



A Guide for Declaring Municipal Agricultural Disasters in Alberta

Prepared by the Rural
Municipalities of Alberta



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About This Guide

Steps used towards declaring a municipal agricultural disaster can bring awareness to a developing situation, inform residents, industry and provincial and federal governments and enable collaboration with impacted producer groups.

This guide is intended to be used as a tool to enable municipalities to use informed decision making process prior to making a formal declaration of agricultural disaster as conditions evolve. **Municipal declarations do not automatically trigger access to increased funding programs, provincially or federally.**

A number of elements drove the creation of this guide, including:

- Past drought and excessive moisture experiences impacting agricultural production and crop yields,
- 2015 drought which resulted in a provincial declaration and multiple municipal declarations,
- Discussion stemming from the provincial Drought and Excessive Moisture Advisory Group (DEMAG) whose mandate is to provide advice and recommendations to complement government actions on drought and excessive moisture related issues affecting Alberta's agricultural producers in Alberta and to advise and provide recommendations to government on long-term strategies for mitigating the effects of drought and excessive moisture. More information regarding DEMAG is included in Appendix C.

Purpose of the Guide:

The purpose of the Guide is to promote a consistent mechanism for data collection and monitoring to support municipal decision making to guide agricultural disaster declarations.

Through the use of information provided in the Guide, municipalities can bring awareness to a situation as it is developing and ensure all levels of government and local residents are aware of the situation, without immediately declaring it as a "disaster."

The use of this guide is intended as a source of information that will allow data comparisons within a municipality year after year.

The Guide provides:

- Directions for consistent and clear messaging
- Identification of tools available to arrive at condition statement
- Access to technical data to support condition statement
- Timeline documentation of conditions
- The ability to modify condition statements due to a change in conditions
- An explanation of the differences between a condition statement versus a provincial declaration of agricultural disaster
- A recommendation as to when a municipal declaration should be made

- A communications guide noting key parties to notify

Condition Statement Tool Overview

The Condition Statement Tool is intended to provide a tracking mechanism that will enable data-driven municipal decision making where agriculture production is impacted by natural causes.

Utilizing data available through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (ASFC) (ex. crop reports available at a regional level) and/or municipal resources such as agricultural fieldmen, the condition statement tool can be used to highlight and track the percentage of crops in poor condition. The use of a colour-coded chart demonstrates a snapshot of conditions at a given time, and includes identification of the size of area impacted (in hectares).

Municipalities are encouraged to attach a map highlighting the impacted area(s) where possible.

It is advisable to assess conditions through this tool every two to three weeks to monitor and document any changes prior to making a formal declaration. It is important to note that improved conditions can result in a declaration being lifted.

The Condition Statement Tool is available in Appendix A for use and a sample is provided below:

Date:	July 7, 2015					
Municipality:	County of RMA					
Total Area Impacted:	324 seeded hectares					
Map Included:	No					
Next Report Due:	July 21, 2015					
	Ranking	Drought	Excessive Moisture	Floods	Pests	Hail
Annuals Impacted (% rated poor):						
Cereals		13% poor				
Oil Seed					26% poor	
Others						
Perennials Impacted (% rated poor):						
Tame Hay				55% poor		

Tame Pasture						
Native Pasture						
Other: (please indicate)						

Legend: % of crop (in hectares) rated 'poor':

	0 – 10%	Crops near normal and above
	10% - 25%	Expected diminished crop yields
	25% - 50%	Pending disaster
	50% or higher	Definite disaster
	No impacts being experienced	

Technical Information to Support Data

There are a number of tools available that supply data municipalities can use in assessing their local conditions and utilizing the condition assessment tool. Click on the hyperlinks provided for access to information.

Agriculture and Forestry

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry houses significant data sources that municipalities can utilize, including:

- [Instructions for Accessing Precipitation Data from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry](#)
- [Alberta Climate Information Services](#)
- [Alberta Climate and Atlas Maps](#)
- [Agriculture and Forestry Climate Services Staff Resources](#)
- [Agricultural Moisture Situation Update](#)

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC)

AFSC can assist municipal districts and counties when they are experiencing drought or excessively wet conditions. AFSC provides information through the following mechanisms:

- *Crop Reports*: AFSC senior adjusters report on crop conditions every two weeks from emergence until harvest is complete. These reports provide information at the county or municipal district level and are available on the AFSC website. This information can be presented in more detail

during severe dry or wet conditions, for example maps that show the percent of crops rated poor relative to previous years.

- *Insurance Program Response*: Detailed information on how AFSC's existing insurance products respond to a specific conditions are made available on the AFSC website. This would include options for putting crops to an alternate use when crops are deteriorating and there is a shortage of feed in an area.
- *AgriStability Response*: How AgriStability responds can be posted on the AFSC website along with procedures for obtaining an advance under this program.
- *AgriRecovery Process*: AFSC along with Agriculture & Forestry staff can provide municipalities with detailed information on what is required to trigger an AgriRecovery response.
- Information on accessing Environment Canada data:
 - [Instructions for Accessing Precipitation Data](#)
 - [Instructions for Accessing Historical Radar Data](#)

Municipal Information:

- [RMA](#)
- Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen ([AAAF](#))

Government of Alberta Declaration

The Role of AFSC

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) is a provincial Crown corporation that provides farmers, agribusinesses and other small businesses with loans, crop insurance and farm income disaster assistance. AFSC expenditures are consolidated into the provincial budget and the provincial budgeting process includes requirements for ministries and Crown corporations to live within budgeted expenditures, meaning that departments or Crown corporations cannot spend more than what has been budgeted for.

AFSC forecasts annual revenues that will be gained through premiums and estimates expenditures to pay out indemnities. AFSC provides those budget estimates to the Government of Alberta for inclusion into the provincial budget. If indemnities exceed budget amounts, AFSC needs to access reserve funds and the remainder of premiums as expenditures. This requires a formal process through the Treasury Board.

Provincial Declaration

In order to access additional funds the Government of Alberta must declare a disaster to access those funds for claim payments. This decision is made by Cabinet and is informed by data and analytical information provided by AFSC and Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. This declaration triggers a financial transaction through the Treasury Board to enable AFSC access to reserve funds.

Municipal Role

A common misperception is that a municipal declaration of an agricultural disaster will influence a provincial declaration or access to funding supports. This is simply not the case. Municipal declarations bring awareness to an issue in a specific area of the province, but they do not trigger a provincial declaration or access to any funding to support the issue.

Municipalities can work with their local agriculture industries or industry/producer organizations to communicate concerns and assess challenges being experienced.

Municipal Communications Process

The RMA assists AFSC and the Government of Alberta in distributing information to municipalities and Ag Service Board members. Providing a central communication hub for information sharing improves understanding of the challenges being experienced and connecting impacted municipalities with appropriate resources and support.

Before a municipality formally declares a state of agriculture disaster, a number of questions should be considered to enable consistent and thorough communications. These include:

- Does the state of agricultural disaster cover the entire area or just a region within the municipality?
- Does the agriculture disaster cover all agriculture in the municipality or only certain commodity products?
- Has the municipality used AFSC data for the local area to assess the level of impact being experienced?
- Has the municipality contacted producer groups and associations to discuss impacts being experienced?
- Does the municipality have data to support this decision (ex. completed condition assessment tool(s) and municipal mapping)?

Once a declaration of agriculture disaster has been made, the municipality should provide information regarding the details of the agriculture disaster to the following organizations for access to consistent information:

- Government of Alberta (Agriculture and Forestry)
- AFSC
- RMA

Appendix A: Condition Statement Tool

Utilizing data available through Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (ASFC) (ex. crop reports available online at a regional level and/or municipal resources such as agricultural fieldmen, the condition statement tool can be used to highlight and track the percentage of crops in poor condition.

The use of a colour-coded chart demonstrates a snapshot of conditions at a given time, and includes identification of the size of area impacted (in seeded hectares where applicable).

Municipalities are encouraged to attach a map highlighting the impacted area(s) where possible. It is advisable to assess conditions throughout the growing season to monitor and document any changes.

Date:						
Municipality:						
Total Area Impacted:						
Map Included:						
Next Report Due:						
	Ranking	Drought	Excessive Moisture	Floods	Pests	Hail
Annuals Impacted (% rated poor):						
Cereals						
Oil Seed						
Others						
Perennials Impacted (% rated poor):						
Tame Hay						
Tame Pasture						
Native Pasture						
Other: (please indicate)						

Legend: % of crop (in hectares) rated 'poor':

	0 – 10%	Crops near normal and above
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	50% or higher	Definite disaster
	No impacts being experienced	

Appendix B: Municipal Agricultural Disaster Declaration Template

Municipal Agricultural Disaster Declaration

(attach all relevant data and completed condition statements to support declaration)

Municipality:	
Type of Agriculture Disaster:	[Type of disaster experienced and impact, such as drought conditions impacting 60% of cereal yields]
Stages of Disaster Declaration:	[Document the stages on the spectrum of the agriculture disaster and, as best as possible, the dates at which each stage was met]
Data to support:	[Insert or reference the data used to justify the state of agriculture disaster]
Level of impact:	[Describe the areas and commodity types impacted by the agriculture disaster]
Communication process:	[Outline the stakeholders to be contacted by the municipality following the declaration of agriculture disaster including Government of Alberta ministries, AFSC, RMA, and producer associations]
Other information:	

Appendix C: Drought and Excessive Moisture Advisory Group

The Drought and Excessive Moisture Advisory Group (DEMAG) is comprised of appointed representatives of key stakeholder agencies:

- Agri-Environmental Services Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC)
- Alberta Agriculture and Forestry
- Alberta Association of Agricultural Fieldmen (AAAF)
- Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (RMA)
- Alberta Environment and Parks
- Crop sector
- Irrigated Crop sector
- Livestock sector
- Wildrose Agricultural Producers Association

Mandate:

- To provide consistent and consolidated advice and recommendations to complement government actions on drought and excessive moisture related issues affecting the agricultural producers in Alberta.
- To advise and provide recommendations to government on long-term strategies for mitigating the effects of drought and excessive moisture.

Key Duties and Responsibilities of DEMAG:

- Facilitate two-way communication that is effective, timely, respectful and clear.
- Recommend extension activities and provide input to drought and excessive moisture related and related risk management information for key stakeholder groups.
- Serve as a formal communication connection between industry and government, and from government back to industry.
- Provide recommendations and policy advice to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for effective, fiscally responsible drought and excessive moisture preparedness, monitoring and reporting, and response actions.
- Actively participate in long-term strategic planning for future drought conditions in Alberta; for example, long-term water management and production/crop choices.
- Work with industry organizations to identify how to best assist producers in preparing for and coping with drought and excessive moisture, and develop these discoveries into recommendations.
- Oversee the implementation of the Agriculture Drought Risk Management Plan (ADRMP), and provide advice on and input during the ADRMP's review and evaluation.

Acknowledgments

The RMA would like to thank the following organizations for their contributions in developing this guide:

- Agriculture Financial Services Corporation
- Alberta Association Agriculture Fieldmen
- Alberta Agriculture and Forestry