



2022-2026

Agricultural Service Board Strategic Plan

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Introduction

Saddle Hills County is located in the Peace Region of Northwestern Alberta and has a population of 2,225 (2016 Census). Of those 2,225 people, there are almost 800 resident farmers within our boundaries. The County is 5,838 square kilometers in size with just under half being crown land, or green zone. There is approximately 363,229 cultivated acres, 8716 improved acres and 279,142 uncultivated (bush pasture) acres in the County. The County is diverse within its agricultural community and produces pulses, cereals, canola, legumes, cattle as well as bison, elk, goats and sheep. The most common livestock production is cattle with an estimated total of ~ 18,000 head.

The County's Agricultural Service Board (ASB) is responsible for protecting the infrastructure from flooding, erosion and weed and brush control within the rights-of-way. The ASB provides annual inspections for prohibited noxious and noxious weeds on private land, public lands and other jurisdictions within the County and manages invasive plants and vegetation on our own infrastructure, such as communications towers, transfer stations, gravel pits and roads. The ASB also provides annual pest and disease inspections for insects and crop diseases and pests and work

closely with the Pest Branch of Alberta Agriculture to accomplish these tasks.

Saddle Hills County provides many services to its ratepayers including sites for recycling agriculture plastics, Veterinary Services Incorporated (VSI) program, various extension events such as Marketing Outlooks, Livestock Health and Predator Management.

Our ratepayers are very progressive in their farm management, over the past years, succession planning, new technologies and sustainability have become the focus of many agriculture settings within the County.

The County has worked historically with the Peace Country Beef and Forage Association (PCBFA) to support and promote Environmental Education programs and will continue to do so in the future.

Saddle Hills is equipped with modern spray trucks, side by side with mounted sprayers, mowers and seed broadcasters and well-staffed with two full time staff, an Agricultural Fieldman and an Assistant Agricultural Fieldman as well as a part-time Equipment Operator. We will be hiring four Weed and Pest Inspectors and three laborers as seasonal staffing from May to August.

Our Agricultural Service Board



2022 Saddle Hills County Agricultural Service Board

(L to R): Member Jace Earl, Member Bruce Thomi, Member Serena Reber, Chair Adam Fitzpatrick, Vice-Chair Candace Dolen, Councillor Kristen Smith and Councillor Ed Armagost

Our Vision, Mission, and Values



OUR VISION

A thriving rural municipality with: a growing population; safe, active communities; and a strong, sustainable, diverse economy.

OUR MISSION

To enhance our communities by providing and supporting quality services and regional initiatives.

OUR VALUES

- **Respect**

To earn respect and be respectful while supporting each other; residents, council members, municipal employees and those working in the County.

- **Adaptable**

To seize opportunities to grow in new directions, and approach change with creative solutions to overcome challenges in agriculture.

- **Accountability**

To deliver accountable and responsible governance through open, transparent and efficient delivery of programs and services that benefit our County producers.

- **Equality**

To ensure our programs and services are delivered fairly and equitably throughout the County.

- **Excellence**

To be innovative and creative; embracing opportunities, adapting to our environment, and leading with best practices and continuous improvement.

- ◆ **Collaboration**

To create healthy relationships with regional communities, other levels of government and the private sector.

- ◆ **Community Spirit**

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

ECONOMIC AGRICULTURAL
VIABILITY

LIVESTOCK HEALTH AND
MANAGEMENT

AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS
AND COLLABORATION

Our Strategic Goals



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Our Strategic Goals

To develop and deliver collaborative environmental stewardship initiatives.

Strategy: Encourage environmental best practices in Saddle Hills County.

Actions:

- I. Increase awareness of ratepayers, stakeholders and land managers regarding invasive plant, insect, and disease species and how to control them.
- II. Inspect for and control invasive plant and insect species within the boundaries of the County in accordance with the *Weed Control Act* and the *Pest Act*.
- III. Provide producers with rangeland and riparian area health assessments.
- IV. Promote soil conservation and health in accordance with the *Soil Conservation Act*.



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Our Strategic Goals

Performance Measures:

- I. Perform 3 rangeland and/or riparian area health assessments per year.
- II. Complete 1000 weed inspections per year.
- III. Participate in provincial pest monitoring protocols for Bertha Armyworm and Wheat Midge annually.
- IV. Spray 1/3 of the County-owned Right-of-Ways for control of vegetation and invasive species per year.
- V. Perform a full Right-of-Way mow on 1/2 of the County, and a shoulder mow on the other 1/2 every year.
- VI. Following a two-year cycle inspect along the water way of the Peace River leading into British Columbia for encroachment of invasive species.
- VII. Monitor existing weed issues within the County and manage these areas with weed notices, letters, and collaboration with producers to increase control over time.
- VIII. Perform inspections under the *Soil Conservation Act* and work to mitigate soil erosion risks on County infrastructure.
- IX. Host 2 workshops or webinars per year relating to invasive species and their identification and control.



ECONOMIC AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

Our Strategic Goals

To promote and develop opportunities for all producers.

Strategy: Provide opportunities and resources to County producers in relation to markets, inputs, succession planning and production of secondary agricultural commodities.

Actions:

- I. Provide producers with access to resources and professionals who can help with succession planning.
- II. Provide producers with applicable rental equipment for secondary agriculture (e.g. chicken plucker, grow lights, precision small-scale seeder etc.)
- III. Provide producers with financial assistance for implementing secondary agricultural practices on-farm.
- IV. Provide producers with information and assistance regarding market access for new and upcoming crops.
- V. Provide producers with demos of new and upcoming agriculture technology.
- VI. Facilitate GPS and drone support for producers.



ECONOMIC AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

Our Strategic Goals

Performance Measures:

- I. Host 1 succession planning workshop or webinar annually.
- II. Implement a program for active agricultural producers within Saddle Hills County annually to create on-farm secondary agricultural production practices.
- III. Offer to rent out secondary agricultural equipment to a minimum of 4 producers a year.
- IV. Host 1 agriculture technology demo annually.
- V. Offer to facilitate GPS and drone support to a minimum of 4 producers annually.



LIVESTOCK HEALTH AND MANAGEMENT

To promote and develop sound livestock management practices.

Strategy: Maintain the Veterinarian Services Incorporated program, support both small-scale and large-scale livestock production within the County, encourage and promote proper livestock handling, management and animal husbandry, and support the Federal and Provincial Government in the case of an animal health emergency.

Actions:

- I. Provide small scale livestock producers with access to services such as veterinarians etc.
- II. Participate in Federal Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy testing.

Performance Measures:

- I. Host veterinarian or livestock professional days at the County livestock facility annually for small-scale livestock producers.



AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Develop research opportunities and promote partnership and collaboration with other agriculture professionals.

Strategy: Provide our local producers with relevant research along with access to unbiased agricultural professionals.

Actions:

- I. Partner with research associations to establish trials within the boundaries of Saddle Hills County.
- II. Provide office and laboratory space for staff from partnering organizations to utilize.
- III. Utilize County-owned agricultural land for the purpose of research trials on pasture rejuvenation and cover crops.
- IV. Have agricultural professionals available at no cost to producers (e.g. agronomists, nutritionists, etc.)



AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Our Strategic Goals

Performance Measures:

- I. Establish at least 2 research trials annually within Saddle Hills County.
- II. Host agricultural professionals at the County Agriculture Complex biannually.
- III. Partner with 1 research association or agricultural industry business to initiate County research projects annually.

Saddle Hills County Agricultural Service Board Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 focused on needs with the Agricultural industry of the County. Since that time, the structure of the Board has changed to include 5 members of the public along with two appointed Councilors. There is now an Agricultural Fieldman, an Assistant Agricultural Fieldman and a part-time Operator to ensure County and provincial needs are met. Tracking programs have been adopted to monitor live chemical usage. Most recently, Saddle Hills County has shifted from paper data collection to digital collection for weed and pest inspections which has streamlined data collection and allowed for tracking crop rotation.

The previous 2020-2024 Strategic Plan goals are listed below with basic comments regarding achievements:

Goals	Accomplishments
Environmental Stewardship	Annually, crop rotations were tracked within the County. The Agricultural Fieldmen are also currently working towards becoming certified to create Environmental Farm Plans.
Education and Outreach	In 2021 we hosted 10 webinars and a livestock predation workshop, all of which were well attended.
Weed Management	Over 1500 weed inspections were conducted annually. There has been an increase in positive ratepayer interaction in regards to weed issues.
Veterinary Services and Livestock Protection	Continue to maintain relationships with local veterinarians in the area. Increase in extension and outreach focused around livestock health and protection.
Integrated Pest Management	There has been a decrease in heavy weed infestation populations.
Promoting Agriculture in Young Farmers	Sent a farm family to the BMO Farm Family Awards.
Pest Management	All pest surveys were completed. There is an increase in the number of producers submitting cereals for Fusarium graminearum surveys.
Soil Conservation	Collaboration between departments for soil erosion in County ditches continues to be a priority.
Intergovernmental, Intermunicipal and internal collaboration	Saddle Hills County Agricultural Fieldmen are actively involved the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen. The County has worked collaboratively with other municipalities in regards to education and extension events as well.

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