

AGRICULTURE MASTER PLAN

AGRICULTURAL SNAPSHOT
WORKING DOCUMENT



ROCKY VIEW
COUNTY

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The **Rocky View County Agricultural Snapshot** captures the most relevant high-level research and engagement findings to date. It is a collection of what we have learned so far while developing the Rocky View County AMP.

Executive Summary

Project Process

Throughout the development of the Agriculture Master Plan for Rocky View County, the project is working to answer the following ‘how might we’ question:

How might we develop an inclusive and adaptable Agriculture Master Plan for RVC that effectively addresses the diverse needs of the agriculture community, provides clarity and continual evolution, and preserves the RVC advantage, ensuring a sustainable rural lifestyle for residents across the different scales of agriculture?

To answer this question, the project is broken down into two phases of work, including:

- **Phase 1** - March - August 2024: Project Foundations, and
- **Phase 2** - September 2024 - March 2025: Agriculture Master Plan Drafting

This highlight deck comes at the end of phase 1, and summarizes the findings from various methods of inquiry including:

- **Previous AMP review:** Tracking what has been completed since the 2011 AMP.
- **Public Engagement:** Survey, workshops and interviews to capture producer and agricultural system participant considerations for agriculture today and into the future.
- **Existing Practices:** Case study and benchmarking policy review to understand how other municipalities address agriculture.
- **Local Plans and policies:** Determining the current bounding box for agriculture in Rocky View County.
- **Local Data Review:** Data benchmarking and mapping to understand trends occurring within Rocky View County as opposed to surrounding counties.

Key findings

Across various streams of investigation, there were a number of themes identified across engagement and research. The most prevalent strategic issues can be found in detail in section **2.0 Key Findings**, and include the following:

- Successful implementation of the 2011 Agriculture Master Plan
- Protection of productive agricultural lands from development
- Responsible parcel subdivision policies
- Streamlining planning and development processes to support agricultural business
- Diversification of agriculture production and processing
- A regional based approach to agriculture planning
- Environmental protection to support sustainable management of agricultural resources
- Infrastructure growth to meet the growing needs of agriculture producers
- Limiting renewable energy development to industrial and commercial lands and small scale generation

- Supporting the financial sustainability and succession of agriculture operations
- Increased marketing, communication, and education to promote knowledge sharing about agricultural operations

These key findings will inform the group involved in the upcoming AMP strategy sprint, and will ultimately support the Agriculture Master Plan Update.

Next Steps

This Agricultural Snapshot Working Document was created to inform the Strategy Sprint with a high level overview of the newest agricultural context for Rocky View County.

In the winter of 2024/2025, we will share the draft Agriculture Master Plan with the public for phase 2 of engagement. During this phase, we will invite additional comments and reviews to ensure the plan reflects the community's needs.

Reference Documents

The following documents can be reviewed if additional information is desired for any research method:

Primary (public reference):

- [Phase 1 What We Heard Report](#)

Secondary (additional reference):

- [Context Review Working Document](#)

Tertiary Documents (raw data/recording):

- [2011 AMP Review](#)
- [Benchmarking Policy Working Document](#)
- [Benchmarking Data Working Document](#)
- [Policy Review Working Document](#)



How to Use this Agriculture Snapshot

The following Agriculture Snapshot was created to capture the most relevant high-level research and engagement findings to date. It is a collection of what the team has learned so far while developing the Rocky View County (RVC) Agriculture Master Plan (AMP).

Attachment B - Agricultural Snapshot

This snapshot is intended to capture historical, current state, and future aspirations for the County, as reflected through a series of inputs which can be seen in the adjacent graphic. If you are unable to review the full document, please review the *Executive Summary* and section 2.0 *Key Findings* to get an overall status of key issues informing the Strategy Sprint in phase 2.

The information gathered from this snapshot, the engagement process and the above reports will inform the Council, staff, and consultant team as they create the project's vision, goals, and actions. Once plan direction has been drafted, the plan will be brought back to the public in the winter of 2024/2025 for review and refinement.

If you are in search of more contextual information, please look to RVC's AMP project webpage: rockyview.ca/agriculture-master-plan. Here you will also find the current AMP, produced in 2011.

Additionally, the detailed process inputs are found linked on slide 3 of this document.

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SECTION 1.0 Agriculture Master Plan Introduction

The **RVC AMP** is a roadmap for supporting agricultural needs in Rocky View County for the next five to 20 years. It determines the priorities for municipal support and determines actions and goals that work towards the County's ideal future for agriculture.

The plan is intended to be the aspirational agricultural accompaniment to the regulatory Municipal Development Plan (MDP) update.



Why a New AMP?

The 2025 AMP builds off the foundation set by the 2011 AMP, which outlined a strong vision, goals and actions to support agriculture in the County. Since its implementation, the County has successfully implemented or are in the process of implementing 94% of the identified actions in the previous AMP (see adjacent graphic).

Attachment B - Agricultural Snapshot

Building from the momentum captured in the 2011 AMP, the 2025 AMP update intends to navigate the County through agricultural challenges found in the current context. The previous AMP, while containing strong actions, was inflexible to new and changing agricultural dynamics, such as renewable energy, topsoil, and regional policy considerations.

The 2025 AMP update intends to:

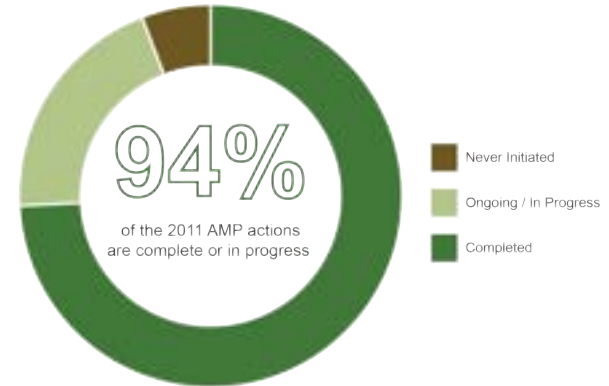
- Identify a long-term vision for supporting both existing agricultural operations and providing new opportunities for diversification of the County's agriculture sector;
- Update the AMP based on goals and best practices to ensure the flexibility for the preservation and prosperity of our agriculture sector for future generations; and
- Align AMP considerations with the upcoming MDP policy update, to ensure that the upcoming statutory policy update meaningfully reflects the needs of the agricultural community today.

F-1 Attachment B

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- Capture and reflect the updated context for RVC's agricultural sector. A lot has changed since the first AMP was adopted in 2011. To capture new challenges for agricultural businesses, this process is meant to pulse check what is currently working well and areas where we can improve policy and service delivery.

The 2025 AMP will plan for a wide range of contemporary agricultural challenges, including: generational planning, agricultural diversification, water and roadway infrastructure, tourism, topsoil handling, and renewable energy.





Methods

Inputs into Phase 1 of the AMP which are recorded in this Agricultural Snapshot include:

Previous AMP review

Actions and sub-actions were tracked to understand how much has been implemented since the passage of the 2011 AMP.

Policies and Plans Review

A review of the most impactful provincial, regional, municipal and committee documents influencing agriculture in RVC. Policies were reviewed for general understanding and identification of gaps.

Data and Benchmarking Review

Using Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture data for the years 2001-2021 and agricultural mapping data, a dataset was compiled and analyzed to identify trends and comparative agricultural circumstances. Data was compiled for the following jurisdictions: Rocky View County, Mountain View County, Wheatland County, Foothills County, and Alberta.

Existing Practices

A high level overview of municipal practices for agriculture. Looking at the MDPs of benchmarked municipalities, and policies and programs instituted across Western Canada, case studies informed the project with existing municipal approaches to agriculture.

Community Engagement

From June 13 – July 21, 2024, a comprehensive public engagement was held to ensure local farmers, agri-businesses, and residents had the opportunity to share their insights and feedback on a revised Agriculture Master Plan.

Throughout the public engagement process, more than 170 participants spent a collective 160 hours sharing feedback on the future and current state of agriculture in Rocky View County. The project team received more than 1000 comments from the participants. The County extensively promoted the engagement through 2,000 direct letters to agricultural landowners, phone calls with agri-business members, road signs throughout the County, interviews with local media, and a digital media campaign.

Complete community engagement feedback can be found in this [What We Heard report](#).

Detailed secondary research findings can be found in the [Context Review Working Document](#), and the links made available on slide 3.



SECTION 2.0 Key Findings

The following 11 findings were identified as the most significant pieces of information gathered across research and engagement methods used in phase 1. More detailed considerations can be found for each method's reporting, found in Section 3.0 and the [Context Review Working Document](#).

1. Successful AMP implementation

Over the last 13 years, RVC's 2011 AMP has been successfully implemented, with 94% of actions completed or integrated into ongoing action. The AMP requires an updated set of actions and flexible goals to respond to evolving pressures and priorities.

2. Protecting agricultural land

The protection of agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses is a priority for RVC farmers, agri-businesses and residents, though this broadly held position includes significant nuance. There is interest in restrictions within productive agricultural lands to forms of development such as country residential, commercial, industrial, and renewable energy. However, flexibility to subdivide land to support farm succession, and allow businesses on agricultural parcels to support agricultural operators was supported. Multiple regions in Alberta have investigated Transfer of Development Credit programs to protect agricultural land (e.g. the Glenbow ASP, which has yet to be successfully implemented).

3. Parcel subdivision

Responsible parcel subdivision is an important consideration for agriculture as it influences the efficiency of agricultural operations amidst a growing population. Currently the County allows for first parcel out, but defers to Council for subdivision into a variety of smaller subsections. Other Counties, such as Leduc or Parkland County allow for 4-6 parcels per quarter section in some agricultural areas, and allow for smaller subdivision abilities through small holdings areas. More information is available on slide 35.

4. Governance and reduced red tape

County governance should focus on promoting agricultural activities in RVC through the streamlining of bureaucratic processes inhibiting the development of agricultural businesses. Incentives and funding opportunities should be considered to support sustainable agriculture initiatives. Education of planners and the general public is also required to increase understanding for the value agriculture brings to the region.



5. Industry structural changes

Over the last 15 years, a major shift in cropland has occurred in RVC, as the acreage of canola production has surged at the expense of forage crops and pasture. This is a pattern shared across much of Alberta's agriculture industry and indicates the flexibility of the industry to respond to market opportunities.

6. Agricultural regions

RVC is a diverse region from an agricultural production perspective. Calgary Metropolitan Region Board has set direction to ensure agriculture policy is responsive to the unique pressures and opportunities facing each sub region, which will need to be considered in the development of the new MDP.

7. Environmental sustainability

Residents, local guidelines, and regional policy acknowledge the interconnected nature between agricultural practices and environmental sustainability. It is critical to integrate

environmental protection and conservation of soils, water, and natural ecosystems to support sustainable production of agricultural resources.

8.0 Infrastructure growth

Ensuring that there is adequate infrastructure (predominantly roads, bridges and water supply) to meet the growing needs of agriculture producers in Rocky View County. Access to roads and ensuring roads and bridges can accommodate larger and heavier agricultural equipment is integral to agricultural operations. These infrastructure corridors also contribute to supporting diversified agriculture operations.

9.0 Renewable energy development

RVC has significant potential for solar and, to a more limited extent, wind electricity generation. While there is low support from agriculture producers for large scale renewable energy production on agricultural land, there are opportunities to leverage industrial lands, small scale generation, and planning tools to support renewable energy production in the County.

10. Financial sustainability of agriculture operations

Over the past 20 years, the agriculture industry has transitioned to increased larger farms through consolidation (and a decreasing number of total farm operations). At the same time farmers in Rocky View County are among the oldest in the region, with over 70% of farmers reported being 55 years of age and older. Supports such as tax credits, residential parcels, farm succession planning, and education are required to support farmers to age in place and transition operations to younger family members.

11. Marketing, communication, and education

Increased marketing, promotion, and direct communication of County programs to residents and agricultural land owners to promote knowledge sharing about agricultural operations, both locally to increase understanding from non-agricultural residents and available programs, and regionally to increase business retention and attraction.



SECTION 3.0

Data Findings

Many things have changed since the creation of the 2011 AMP. The following mapping and statistical data products provide insight into shifting agricultural trends over the past 20 years in Rocky View County.

3.1 Mapping

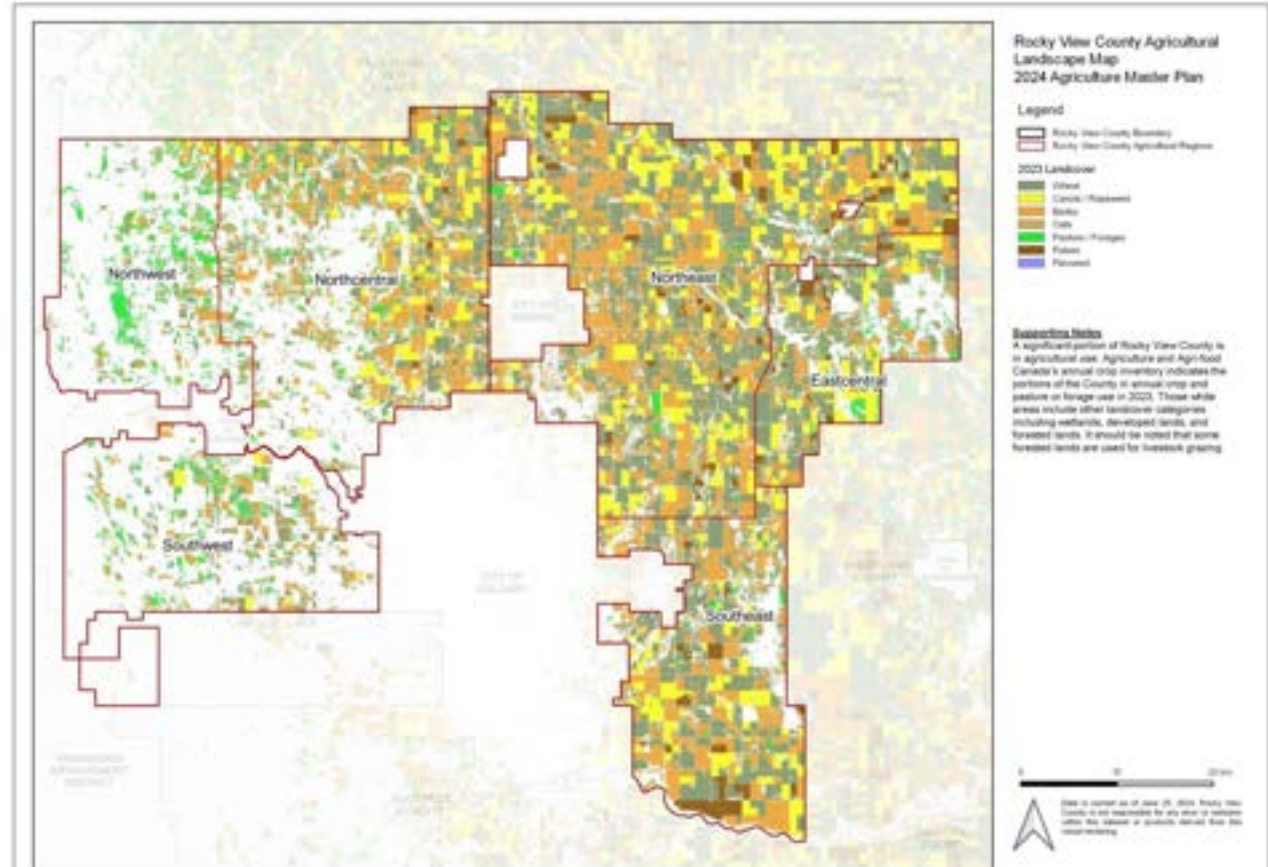
RVC Agricultural Cropland

A significant portion of land in Rocky View County supports agricultural land uses.

The adjacent map draws upon Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's annual crop inventory to indicate the portions of the County in annual crop and pasture or forage use in 2023.

Those white areas include other land cover categories including wetlands, developed lands, and forested lands. It should be noted that some forested lands are used for livestock grazing.

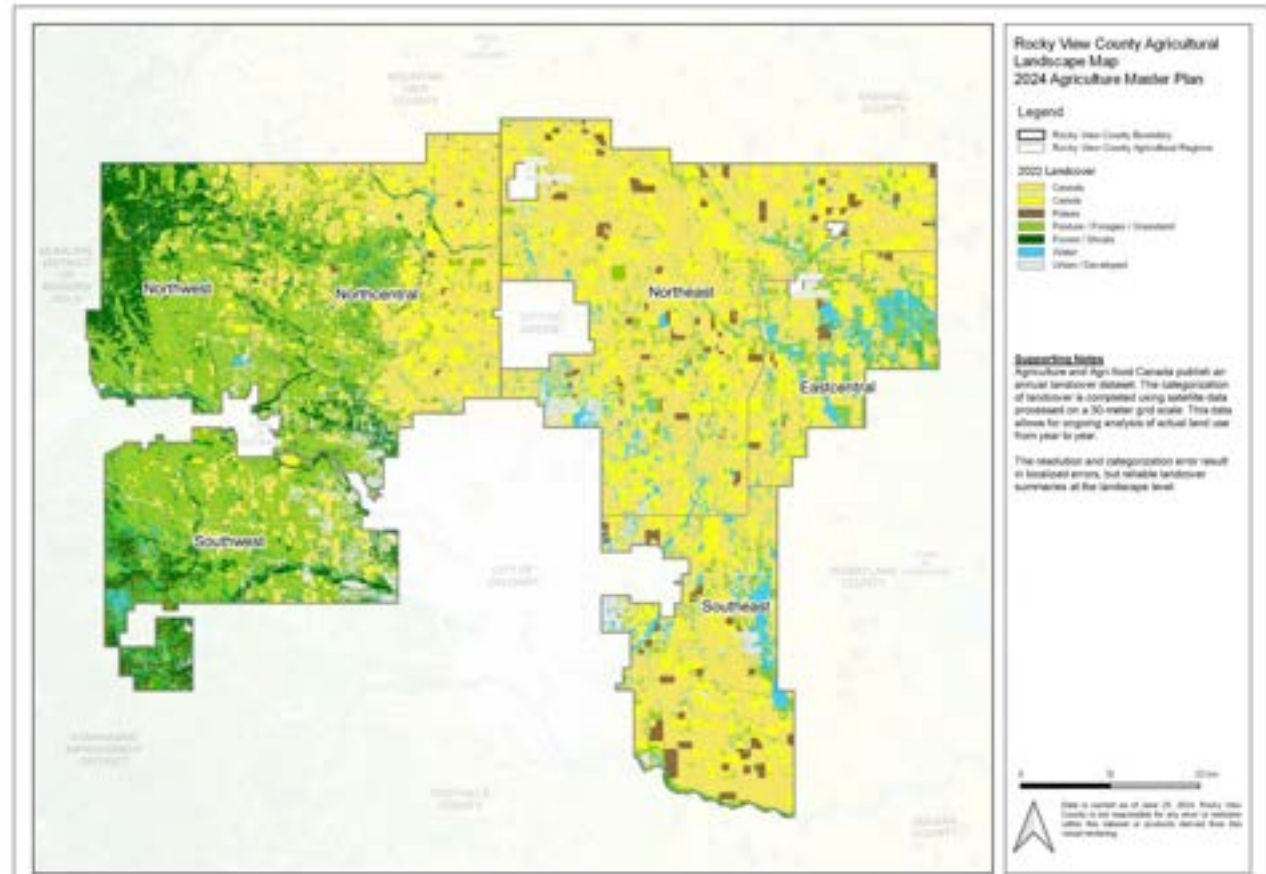
DRAFT Map 1. RVC Agricultural Cropland, 2023



RVC Land Cover Categories

Agriculture and Agri-food Canada publish an annual landcover dataset. The categorization of land cover is completed using satellite data processed on a 30-meter grid scale. This data allows for ongoing analysis of actual land use from year to year.

DRAFT Map 6. RVC Landcover Categories, 2022

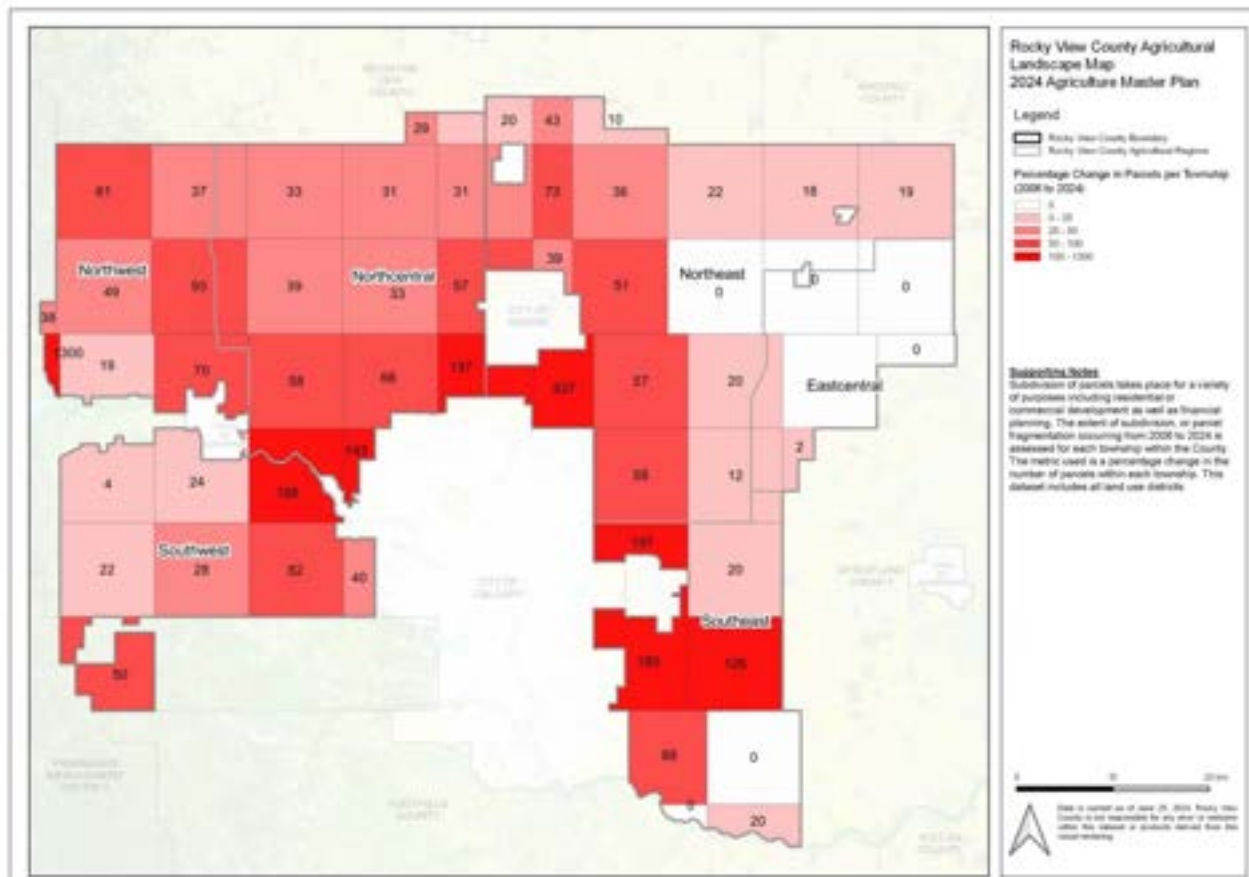


RVC Parcel Fragmentation by Township

Subdivision of parcels takes place for a variety of purposes including residential or commercial development as well as estate and financial planning.

The extent of subdivision, or parcel fragmentation occurring from 2006 to 2024 is assessed for **each township** within the County. The metric used is a percentage change in the number of parcels within each township. This dataset includes all land use districts.

DRAFT Map 8A. RVC Parcel Fragmentation by Township

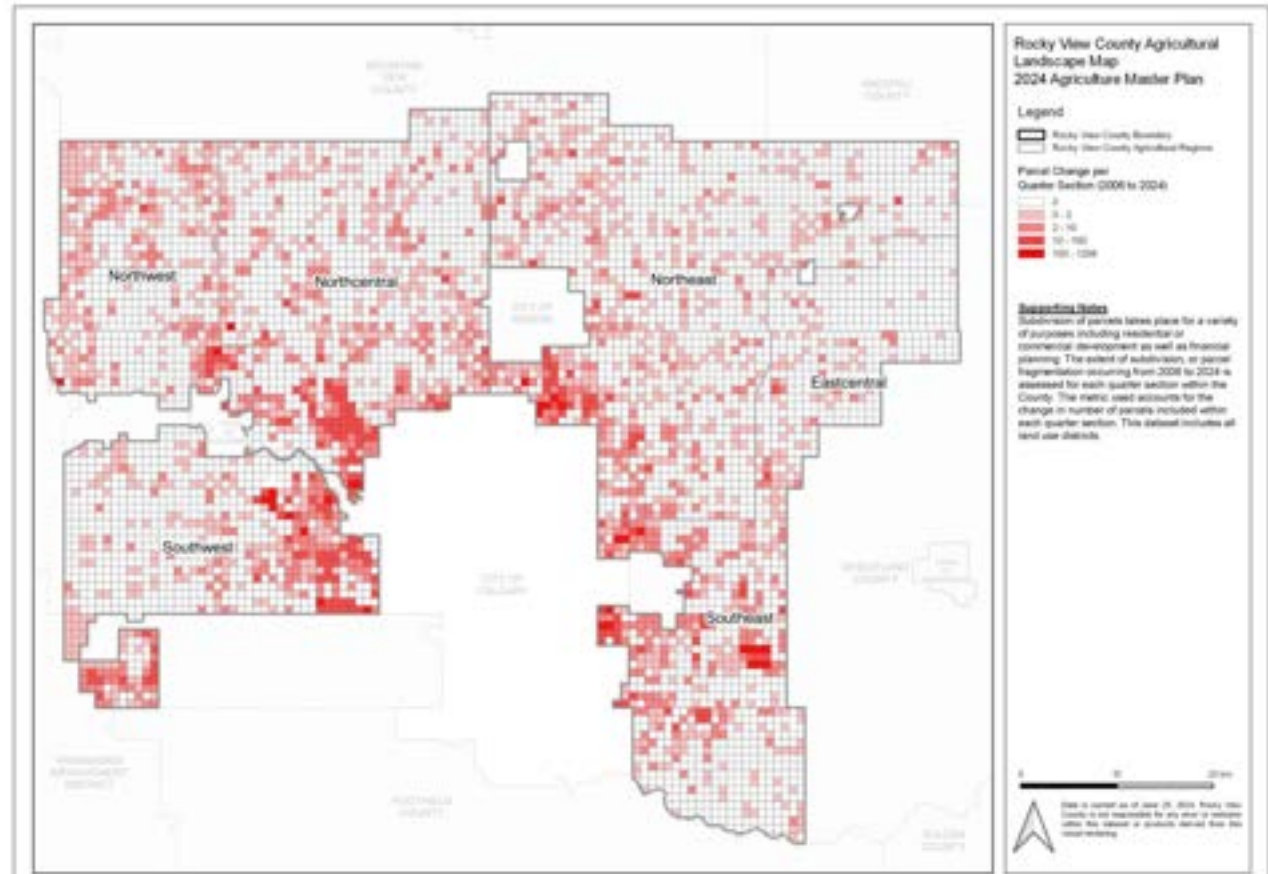


RVC Parcel Fragmentation by Quarter Section

Subdivision of parcels takes place for a variety of purposes including residential or commercial development as well as estate and financial planning.

The extent of subdivision, or parcel fragmentation occurring from 2006 to 2024 is assessed for **each quarter section** within the County. The metric used accounts for the change in number of parcels included within each quarter section. This dataset includes all land use districts.

DRAFT Map 8B. RVC Parcel Fragmentation by Quarter Section



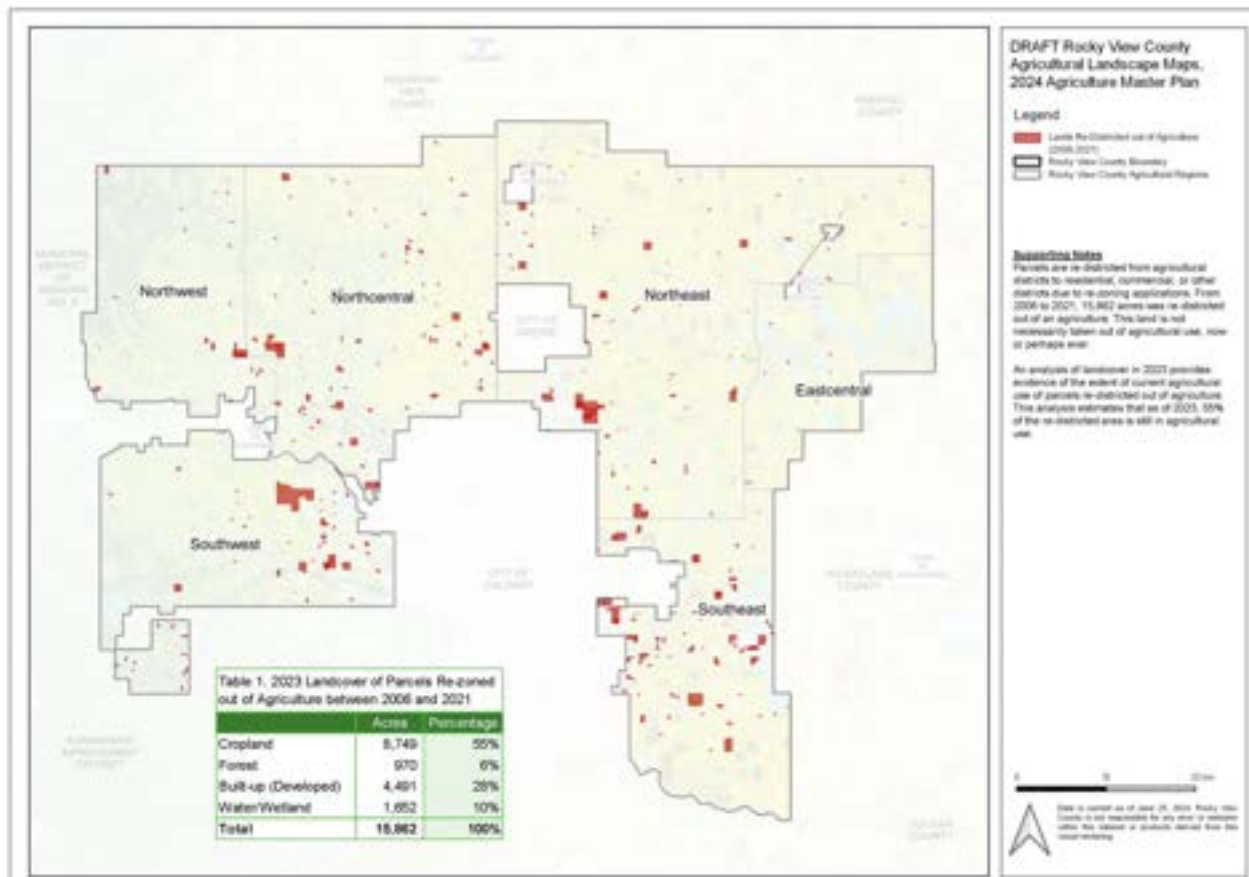
RVC Agricultural Cropland

Parcels are redistricted from agricultural districts to residential, commercial, or other districts through rezoning applications. From 2006 to 2021, 15,862 acres was redistricted away from agriculture. However, this land is not necessarily taken out of agricultural use, now or perhaps ever.

An analysis of land cover in 2023 provides evidence of the extent of current agricultural use of parcels redistricted out of agriculture.

This analysis estimates that as of 2023, 55% of the redistricted area is still in agricultural use.

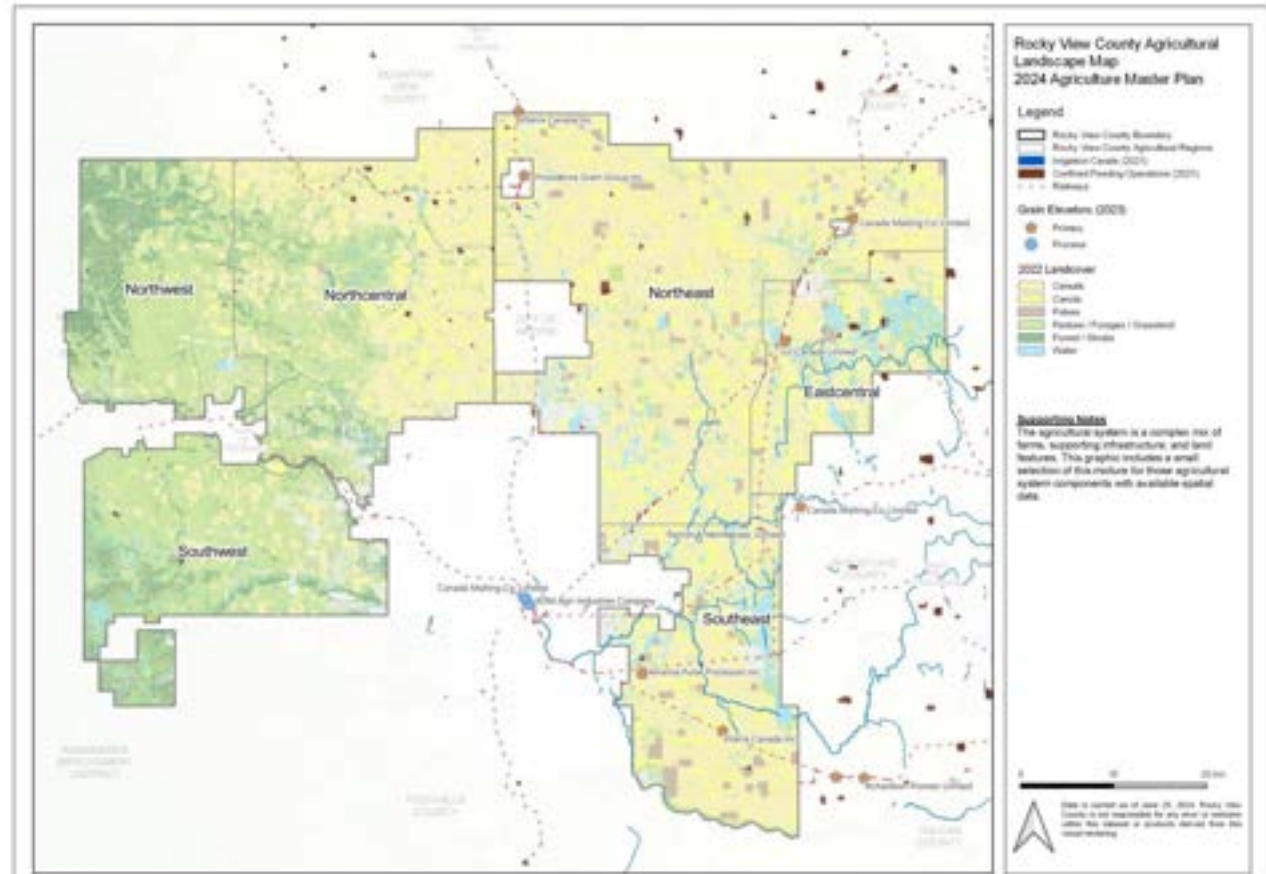
DRAFT Map 9. RVC Re-districted Agricultural Landcover Change (2006 to 2021)



RVC Agricultural Cropland

The agricultural system is a complex mix of farms, supporting infrastructure, and land features. This graphic includes a small selection of this mixture for those agricultural system components with available spatial data.

DRAFT Map 10. RVC Agricultural System, 2024



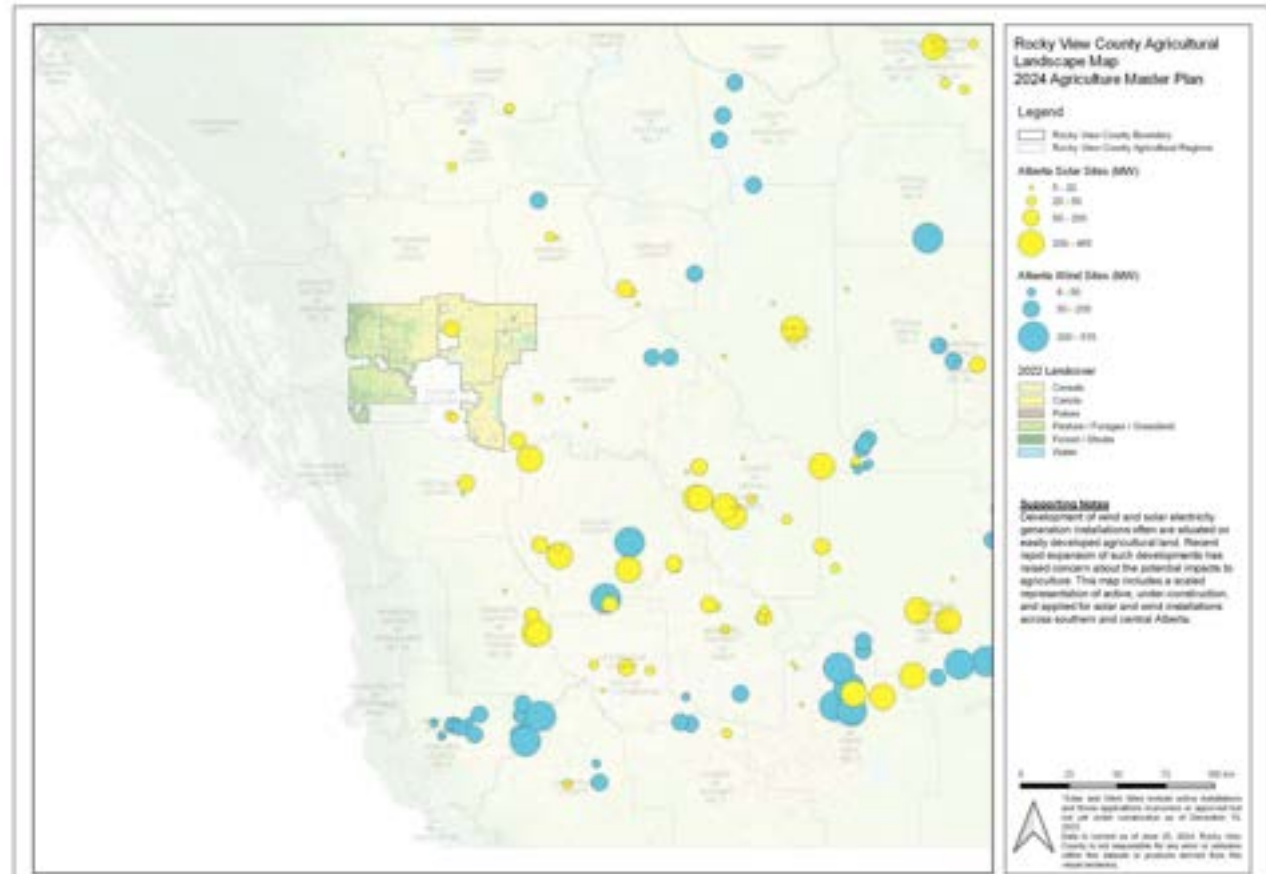
RVC Agricultural Cropland

Development of wind and solar electricity generation installations are often situated on agricultural land due to the relative ease of development and size requirements.

Recent rapid expansion of such developments has raised concern about the potential impacts to agriculture.

This map includes a scaled representation of active, under-construction, and applied for solar and wind installations across southern and central Alberta.

DRAFT Map 11. RVC Regional Wind and Solar Sites, 2024



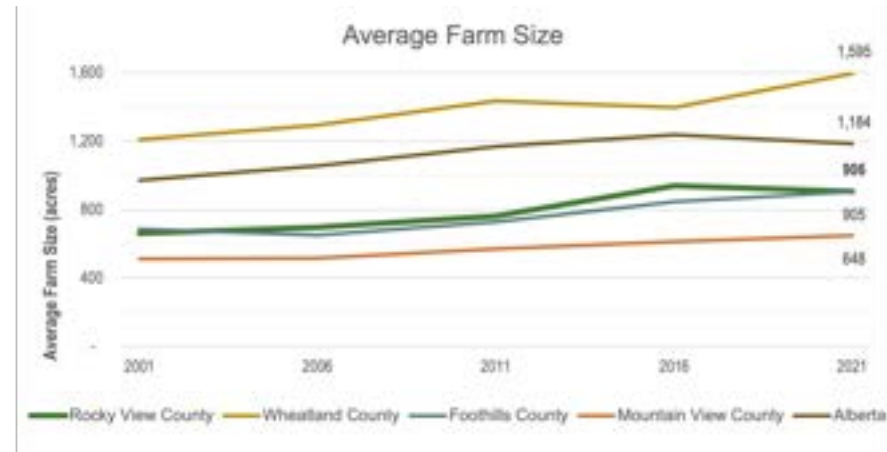
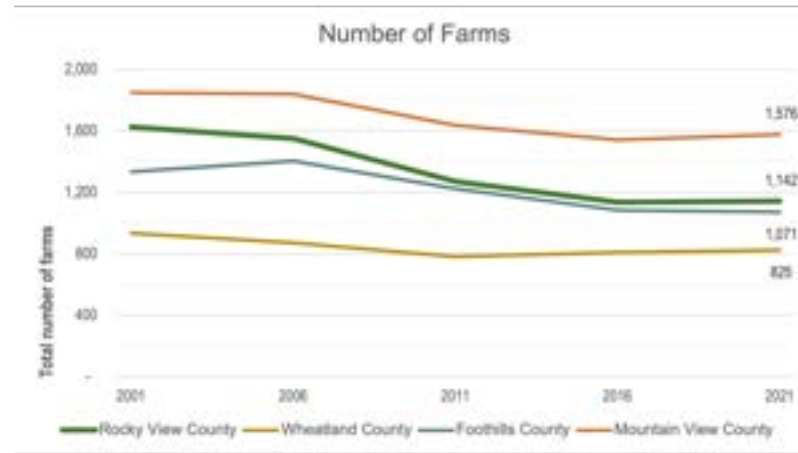
3.2 Data Review

Benchmarking undertaken in data review sought to understand the trends ongoing in the County by tracking 2001 - 2021 Statistics Canada Data for RVC. This was done alongside equivalent data for comparators Wheatland, Foothills, and Mountainview Counties and Alberta as a baseline. The following are the most substantial findings.

Agricultural change

The number of farms across all counties and Alberta have increased slightly since 2016, but all regions remain well below 2001 farm numbers.

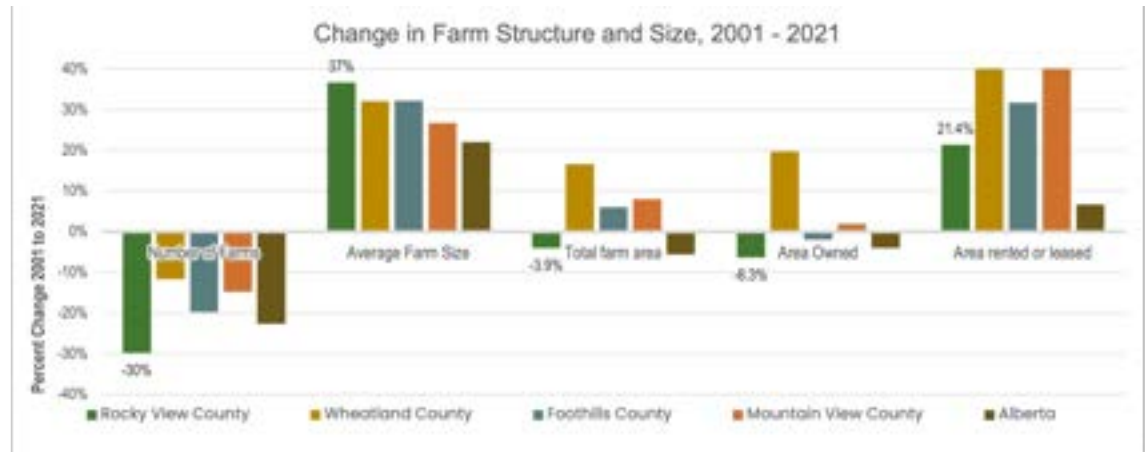
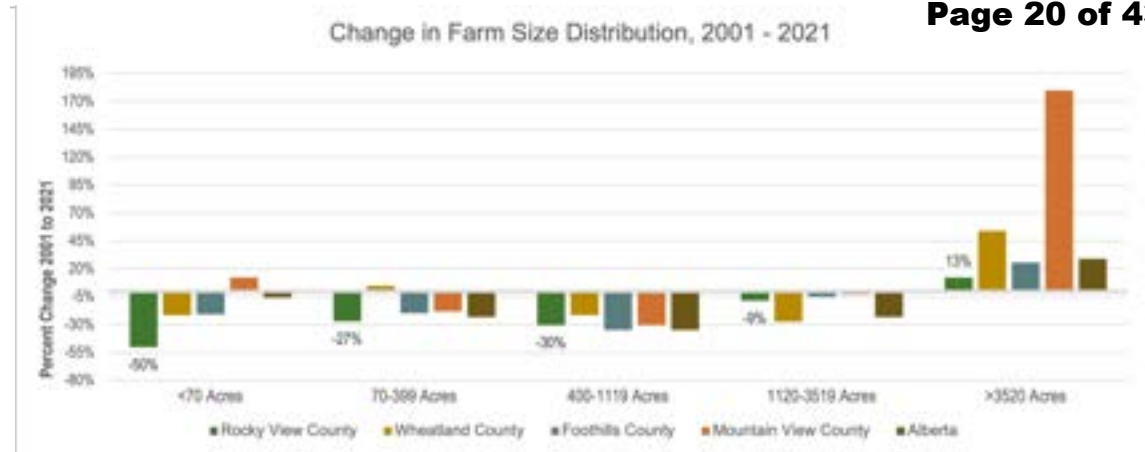
Using the farm size distribution data, the largest farm category (>3,250 acres) is the only category of farm size experiencing significant growth across all counties and Alberta - indicating farms are growing larger from consolidation.



Agricultural change

Rocky View County was the only county that saw a decrease in total farm area from 2001 to 2021.

However, the average farm size in 2021 (905 acres) is still greater than the 20-year average farm size (793 acres). The overall area owned by farms in Rocky View County decreased while the area rented/leased has increased across all comparator counties and across Alberta.

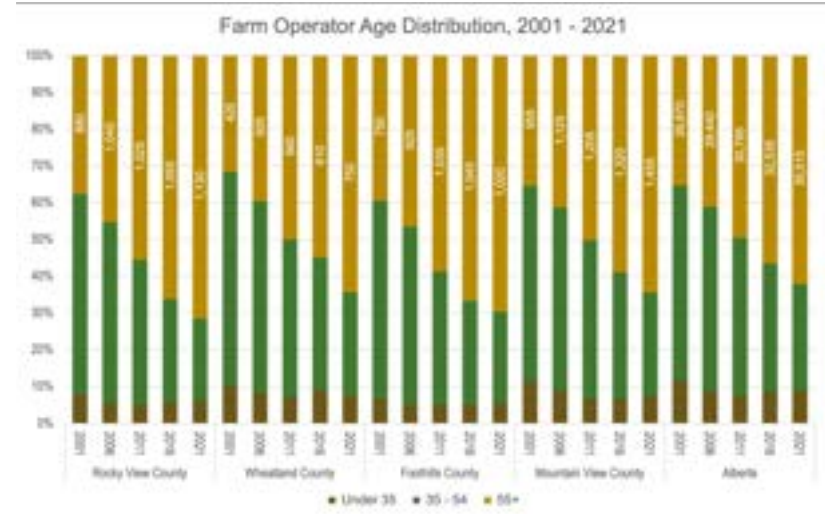
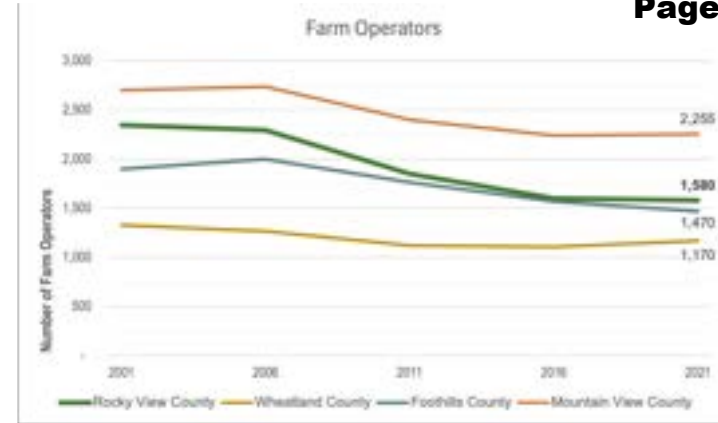


Agricultural demographics

The total number of farm operators has steadily decreased over the past 20 years across all counties and the province. A **farm operator** is defined by Statistics Canada as “those persons responsible for the management decisions in operating an agricultural operation. Can be owners, tenants or hired managers of the agricultural operation, including those responsible for management decisions pertinent to particular aspects of the farm - planting, harvesting, raising animals, marketing and sales, and making capital purchases and other financial decisions.”

In Mountain View and Wheatland Counties, the 2016-2021 period saw a slight increasing trend in total farm operators. Despite this increase, Mountain View and Wheatland Counties are still below the respective 20-year averages, indicative of the larger farm size trend.

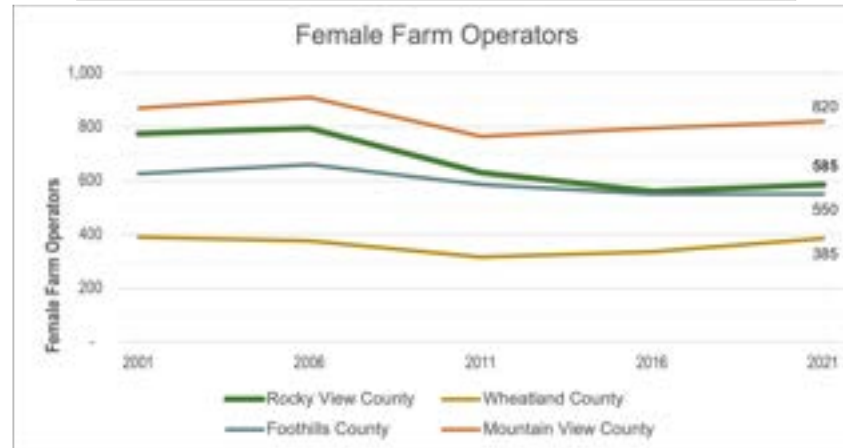
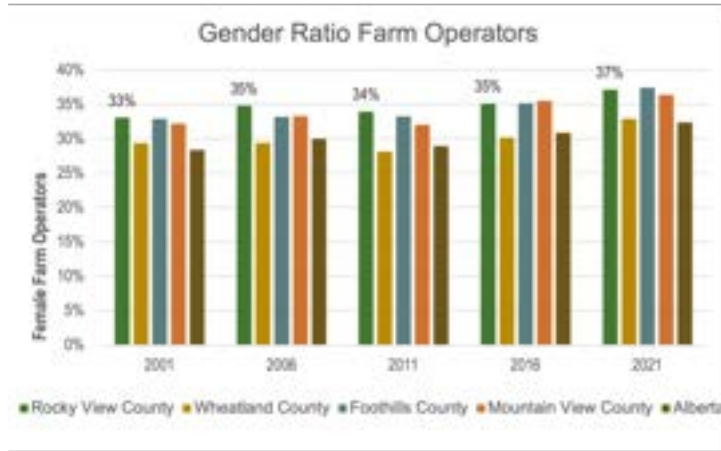
Concerning the average age of farm operators in 2021— across All Farms, Farms with One Operator and Farms with Two or More Operators – Rocky View County had the highest average age except in farms with one operator where Foothills was highest at 60.4 with Rocky View County at 60.3. The overall 20-year trend across all counties and the province shows a steady increase in average age, indicating an aging farm operator population.



Agricultural demographics

The percentage of female-identifying farm operators has increased across all counties from 2001 to 2021, with 37% of farm operators identifying as female in Rocky View County in 2021.

Note: This figure is impacted by the total number of operators decreasing over the same period, as seen in the absolute number of female identifying farm operators below.

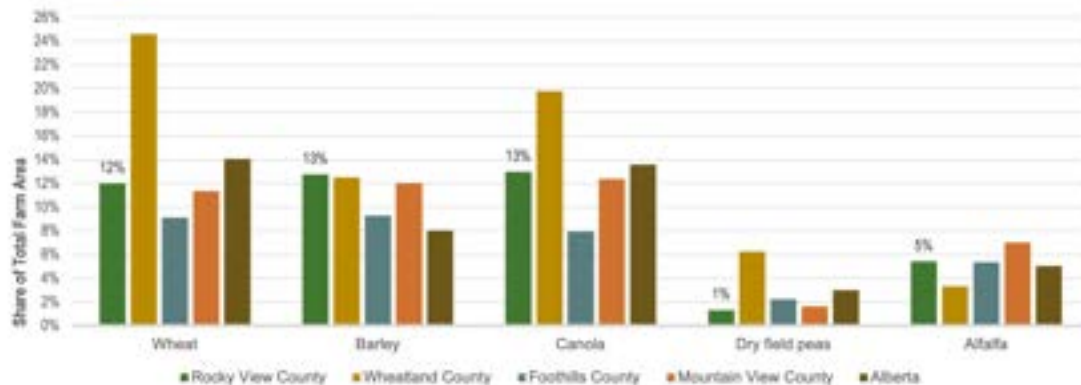


Agricultural production

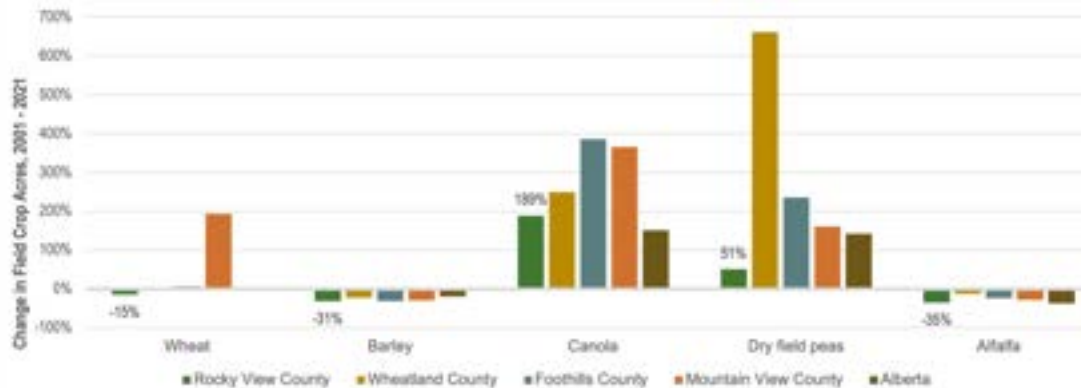
Rocky View County has increased the share of wheat acreage, but in 2021, was the only surveyed county performing below its 20-year average.

Canola has seen an increase in acreage and number of farms producing across all counties and Alberta. Assessment of the percentage of total farm area allocated to each crop found that canola had consistently gained a larger share of the total crop acreage, mainly at the expense of barley acreage. Rocky View County has had a decreasing Dry Field Pea acreage over the 2016-2021 period with the other counties and Alberta increasing production.

Field Crop Share of Total Farm Area, 2021



Change in Field Crop Acres, 2001 - 2021



Agricultural production

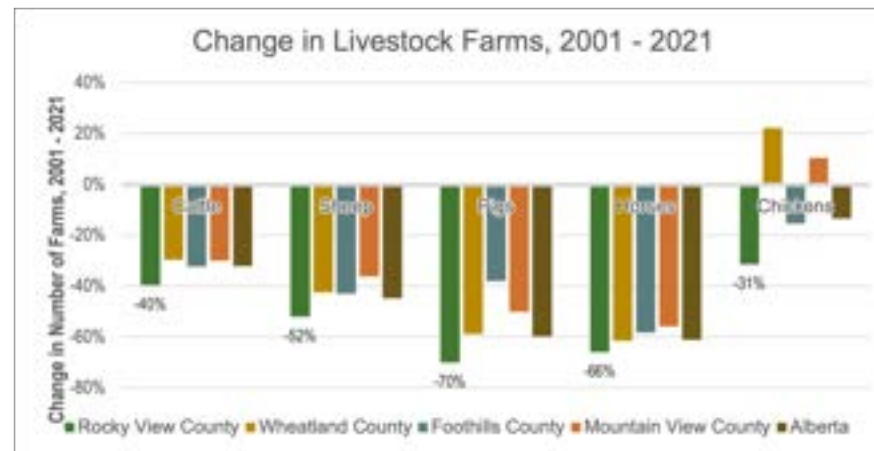
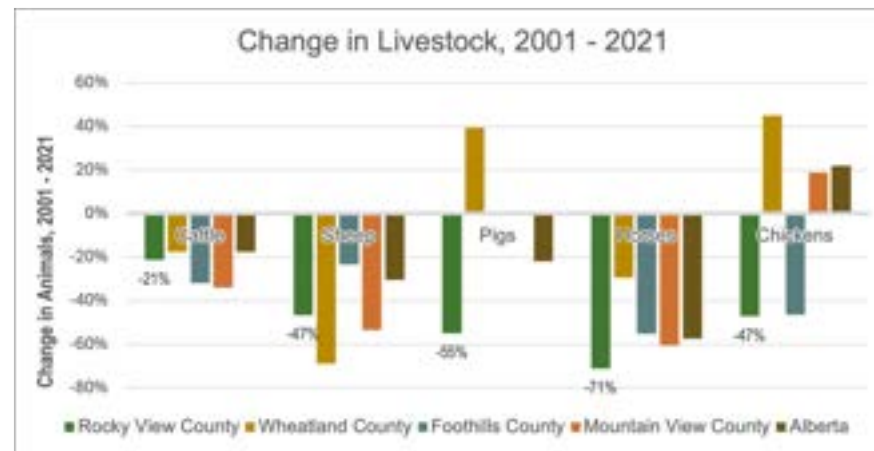
The number of cattle farms and inventory of cattle increased across all counties from 2016 to 2021, however, all counties are below their respective 2001 and 2006 cattle populations.

In RVC, the number of sheep, and sheep farms increased from 2016-2021. Similarly to trends in cattle, there is increased inventory from 2016 to 2021, however, 2021 herd sizes are still below their respective 20-year averages.

Hog inventory decreased in RVC from 2016 to 2021, remaining below the 20-year average. Whereas in Wheatland County, from 2016-2021, herd sizes have increased.

In RVC from 2016-2021, the number chicken and hen farms reporting increased but inventory decreased. There is a similar trend in Mountain View County, while other counties and the province saw an increase.

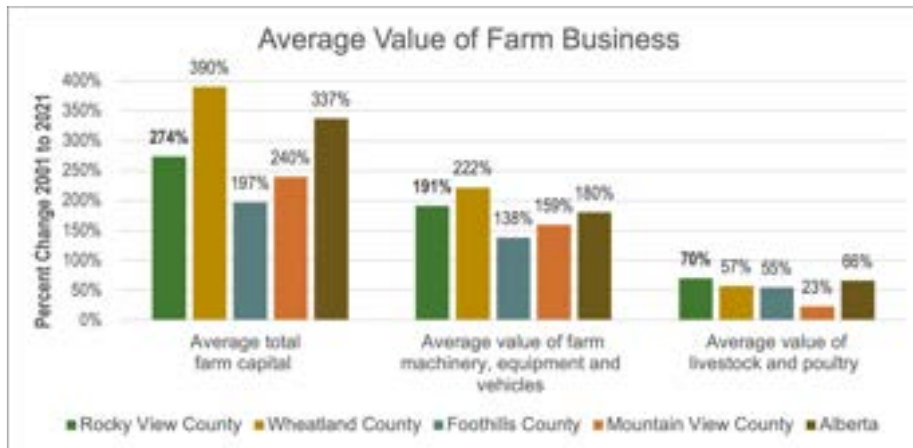
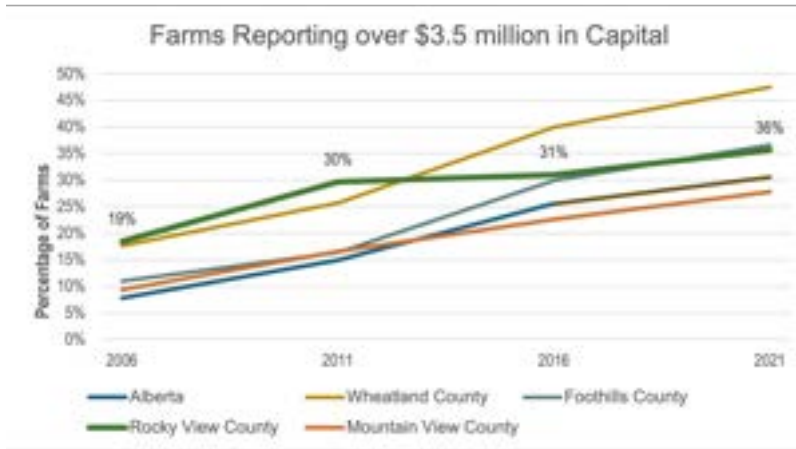
More graphs for livestock breakdowns can be found in the [Context Review Working Document](#).



Contemporary farm business

Examining Total Farm Capital distribution, it was found that across all counties and Alberta the number of farms in the highest category (> 3.5 million) increased consistently over the 2006-2021 period while other capital distribution categories decreased.

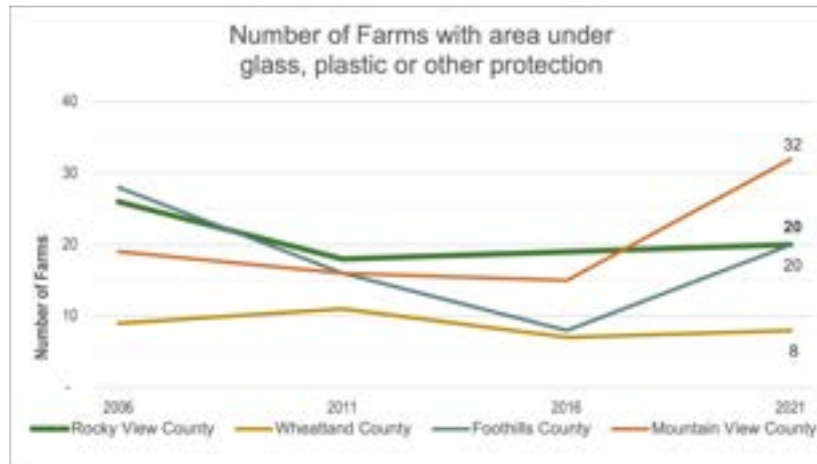
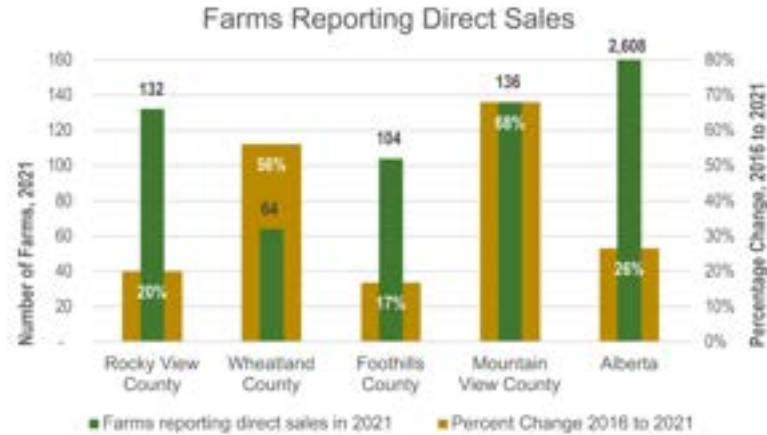
Across all counties and Alberta, an increase in total farm capital, farm machinery, equipment & vehicles and farm livestock and poultry can be observed from 2001 to 2021.



Contemporary farm business

In 2016, Statistics Canada started tracking the number of farms reporting direct sales to consumers. In this period, the number of farms reporting direct sales increased across all comparator counties and throughout Alberta.

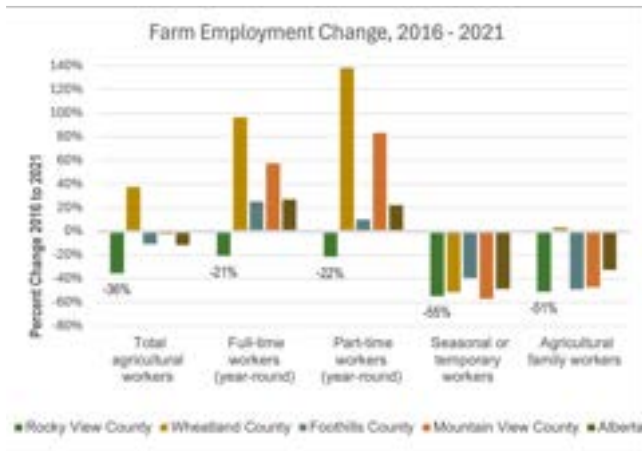
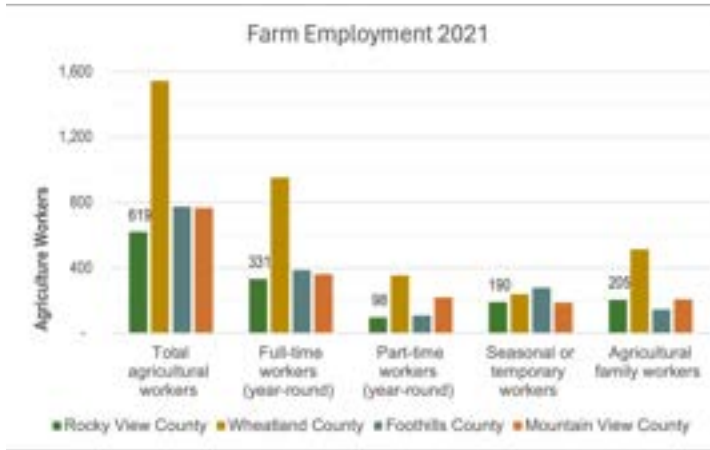
The number of farms reporting area under glass, plastic or other protection increased significantly from 2016-2021, in Foothills and Mountain View counties with Rocky View County and Wheatland County increasing less.



Contemporary farm employment

In the 2016-2021 period, the number of Total Agriculture Workers decreased in all comparator counties but Wheatland, with Rocky View County seeing the greatest decline.

The number of Full Time Workers and Part Time Workers increased in all regions except in Rocky View County. In consideration of total agriculture family workers, each comparator county and the provincial average each decreased in number of agriculture family workers except Wheatland County.





SECTION 4.0

Engagement Findings

This section highlights what local farmers, agri-businesses, and residents have had to say in response to our questions regarding support for current agricultural goals, feedback on programs and services, and suggestions for additional goals or improvements to existing ones. Using a variety of engagement approaches, feedback was obtained on the following high level themes.

To read all the findings from engagement, please read the [What We Heard Report](#).

Protect agricultural land

Population growth pressure has led to residential development and the concurrent loss of productive agricultural lands in the County. Respondent sentiment suggests productive agricultural lands should be protected from development (country residential, commercial, industrial, etc.). Limiting subdivision to main contiguous sections of farmable land, and ensuring compatible land uses adjacent to agriculture operations are additional considerations.

Perception of agriculture

Respondent sentiment suggests that residential and industrial development is seen as the priority in Rocky View, where large-scale agriculture is not supported and agriculture businesses are on their own to survive. There is a perceived lack of understanding, respect, and support for the agriculture industry in Rocky View County, and acknowledgement for the value it brings to the Calgary region at large.

Governance and regulation

Systematic issues (i.e. bureaucratic processes) are perceived as a barrier to supporting agriculture business. Streamlining regulatory processes at the County would enable agricultural producers to focus on agriculture. Incentives and funding opportunities should be provided to support sustainable agriculture initiatives.

Accountability and implementation

Sentiment suggests increased accountability by a Rocky View County Council and administration knowledgeable about agriculture and direction for action to ensure the AMP vision and goals are realized.

Flexibility of land use

Outside of agricultural land protection, reduced regulation from the County is desired to enable landowners to continue practicing agriculture and trusting their expertise to determine the best use of land. There is support for businesses to be allowed on agricultural parcels that directly and indirectly support agricultural producers.



The following themes are the high level public viewpoints drawn from each engagement method.



Farm succession

Feedback sentiment included ensuring the farming industry remains financially sustainable for the next generation, minimizing taxation and land speculation on agricultural lands, while supporting farm succession planning and education and outreach. There is high support for residential parcels that allow farmers to age in place and receive additional support from younger family members.

Environmental sustainability

Sentiment noted that agricultural lands contribute to environmental sustainability and stewardship in the County. Considerations include native landscapes, invasive species removal, limiting aggregate operations, clean up and remediation. Sustainable management of water resources was also identified as an critical importance to environmental sustainability.

Road infrastructure improvements

Sentiment noted that roads and bridges require widening to accommodate larger and heavier agricultural equipment. Access to roads are integral to agricultural operations, and limitations can have negative impacts on producers, particularly during the harvest season.

Weed control

There is support for more weed control measures in the County to prevent the spread of invasive species and pests. Incentives, herbicide rebates, roadside weed control, pasture sprayer rental opportunities, and education were identified as opportunities to increase weed control.

Renewable energy development

There is low support for active solar farm and renewable energy development on productive agriculture lands. Large scale renewable energy development should be directed towards industrial areas, rooftops, and parking lots.

Marketing and promotion of existing agricultural services

Sentiment noted that existing County programs, including ALUS, agriculture workshops, and agriculture tours would all benefit from increased marketing, promotion, and direct communication to residents and agricultural land owners.

Topsoil disposal

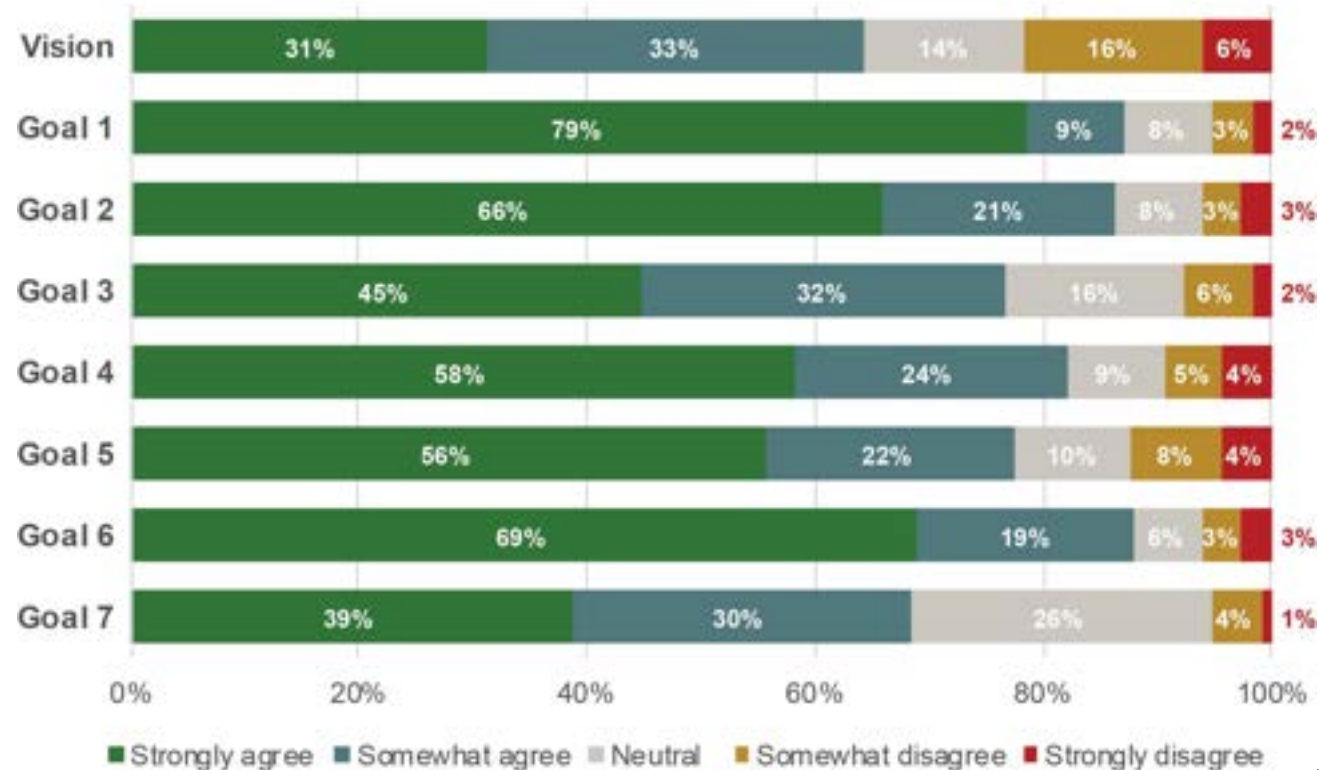
Regulation and monitoring is required when it comes to topsoil disposal in the County. Inspection, monitoring and testing of the topsoil use and potential effects should be required before approval of topsoil distribution to agricultural lands. There is opportunity for topsoil to be used for land reclamation in marginal lands.

2011 Vision and Goals Alignment

Question: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the 2011 AMP vision and goals?

In the survey, participants shared their agreement with the previous AMP's vision and goals. The majority of participants strongly agreed with the existing goals, with relatively weak support for Goal 7. The existing AMP vision similarly drew comparatively weak support.

To read all the findings from engagement, please consult the [Phase 1 What We Heard Report](#).



SECTION 5.0

Municipal Trends in Agriculture

The following themes explore how Rocky View County attends to agricultural considerations in comparison to other benchmarked counties and other municipal existing practices. There are a variety of considerations for a municipality's role in agricultural regulation. The majority of the following considerations are focused on themes of land use or economic development.



Definitions of Agriculture

To see the definitions currently used within RVC's context, or to read more about agricultural definitions, look to the [Context Review Working Document](#).

Rocky View County Today

In RVC, agricultural land is primarily defined through the Land Use Bylaw, and is separated into four primary types dictated by use, including: general, intensive, regulated and processing. In the Land Use Bylaw, agriculture is a permitted use on A-SML zoned parcels at a minimum of 20.2 ha (49.92 acres), and R-RUR

Attachment B - Agricultural Snapshot

zoned parcels as a discretionary use at a minimum parcel size of 1.6 ha (3.95 acres). Agricultural areas are generally defined in the County Plan as areas not guided by area structure plans, conceptual scheme or master site development plan. Definitions in the 2011 AMP align closely with the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board Growth Plan definition for agriculture, with the County's definition not including transportation.

Benchmarking

Across the benchmarked counties of Foothills, Mountain View, and Wheatland, all lands within the counties are deemed to be agricultural lands unless otherwise designated. In Foothills County, agricultural parcels are further defined by a minimum of 21 acres in size. In Mountain View County, a baseline assessment to identify “productive” farmland was further defined through the Canada Land Inventory and Agricultural Regions of Alberta Soil Inventory Database Land Suitability Rating System Class 2 and 3 soils as the 1st Dominant, or Co-dominant, in conjunction with Environmentally Significant Areas mapping.

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External Practices

In most communities, there are distinctly different definitions for agricultural uses for land use bylaws, municipal development plans, and tax assessment purposes. Definitions of agriculture and various uses are important to understanding a community's agricultural focus, and the system encompassed within agriculture-related industries.

One example that uses a centralized series of agricultural definitions is the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board's [Regional Agriculture Master Plan](#) (RAMP, 2022).

The RAMP defines both agriculture overall, and the various systems within and connected to agriculture, including: agri-food, agricultural land, primary agricultural land and areas, specialty agricultural land, on-farm diversified uses, agri-tourism, value added agriculture, ecological goods and services, farmsteads, generally accepted agricultural practice, natural capital, and urban agriculture.



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First parcel out: There are currently policies in the County Plan as well as the Land Use Bylaw to allow a first parcel out for an agriculture subdivision, without redesignation. This is handled in section 8.17, of the County Plan, which details the requirements for the “first parcel out that is a minimum of 1.60 hectares (3.95 acres) in area. There are detailed requirements specific to parcels less than 4.0 ha (9.88 ac)”, and considerations for fragmented parcel subdivision (see section 10).

New or Distinct: The County Plan (section 8.18) introduced ‘new or distinct’ as a land designation under ‘designation and subdivision for agricultural purposes’. The intention of the designation is to allow for flexibility in the definition of agricultural production, to allow for new agriculture operations which are distinct from the existing land use. Recent applications have suggested an emerging theme of redesignation of agriculture land into ‘new or distinct’ designations for the purpose of smaller subdivided parcels. Overtime these parcels have been stripped of their ‘agriculture’ designation as the resulting land division is too small to support agricultural operations.

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Secondary Suites: Section 122 of the Land Use Bylaw overviews the general requirements for accessory dwelling units, with A-SML and A-GEN having a maximum of two dwelling units with A-GEN parcels greater than or equal to 80 acres allowed four dwelling units.

Confined feedlots: Regulated by the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), confined feedlots are currently supported for existing operations, with the County being available to assist with grandfathering applications. The County Plan includes a series of policies (Section 8.20 - 8.24) which outline the requirements and scoping for new and expanding confined feedlots. Confined feedlots are exempt from the requirements laid out in the Land Use Bylaw due to the regulatory context of the NRCB and unique nature of this development type.

Changes with Growth Plan: Section 3.2.3 of the CMRB Growth Plan will require RVC to make some land use updates in the realm of: agriculture preservation areas, and agricultural economy.

Land Use and Subdivision Policy

Land use and subdivision policy contains various subissues, including: right to farm, housing, confined feedlots, diversification, renewable energy, infrastructure, etc. Topics have been moved to other sections where appropriate.

Rocky View County Today

Right to Farm: In the 2011 AMP, it was recommended to adopt a County Right to Farm Policy which supports the unimpeded continuation of agricultural operations who follow generally accepted agricultural practices. Language for this policy was included in the County Plan, which was later adopted in 2013.

Benchmarking

Municipal Development Plans for comparators Foothills County, Mountain View County and Wheatland County were compared to understand their current approaches to agricultural land use. A table is available for review in section 5.2 of the [Context Review Working Document](#).

All counties had policies or reference in their MDPs for Right to farm and first parcel out. Foothills and Mountain View Counties had MDP policies for fragmented parcel subdivision, agriculture preservation areas, and minimum parcel sizes. Other areas were less common to find in County MDP documentation, including: Transfer of development credits, maximum non-agricultural area, farmstead separation, country residential subdivision, and secondary suites. Additional MDP policy details can be found in the [Context Review Policy Benchmarking spreadsheet](#).

Existing Practices

There are a variety of Land Use and subdivision policy practices currently in practice in Western Canada. The following are a sample of currently emerging practices:

- Limiting or discouraging fragmentation of formally-identified high quality agricultural land. This has been done in a variety of contexts across Canada, with a recent example being the [Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Board's](#) Prime Agricultural Land Designation, which was identified by land evaluation and through a site assessment tool. The Prime Agriculture Area, as well as the other three identified areas has a series of associated policy recommendations and protections.
- [Transfer of Development Credits](#) to concentrate development while respecting property values and protected agricultural areas. While this program has been investigated in RVC, and included in the Glenbow ASP, there is still more potential for RVC to consider this form of agricultural policy innovation.

- There are various examples of subdivision allowances which take agricultural protection and generational planning into account. Leduc County MDP is a unique example which discusses options for agricultural subdivision using different geographical considerations. Similar to RVC, Leduc County has a series of geographically unique differentiations for agriculture, which is reflective in their subdivision policy variety.
- Smallholdings have similar permissions to general agriculture in RVC. In other areas of Alberta, small holdings have additional policy support to allow for greater subdivision and diversification in some areas. For example, Leduc County has a Small Holding Agriculture Area detailed in their MDP, which allows four title areas per quarter section. Similarly, Parkland County MDP includes provision for a 'prime agriculture area small holdings'. This area allows for flexibility in parcel sizes with 4-6 parcels per quarter section allowed. Strathcona County MDP also includes provision for an Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area.

Rocky View County Today

Renewable Energy in RVC today is primarily guided by the County Plan, which supports and encourages the use of agricultural land for small scale production of renewable sources of energy. On July 11, 2023, the Municipal Land Use Suitability Tool (M-LUST) was introduced in a RVC Governance Committee Meeting. In this meeting, it was moved that the Governance Committee direct administration to incorporate the data from M-LUST to include in the Municipal Development Plan review process and future County policy development.

Benchmarking

The approach to renewable energy on agricultural lands differs across the benchmarked counties. Wheatland County encourages the installation of sustainable energy generation technology across the county as a primary and accessory use in any land use designation provided it is appropriate in terms of scale and location. Conversely, Mountain View County does not support renewable energy development within their Agricultural Preservation Area.

While Foothills County does not have any official policy, as of March 2024, they have chosen to wait for the provincial government to provide direction for renewable energy development. The [Alberta Utilities Commission](#) is currently in the process of updating its policy in accordance with the province's approach to focus on agriculture first and restrict renewable energy installation on Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS) Class 1 and 2 lands.

External Practices

[Cypress County's Land Use Bylaw](#) outlines a series of clear policies for renewable energy installation on land. If used for personal use, Cypress County does not require the applicant to undergo a development permit, instead defaulting to the electric distribution company for necessary approvals, with minor policies related to size, glare, and setbacks. Solar panel installation for commercial use is a "type two" discretionary use in agricultural and industrial. These policies can be considered in defining RVC's approach to renewable energy generation.



**Renewable energy
on agricultural lands**



Infrastructure

Rocky View County Today

Infrastructure key to RVC's agricultural success is primarily outlined in the County Plan and Agricultural Boundary Design Guide.

Infrastructural considerations are detailed in section 8.18 of the County Plan for cases of redesignation and subdivision to smaller agriculture parcels as a new or distinct agricultural operation. In regards to infrastructure, these proposals consider evaluation criteria including suitable on-site infrastructure for the proposed use, which may include: access areas, water wells, irrigation and sewage infrastructure, and manure management.

Similarly, when conducting a site analysis for agricultural uses, the Agricultural Boundary Design Guide suggests considering the road type, lot access, neighbouring lot access, future road connection requirements, proximity to parks and pathways, and proximity to other hard infrastructure.

Benchmarking

As a means to protect agricultural lands and promote the efficient use and economies of scale for services and infrastructure, all benchmarked counties promote the intensification of existing industrial and economic nodes.

External Practices

Agriculturally supportive infrastructure takes many forms in Alberta. One example being looked at for improving agricultural infrastructure is stormwater drainage. The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) suggest to include drainage infrastructure, (e.g. retention ponds, culverts, municipal drains, etc) into asset management plans so that drainage is reviewed and maintained effectively.

Road construction is another component of agricultural infrastructure. Modern practices for new road and bridge construction in rural areas is to ensure developments are compatible with modern farm equipment widths, including guardrail, median, and bollard placement.

Additionally, multiple counties in Alberta (including Leduc, Lacombe, and Red Deer) have implemented signage or public campaigns to remind non-farm residents of best practices for interactions with farm vehicles in spring and fall. In Leduc, agricultural producers are able to apply for roadside signage in their area to inform other motorists of slow-moving equipment.

Governance

Rocky View County Today

Agriculture in RVC is currently supported by the advisory services of the Agricultural Service Board (established in 1945), with application decisions and formal decisions being made through Council. The Agricultural Service Board's mission is to act as an advisory body to Council on agricultural matters affecting residents, while promoting and developing agricultural policies to meet the needs of the municipality. The ASB is made up of a combination of farm and Council members, and meets five times a year.

RVC has in place a Right to Farm Policy, which ensures agricultural producers have the continued right to engage in Generally Accepted Agricultural Practices as defined in the Agricultural Operations Practices Act [AOPA], and that Council is committed to supporting compliant Agricultural Operations and Producers' Right to Farm.

Benchmarking

As a governance mechanism, Mountain View County has been investigating the creation of a land trust that will accept the donation of land for continued agricultural or open space use. At the governance level, Wheatland County works to provide waste management services that meet specific needs of agricultural operations.

External Practices

Agricultural Service Boards (ASBs) are common across Alberta, and often take an advisory role. One place that ASBs can be used more effectively is to raise municipal policy issues important to the farming community. The advisory role of ASBs is inherent to their mandate, however the solicitation of policy options to address priority issues should be clearly enabled through the governance of ASBs.





Agricultural Economic Development

Rocky View County Today

There are a series of ways RVC supports agricultural economic development, and programs the County runs to do so, including:

- Agri-Environmental Incentive Program
- Traps and Rental Equipment
- Agricultural Educational Workshops
- Agricultural Tour

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In addition to these, the County has a series of economic development policies and practices which promote agricultural business, on-farm diversified uses, value-added agriculture, and regional investment.

RVC's economic development strategy has a series of priorities related to agricultural economic development, including:

- Identify opportunities in emerging and value-added sectors where the County can demonstrate strengths and unique advantages
- Promote Rocky View County as a choice destination for investment in key sectors among local and international audiences
- Increase engagement, relationship building, and business development activities through attendance at target sector events and involvement with trade and industry associations
- Develop an Agricultural sector profile and marketing plans for target sectors, focusing on high-value industries and complementary supply chain businesses.

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- Enhance and promote programs and tools that support and anticipate the needs of the prospective business community (incentives etc.)
- Leverage existing Government programs and services to attract investment (i.e. Government of Alberta Agri-processing Investment Attraction Services)

Upcoming initiatives for RVC's economic development sector could include:

- Supporting and enabling local production in fresh produce to meet consumer demand. Focusing on outbound marketing of our local producers to fast-food service providers and our existing large scale food distribution companies who are seeking consistent reliable supply.
- Including agri-tourism in the upcoming tourism strategy.
- Adopting MDP policies in support of value-added ag., agri-tourism, and agri-business from the CMR Growth Plan (section 3.2.3).

Attachment B - Agricultural Snapshot

Benchmarking

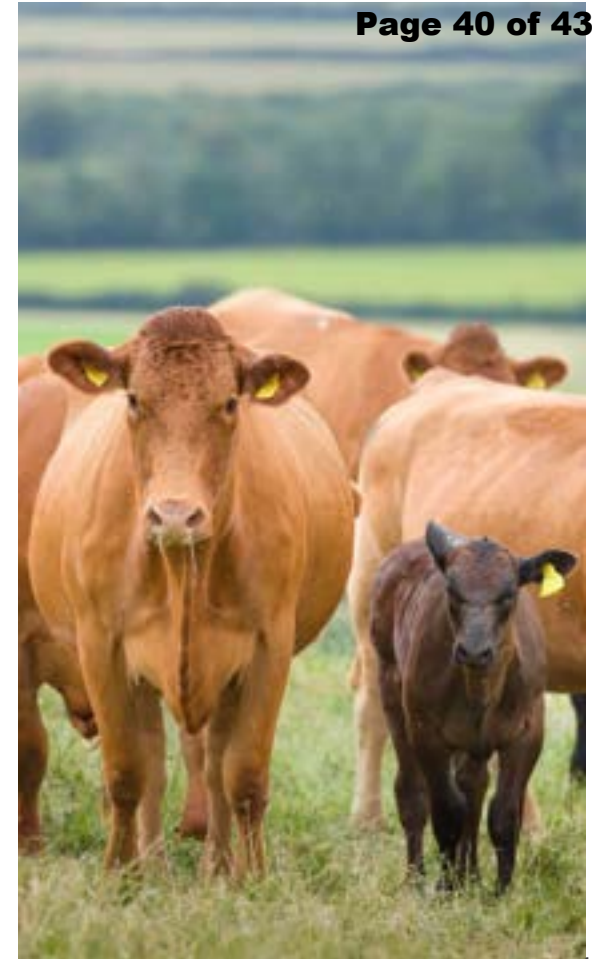
In Wheatland County, the local government encourages commercial and industrial uses that support the agricultural community, enhance tourism and community development, provide employment opportunities, and diversify the local and regional economy. Through an active Agricultural Services Board, Wheatland County promotes and organizes events for the growing agricultural business community in the county. The County also works to identify and promote innovation in agricultural production, tourism, and support long standing agricultural producers. In Foothills County, agricultural uses and industries that support agriculture are encouraged with the caveat that non-agricultural uses should only be permitted on lands with minimal negative impacts on agricultural resources.

Existing Practices

Agricultural economic development has taken many forms in Western Canada. Some examples of existing practices for County- and region-level agri-business support and retention include:

- Agri-tourism support through municipal partnership with [Foothills Tourism Association](#) to enable local companies to market their services/products effectively.
- [Canada's Premier Food Corridor](#) (CPFC) is a collaboration to focus agri-food economic development in southern Alberta (Lethbridge County, MD of Taber, Lethbridge, Taber, Coaldale).
- Agri-processing in Leduc County Nisku Industrial Park Agri-processing Cluster provides pre-serviced lots with competitive tax rates and affordable services.
- Strathcona County and Sturgeon County have implemented a [site selector tool](#) to help companies conduct a due diligence on prospective land parcels.

Other counties have a practice of proactive regional investment attraction to provide targeted agri-food information (i.e. feedstock availability, research institution access, utility service statistics, etc.) to potential buyers.



Small Holdings & Diversification

Rocky View County Today

Agri-business in RVC is communicated as an opportunity for job creation, income diversification, local economic impact, agricultural innovation, and market diversification. One primary driver that has been used in supporting agri-business has been support for agricultural diversification.

In RVC today, there are a series of high-level policies which support a diversified agricultural land base. The Calgary Metropolitan Region Board includes high level policy language to “support a strong, resilient and diversified agricultural economy.” Similarly, the RVC County Plan’s vision includes a statement of “Rocky View County respects, supports, and values agriculture as an important aspect of the County’s culture and economy [...] Help minimize adverse impacts on agriculture operations and support agriculture diversity through land use policy.

In implementation, RVC’s Agricultural Boundary Design Guide states in Section 1 that “the growth of Rocky View County over the last several decades has increased the diversification of the agricultural sector as well as the expansion of non-agricultural uses into areas that have traditionally been very rural.”

In addition to the above, RVC has a A-SML section of their zoning bylaw for small scale agriculture, which is permissive to most uses that the general ag category is. Both include a series of discretionary uses to help support value-added agriculture and other income generating avenues, including: processing, farm gate sales, farmers’ market, recreation, special function business, among others.



Benchmarking

In Foothills County, an “Agricultural Business District” land use was created to provide for agricultural-related business in agricultural areas. Uses include primarily agricultural processing, retailing of agricultural products and business uses related to agricultural activity while allowing for limited services related to agriculture. Wheatland County addresses value-add agriculture more indirectly, encouraging the inclusion of value-added operations and accessory uses in the consideration of agricultural land use applications. Opportunities for agri-industrial activities such as the processing and shipping of agricultural products, are also supported where appropriate.

Existing Practices

Small holdings and diversification supports take various forms in Alberta. A few examples of existing practices to support diversification and value-added activities include:

- Sturgeon County has a [Value-Added Agriculture Incentive](#) that provides a tax credit between one and a half to two percent of eligible capital costs. This credit may be stacked with the provincial tax credit to provide producers with tax savings.
- Sturgeon County also has a [Diversified Agriculture](#) (AG2) land use category which for low-intensity activities are permitted within an AG (Agriculture General) district and high-intensity (i.e. high customer traffic) requires redistricting to the AG2 land use category.
- Leduc County has a [Small Holding Agriculture Area](#) detailed in their MDP, which allows for greater subdivision to support diversification of agricultural operations (4 titled areas per quarter section). Strathcona County’s MDP also includes provision for an [Agricultural Small Holdings](#) Policy Area.
- Parkland County's MDP includes provision for a [Prime Agriculture Area Small Holdings](#). This area allows for flexibility in parcel sizes with 4-6 parcels per quarter section allowed.





SECTION 6.0

Next Steps

This Agricultural Snapshot Working Document was created to inform the Strategy Sprint with a high level overview of the contemporary agricultural context for Rocky View County.

In the winter of 2024/2025, we will share the draft Agriculture Master Plan with the public for phase two of engagement. During this phase, we will invite additional comments and reviews to ensure the plan reflects the community's needs.

For more information on the project, please visit:
www.rockyview.ca/agriculture-master-plan