



AGRICULTURAL SERVICES BOARD
STRATEGIC PLAN: 2024 - 2028

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Saddle Hills County is located within the Peace Region of Northwestern Alberta and has a population of **2,338** (2021 Census). Of those 2,338 people, there are approximately **800** resident farmers within our boundaries. The County is **5,838** sq. km. in size, with just under half being crown land, or green zone. There is approximately **363,229** cultivated acres, **8,716** improved acres, and **279,142** un-cultivated (bush pasture) acres in the County.

The County is diverse within its agricultural community and produces pulses, cereals, canola, legumes, and 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 works 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, a Veterinary Services Incorporated (VSI) program, and various extension events, covering topics 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 historically worked with the Peace Country Beef and Forage Association (PCBFA) to support and promote Environmental Education programs.

Saddle Hills County is equipped with modern spray trucks, side by side with mounted sprayers, mowers, and seed broadcasters, and well-staffed with three full-time staff: an Agricultural Fieldman, Assistant Agricultural Fieldman, and a Lead Hand, and one part-time staff member: an Agricultural Administrator. The department also hires seven seasonal staff members from May to August.





VISION, MISSION & VALUES

VISION

The Saddle Hills County Agricultural Services is focused on supporting a thriving rural municipality, promoting a sustainable and diverse agricultural sector, and fostering continuing education

MISSION

The Saddle Hills County Agricultural Services Department aims to enhance our agricultural community by providing and supporting quality services and programs.

VALUES

Respect: To earn respect and be respectful while supporting each other – residents, council members, municipal employees, and those living and working in the county.

Adaptability: To seize opportunities to grow agriculture within the County in new directions and approach new agriculture changes and challenges with creative solutions.

Accountability:

Equality: To ensure Agricultural Services programs and services are delivered fairly and equitably throughout the County.

Excellence: To be innovative and creative, embracing opportunities and adapting to a changing agricultural environment, leading with best practices, and striving for continual improvement.

Collaboration: To create healthy relationships with regional communities.

Community Spirit: To support programs and activities to improve the agricultural community in our county.

DEPARTMENT MANDATE

The Agricultural Services Department is accountable to the Chief Administrative Officer and provides support to the Agricultural Service Board (ASB) to implement their decisions, deliver agricultural programming, and enforce applicable agricultural legislation. The Agricultural Service Board Act authorizes the Board to act as an advisory body to Council on agricultural matters, to promote enhance and protect viable and sustainable agriculture, and to promote and develop agricultural policies to meet the needs of the municipality. The Board is responsible for municipal support of and adherence to the following Alberta legislation:

AB Soil Conservation Act
AB Agricultural Pests Act
AB Weed Control Act
AB Animal Health Act

AB Wildlife Act
AB Agricultural Operations & Practices Act
AB Water Act

The Agricultural Services Department implements and administers all agricultural related programming within Saddle Hills County, including but not limited to: Agricultural Service Board programming, vegetation management and beautification, invasive species monitoring and management, and education and outreach programming.



STRATEGIC GOALS

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

to develop and deliver environmental stewardship initiatives.

STRATEGY

Encourage environmental best practices within Saddle Hills County.

ACTIONS

- Increase awareness of ratepayers, stakeholders and land managers regarding invasive plant, animal, insect and disease species and how to control them.
- Inspect for invasive species within the County in accordance with the Weed Control Act and the Agricultural Pests Act.
- Provide producers with information and assistance on Environmental Farm Plans.
- Promote soil conservation and health in accordance with the Soil Conservation Act.
- Implement an ALUS program within Saddle Hills County.
- Implement a program for landowners and renters to register their invasive weed control plans ahead of the growing season.
- Administer the Tree Seedling Program.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Hire a full-time staff member to facilitate the ALUS program and assist producers with completion of Environmental Farm Plans, provide information on grants, and provide agricultural technology knowledge and support.
- Develop and produce a Saddle Hills County Agricultural Services podcast.
- Complete 1,000 weed inspections per year.
- Participate in the annual provincial pest monitoring programs for bertha armyworm and wheat midge.
- Spray 1/3 of County-owned right-of-ways annually for control of vegetation and invasive species.
- Inspect along the waterway of the Peace River leading into British Columbia for encroachment of invasive species, on a two-year cycle.
- Monitor existing weed issues within the County and manage these areas with weed notices, letters, and collaboration with producers.
- Perform inspections under the Soil Conservation Act and work to mitigate soil erosion risks on County infrastructure.
- Host two workshops or webinars per year, relating to invasive species and their identification and control.
- Provide soil sampling services.
- Provide blue books for producers to purchase at cost.
- Provide both paper and electronic forms for producers wishing to register their weed control plans.
- Host at least one workshop annually relating to water management.
- Aim for a minimum of five orders through the Tree Seedling Program annually.

LIVESTOCK HEALTH & MANAGEMENT

to promote and develop sound livestock management practices.

STRATEGY

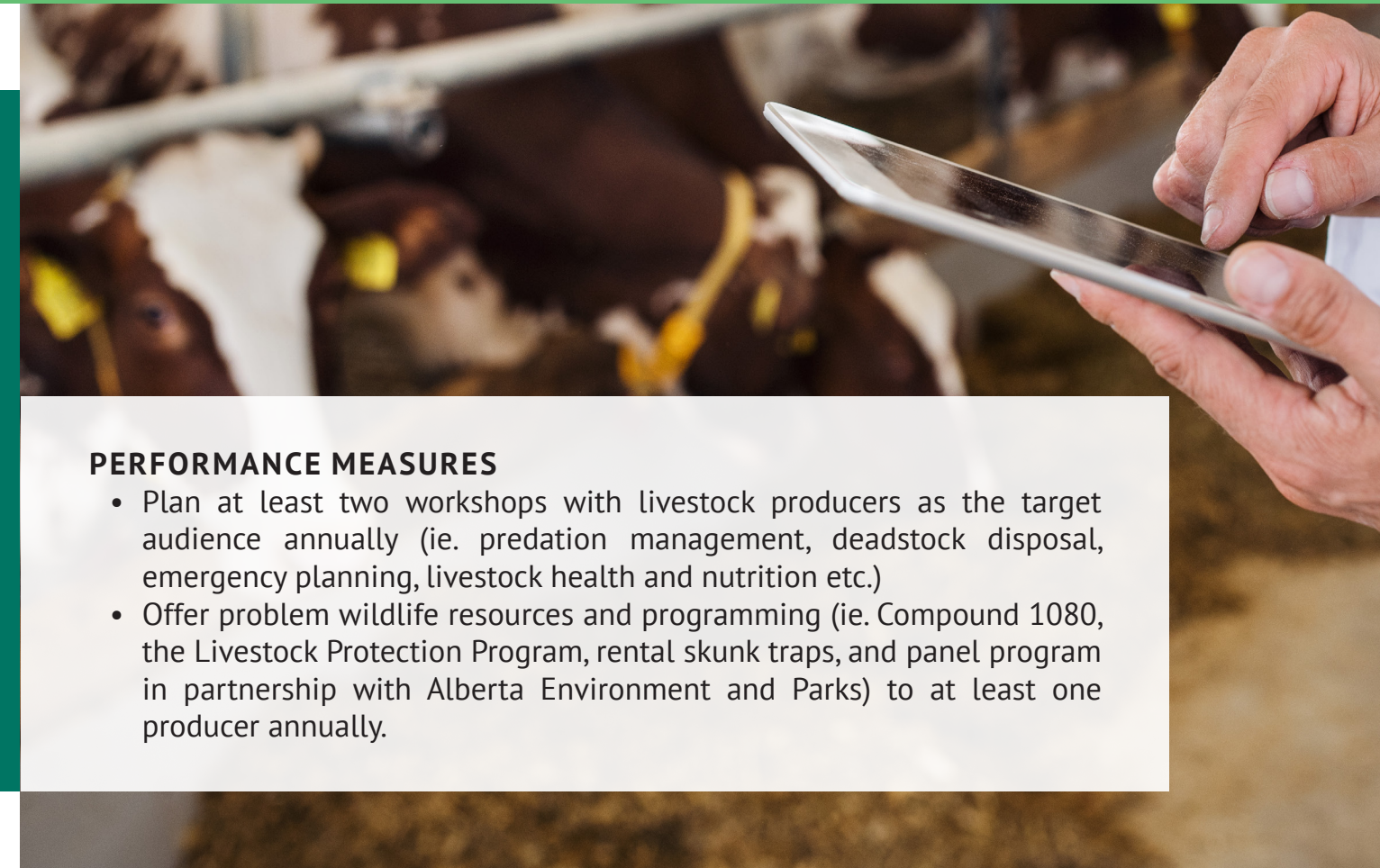
Maintain the Veterinarian Services Incorporated (VSI) program, support both small-scale and large-scale livestock production within the County, encourage and promote proper livestock handling, management and animal husbandry, and support the federal and provincial governments in the case of a livestock health emergency.

ACTIONS

- Support Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Testing Program.
- Provide educational materials and seminars on topics relating to livestock.
- Maintain funding levels for the Veterinarian Services Incorporated (VSI) program.
- Provide information and resources related to livestock emergency planning.
- Continue to provide problem wildlife management programming.
- Support local 4-H Clubs.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Plan at least two workshops with livestock producers as the target audience annually (ie. predation management, deadstock disposal, emergency planning, livestock health and nutrition etc.)
- Offer problem wildlife resources and programming (ie. Compound 1080, the Livestock Protection Program, rental skunk traps, and panel program in partnership with Alberta Environment and Parks) to at least one producer annually.



ECONOMIC AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

to promote and develop opportunities for all producers.

STRATEGY

Provide opportunities and resources to County producers in relation to succession planning and production of agricultural commodities.

ACTIONS

- Hire a full time staff member to assist producers with agronomic questions, sample interpretation and approve grant applications.
- Support producers with access to resources and professionals who can help with succession planning.
- Support producers with rental equipment
- Support producers with information and assistance on new and upcoming crops.
- Support producers with information and resources on new and upcoming agricultural technologies.
- Facilitate GPS and drone support for producers.
- Support producers with information and resources on available grant and funding programs, as well as assistance with completing applications.
- Support producers with access to resources and professionals who can help with commodity marketing.
- Implement a grant program for non-profit organizations and schools for agricultural programming



AGRICULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

develop research opportunities and promote partnerships and collaborations with other agriculture professionals.

STRATEGY

Provide our local producers with relevant research and education along with access to unbiased agricultural professionals.

ACTIONS

- Support producers with access to agricultural professionals, such as agronomists or livestock nutritionists, to interpret various test results (e.g. soil/water/hay/grain tests etc.)
- Partner with research associations to establish research trials within the boundaries of Saddle Hills County.
- Encourage partnering organizations to utilize community halls or County facilities.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Host one succession planning workshop or webinar annually.
- Offer to rent out available agricultural equipment to a minimum of four producers annually.
- Offer to assist a minimum of two producers annually with grant and funding applications.
- Provide a location for agricultural professionals to provide producers with GPS and drone tech support.
- Develop and offer a agricultural education grant program to a minimum of one school or non-profit annually.
- Host one drone or GPS seminar or workshop annually



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Establish at least two research trials within the boundaries of Saddle Hills County, annually.
- Partner with one research association or agricultural industry business to initiate annual County research projects.
- Host agricultural professionals at a community hall or the County Complex on a monthly basis.



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