

Agriculture

Rural Alberta is home to a large agriculture industry that has supported Alberta's economy for generations. There is a broad range in the types and size of farming operations in Alberta; from small family operations to large-scale facilities. This results in a diverse industry with different regulatory and operating challenges, which can also be impacted significantly by global market influences as well as unpredictable weather and climate fluctuations.

What is RMA's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective in the agriculture industry?

- ◆ Agriculture is a vital industry in Alberta and supports the sustainability of our rural communities.
- ◆ As the voice for rural Alberta, RMA advocates for the need to protect and promote the agriculture industry to grow and diversify Alberta's economy.
- ◆ Due to its unique nature, regulatory changes may have unintended consequences on the agriculture industry. As such, it is critical that the Government of Alberta thoroughly consult with agriculture stakeholders and producers prior to making changes that may impact their operations.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to the agriculture industry?

- ◆ The agriculture industry requires consistent support to promote industry sustainability and enable value-added options that will contribute to a diversified local and provincial economy.
- ◆ Agricultural income is vulnerable to extreme market fluctuations and natural disasters. Federal and provincial programs that provide assistance for producers should be designed to support the industry and address the diversity of conditions experienced.
- ◆ RMA appreciates federal support through programs, such as the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), that reflect the important economic role of agriculture by promoting innovation and enabling the use of new technologies.
- ◆ RMA supports the need to improve programs that encourage next-generation entrants into the agriculture industry.
- ◆ In some areas of Alberta, intensive agriculture operations cause significant strain on municipal road and bridge infrastructure. It is important that rural municipalities have the autonomy to address this in a way that does not compromise the sustainability of the agriculture industry.

- ♦ Agricultural societies and agriculture service boards are important community supports for the agriculture sector and rural communities more broadly. Funding for these organizations must be sustainable and predictable.

What collaborative relationships are essential to rural municipalities in agricultural development?

- ♦ Agricultural producers in Alberta work with multiple levels of government in a variety of capacities. This includes working with municipal governments for land use planning decisions, the provincial government for income support and insurance and federal funding programs.
- ♦ Municipalities and agriculture producers work with provincial and federal regulatory bodies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) through the Policy Advisory Group, which deals with the approval processes related to intensive livestock operations (ILOs), on the approval process regarding operations.
- ♦ Where compliance with provincial and federal legislation requires specific expertise not typically available within municipalities, the regulating government should provide financial or capacity support to municipalities to assist them in gaining the necessary expertise.
- ♦ RMA collaborates with the provincial Agricultural Services Board (ASB) and jointly advocates on mutual areas of interest to strengthen the rural voice.

What does RMA believe is needed to continue to support the sustainability of the agriculture industry?

- ♦ Agriculture and food production support Alberta's economy and contributes to the availability of quality food within Alberta and across Canada. A positive and collaborative relationship between the provincial government, federal government, producer groups, and producers is needed to support a sustainable agriculture industry.
- ♦ The viability of the agriculture industry and its ability to compete on the global market is supported through the incorporation of innovative technologies and educational advancements.
- ♦ Provincial and federal policies must adapt to changing industry conditions to allow for innovative agricultural practices to take advantage of emerging markets.
- ♦ Teaching children in schools about farming and ranching is vital for building understanding between agricultural producers and non-farming Albertans.

- ◆ Extension services for agricultural producers are a vital resource for rural Alberta. With the Government of Alberta's recent reduction in staffing for extension services, there is a need to ensure these services are still provided.
- ◆ RMA supports the advancements being made in the value added sector for agricultural products.
- ◆ RMA supports the creation of agricultural trusts that would protect land for agricultural production and recognize the donor in a manner similar to eco-trusts.
- ◆ Agriculture serves an important role in carbon sequestration. The agricultural sector has a unique ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, store or sequester carbon in soils, and increase the resilience of soils to a changing climate.

What current agriculture-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Agricultural Plastics

- ◆ Growth and change in the agriculture industry has led to greater use of agricultural plastics by producers to help manage their storage, improve efficiencies and improve cost-effectiveness.
- ◆ The lack of comprehensive end-of-life management of agricultural plastics continues to have adverse impacts on the environment and human health.
- ◆ RMA chairs the Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group (APRG). The APRG has brought together stakeholder and government representatives to develop an end-of-life management solution for agricultural plastics. The APRG launched a three-year pilot program in 2019 to collect agricultural grain bags and twine with 26 collection sites now enrolled.

Agriculture Disaster Declarations

- ◆ In collaboration with the Government of Alberta and the Agriculture and Financial Services Corporation (AFSC), RMA developed A Guide for Declaring Municipal Agricultural Disasters in Alberta to guide the municipal decision-making process. Supported by data, these declarations can help to inform governments, industry and residents regarding developing situations.
- ◆ The declaration of an agriculture disaster should trigger additional support for farmers from the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada.
- ◆ The *Agricultural Pests Act* is an important piece of legislation that identifies threats and enables producers, inspectors, and local authorities to deal with native and introduced pests and nuisances which adversely impact agricultural production.

Market Access

- ◆ Ensuring Alberta’s agriculture products have access to international markets is essential for continued value and growth of the agriculture industry. The RMA strives to work collaboratively with Alberta’s commodity organizations to support advocacy to various levels of government to support market access for the agriculture sector.

Farm and Ranch Safety

- ◆ It is important that paid agricultural workers have the same rights and protection as other workers in Alberta and that these rights are enshrined in legislation. However, it is also important that farm safety legislation does not unfairly compromise the ability of agricultural producers to operate sustainably.
- ◆ RMA continues to advocate to the Government of Alberta for effective communication of farm and ranch workplace safety requirements to both employers and employees in the agriculture industry.

Land Use

- ◆ Competing demands for land-use in a growing province have impacts on the agriculture industry. Urban sprawl and conversion of agricultural lands threaten high quality agricultural land; stronger land-use planning practices are needed to promote infill and consider the preservation of valuable agricultural lands.
- ◆ The sterilization of large tracts of agricultural lands can have significant impacts on the ability of agriculture producers to maximize the full potential of Alberta’s agriculture resources (e.g. caribou protection areas).

Rail

- ◆ Moving products to market is vital to the sustainability of the agriculture industry. With a recent increase in the use of rail transportation in a variety of industries, the availability of track and rail cars for the movement of agricultural products needs to be prioritized. It is vital that all levels of government collaborate on establishing a long-term solution to grain by rail backlogs.

Contact

Warren Noga
Policy Advisor
warren@RMAAlberta.com