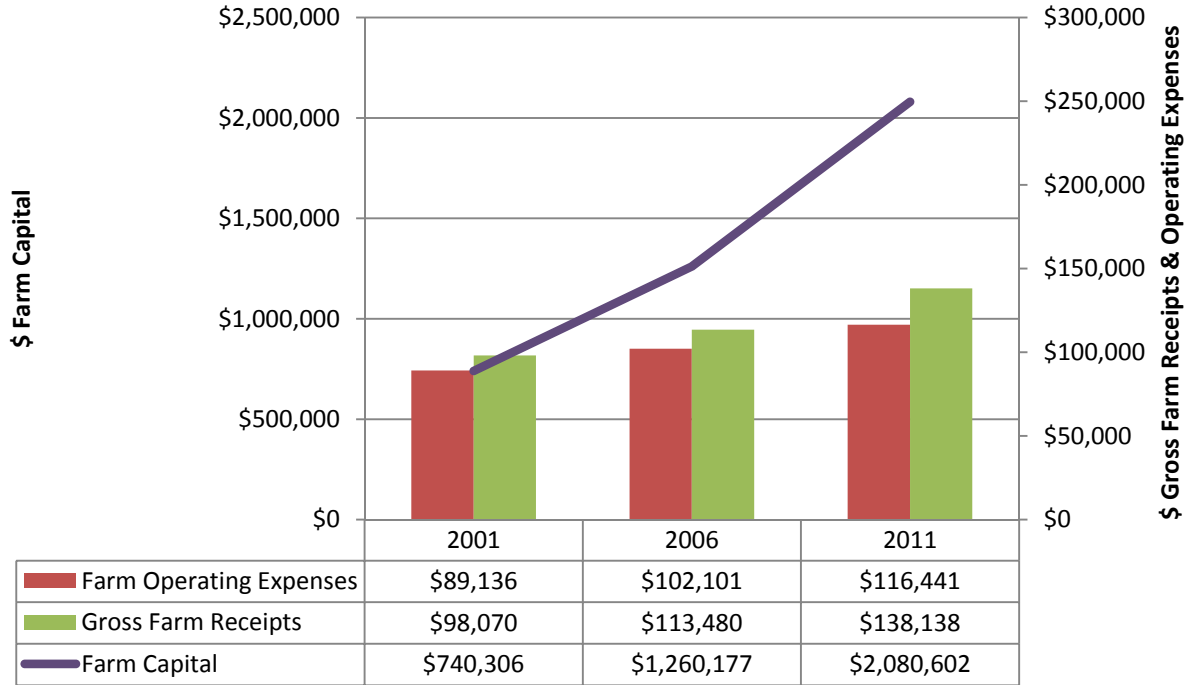


**Table 2.11 Number of Farms -- by Type**  
Strathcona County 2001-2011



**Table 2. 12 Average Farm Capital, Receipts and Expenses**

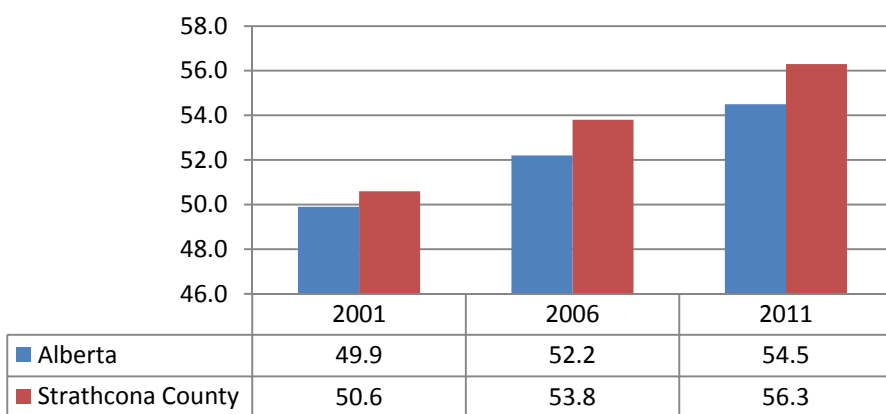
Strathcona County 2001-2011



**Table 2.13 Livestock Inventories -- Strathcona County  
2001-2011**

	2001	2006	2011
Dairy Cows	1,102	588	587
Beef Cows	11,590	9,703	5,127
All Other Cattle	20,187	13,834	9,067
All Pigs	2,922	x	x
Hens and Chickens	554,797	367,599	x
Horses	3,746	3,417	2,859
Sheep/Lambs	2,259	1,081	1,126
Goats	1,909	359	150
Elk	1,745	2,442	123
Bees (# of colonies)	501	280	897

**Table 2.14 Average Age of Farm  
Operators**





## Appendix 3: Implementation Plan

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### Short Term Potential Actions

(within the next 6 months; some actions are definitive, others are ongoing)

#### Governance

1. That Council adopt the Agriculture Master Plan to clearly demonstrate its commitment to a broad base of agriculture in Strathcona.
2. That Strathcona County Administration review and revise its organizational structure to ensure that implementation of the Master Agriculture Plan will be led by a senior leader (with a supportive team) with the responsibility and authority to implement the Plan.
3. That Strathcona County facilitate the formation of an Agriculture and Food Leadership or Institute that is representative of the range of agricultural interests within Strathcona and to provide ongoing leadership, advocacy, and direction both to the Council and to Strathcona at large.
4. That Council include a commitment to these recommendations in the next update to its *Strategic Plan: Strathcona County 2030—Powering our New Tomorrow*.
5. That Council direct the Administration to include appropriate recommendations from the Agriculture Master Plan in the new MDP, for which a planning process is now just initiated.

#### Communications

- 1 That Strathcona County develop a strong, and ongoing, communications and public relations program that outlines Strathcona County's commitment and vision for agriculture. In addition, the supporting communications plan should address the key initiatives recommended by the Agriculture Master Plan.

#### Land Use and Development Planning

1. That all further development for the purposes of industrial, commercial or residential shall be considered in a manner whereby the impact on agriculture and lands used for agriculture is minimized or enhanced.
2. That Strathcona County review its bylaws etc. related to the establishment of agri-business/opportunities (e.g. food processing, urban/acreage agriculture) and make them more supportive to equine and local food development/initiatives.
3. That Strathcona County allow for 'Agriculture Commercial' in selected areas to accommodate 'agricultural businesses.' A specific example would be the proposed Multi-purpose Agricultural Facility that would allow for adjacent uses such as an agricultural supply business and/or an equestrian supply business; as well as allow for trailers/campers for overnight stays.

#### Food & Agriculture Sector Development

1. That Strathcona County make resources available to conduct detailed economic development and business plans for two priority areas: **(1)** the development of local food opportunities; and **(2)** the equine sector. The plans will need to identify key priorities, objectives, key initiatives and/or events, facility requirements, staffing, financials and milestones to measure progress.

2. That these two priority business plans be guided respectively by a group of knowledgeable and committed stakeholders who are representative of the sector. This would require the establishment of two steering groups:
  - Strathcona Food and Agriculture Steering Group;
  - Strathcona Equine Industry Steering Group.
3. That the local food initiative include a feasibility assessment of establishing large scale greenhouses that access waste heat and CO<sub>2</sub> from the Heartland; the development of market channels for local produce in Strathcona as well as the Capital Region; and the building of unique Strathcona events or festivals that feature and celebrate food and agriculture within Strathcona.

### **Urban Agriculture**

1. That Strathcona County develop a strategy and policies to foster urban agriculture.
2. That Strathcona County bylaws be amended to allow appropriate specific/limited livestock to be raised under the same public nuisance, and safety bylaws governing pets.

### **Infrastructure**

1. That capital plans for future infrastructure identify the specific requirements of the priority areas identified in the previous recommendations. Strathcona County is currently evaluating the feasibility of a Multi-Purpose Agricultural Facility that could serve as a central facility capable of serving a wide range of interests including the equine sector.

### **Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment**

None



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## Medium Term Potential Actions

(within the next year to 18 months; then ongoing)

### Governance

None

### Communications

1. That Strathcona County, as a municipality with a blend of both urban and rural lands, take a leadership role in the emerging opportunities for agriculture in the urban shadow and commit to a regular forum or conference that brings subject matter experts to the Strathcona.

### Land Use and Development Planning

1. That Strathcona County develop processes for educating its rural and/or agricultural land owners regarding permit and regulatory requirements specific to agricultural related initiatives that are either new or an expansion of a current enterprise.
2. That Strathcona County review its current approach to rural land owners with the view to develop a more customer-focused permitting process for agricultural uses.
3. That Strathcona County take an active role, working with its municipal partners, to shape Capital Region Board land use and development policies to provide a regionally-consistent approach that provides long term support and certainty for agricultural uses. As the CRB is currently reviewing its plan, it is important to engage in this process as soon as possible.

### Food & Agriculture Sector Development

1. That Strathcona County identify and support the expansion and/or attraction of the food and agriculture value added/processing sector. One example would be seed research.

### Agri-tourism

1. That strong marketing and communications programs be developed for each priority area (local food opportunities and the equine sector) both individually but also in concert with Strathcona's communication objectives. These will be necessary to create awareness among Strathcona residents and attract them to local markets, local food opportunities and events.
2. That rural stakeholders be encouraged to develop a Strathcona County Agri- Tour – a multiple 'stop' tour with a range of experiences and offerings.

### Infrastructure

1. That Strathcona County pursue funding opportunities for agricultural community development projects. Such funds are typically available from either provincial or federal programs.

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment

1. That Strathcona County be vigilant in monitoring trends and new development in agriculture with specific attention to local food initiatives.
2. That Strathcona County develop a set of indicators and report annually on the success of the implementation of the Agriculture Master Plan. This would include addressing a range of planning measures (land conversions, etc.), business measures (market development achievements, etc.), and progress specific to a Capital Region Agriculture and Food Strategy.



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## Long Term Potential Actions

(commence in 2016 and ongoing)

### Governance

1. That Strathcona County consider the impact on agriculture as a central element in the scope of work for all plans to be developed for or on its behalf.
2. That Council direct the administration to update its evaluation and reporting processes to ensure 'agricultural impact assessment' is specifically considered at all levels of Strathcona's decision making processes.

### Communications

1. That Strathcona County commit to a long term program of education specific to the meaning, opportunities and the diversity of agriculture and food. This program will be designed for citizens at large but with a specific focus on Strathcona youth via the education system.

### Land Use and Development Planning

1. That any application to re-zone or re-designate lands currently zoned or designated agricultural will require an agricultural impact assessment and that the results will be a key consideration in the final planning decision.
2. That lands be appropriately reclaimed and revert to agricultural function and zoning after resource extraction is complete.
3. That the MDP and land use bylaw allow the discretionary use of community food growing programs on community shared lands, MRs and common properties.
4. That future community plans include provisions for farmers markets in public or private space areas in new or existing communities. Strathcona will also identify potential public and private lands within urban centres and support their development as temporary or permanent community gardens, etc.
5. That Strathcona County establish a mechanism for the purchase of agricultural protection easements through different sources. This could be in conjunction with the system for administering environmental credits envisaged for the Beaver Hills Moraine. There are options for funding, such as a special levy, a land conversion fee, or donations, etc.
6. That Strathcona County establish a development credit transfer strategy. This could be a program that requires developers in a designated receiving area (i.e., an area to be developed or redeveloped) to purchase development rights from a designated sending area (the agricultural area to be protected).

## **Food & Agriculture Sector Development**

Ongoing from short and medium term

### **Urban Agriculture**

See Medium Term Priorities

### **Agri-tourism**

See Medium Term Priorities

### **Infrastructure**

1. That Strathcona County transportation and roads planning, capital projects and maintenance in rural areas ensure the ability to easily access agricultural land, move large agricultural equipment, and get products to market.

### **Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment**

1. That Strathcona County hold an annual review with stakeholders on agriculture and food in Strathcona to comment on the progress of the Plan and suggest changes if needed.









**Toma & Bouma**  
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS



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