

POSITION STATEMENT

2026 – Volume 1

Rural Industry and Economic Development

Rural Alberta contributes to provincial and national economic vitality through strong agriculture, energy, and resource sectors. Rural Alberta is home to industries that drive the economic engine of the province. RMA advocates for policies that sustain the continued growth of core industries such as oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture while enabling innovation and rural entrepreneurship in emerging fields.

What is RMA's position on the importance of rural industry and economic development?

- ◆ Rural industries depend on strong infrastructure to thrive. Roads, bridges, water systems, and broadband are essential for moving goods, supporting resource development, and enabling digital connectivity. Rural municipalities provide and maintain these assets, but doing so requires predictable and sustained provincial investment.
- ◆ Rural industries are central to Alberta's economic growth and community stability, generating jobs, investment, and market opportunities. RMA advocates for policies that protect this competitiveness by maintaining local expertise in industrial property assessment and ensuring meaningful consultation on land-use decisions and environmental regulations.
- ◆ Agriculture is a cornerstone of rural Alberta's economic development and a vital link to its heritage, fostering community stability and resilience. RMA advocates for policies and programs that expand agricultural opportunities, strengthen market access, and drive innovation in value-added processing. These efforts support economic diversification, encourage next-generation participation, and ensure agriculture continues to anchor rural prosperity.

Rural Industry and Economic Development in Context

- ◆ Agriculture and resource development in rural municipalities contribute \$10.3 billion annually to provincial GDP and support over 83,000 jobs, anchoring rural prosperity.
- ◆ Alberta has 1.8 million acres of irrigated agricultural land, representing 75% of Canada's total irrigated acres and making Alberta the irrigation capital of Canada.
- ◆ Alberta produces 4.3 million barrels of crude oil per day, accounting for 84% of Canada's total oil production, with most infrastructure located in rural municipalities.

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- ◆ RMA works to ensure rural municipalities are meaningfully engaged in approval processes, and benefit through partnership from oil and gas, aggregate, forestry, and renewable energy projects.
- ◆ As rural municipalities represent landowners most impacted by industrial development, and provide much of the infrastructure that enables new and ongoing investment, it is crucial that all aspects of how such industries are regulated consider rural municipal impacts related to project approvals, land use, taxation, and reclamation.
- ◆ RMA supports growth in emerging sectors such as value-added agriculture, tourism, and data centres.

Why is rural industry and economic development relevant to rural municipalities?

- ◆ Rural municipalities are central to Alberta's agriculture and resource development, playing a vital role in the provincial economy and significantly carrying responsibility for land-use planning and infrastructure maintenance.
- ◆ Rural municipalities depend on property taxes from oil and gas facilities to fund essential services and infrastructure. Unpaid taxes from delinquent operators have created significant financial challenges, forcing municipalities to make difficult decisions such as cutting services or raising tax rates. Recent provincial policy changes have further exacerbated these impacts, creating long-term fiscal uncertainty for municipalities.
- ◆ Industrial and agricultural operations place heavy demand on municipal roads and bridges. Rural municipalities manage over 130,000 km of roads and face an \$11.99 billion road infrastructure deficit, spending \$5.5 billion annually just to maintain current conditions. Energy projects, including oil, gas, and renewables, increase heavy-haul traffic, accelerating deterioration and raising costs.
- ◆ Economic development expands the municipal tax base, enabling rural municipalities to fund infrastructure maintenance, operations, and provide services residents rely on. Without predictable revenue from energy and industrial projects, municipalities face fiscal pressure that limits their ability to maintain service levels and attract investment.
- ◆ Expanding into sectors such as agri-food processing, tourism, and emerging sectors provides economic diversification that enables stable communities. Alberta's agri-food exports totaled \$17.9 billion in 2023, including \$9.7 billion in value-added products. Renewable energy projects are growing but require balanced land-use policies to protect agricultural production and respect municipal autonomy.

Who does RMA partner with to advance the rural perspective on rural industry and economic development?

- ◆ Government of Alberta: This includes collaboration on Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) for irrigation and drought resilience, engagement on renewable energy siting and reclamation security frameworks, and input on regulatory modernization for oil and gas. These efforts have influenced policy changes that reduce environmental liabilities and improve municipal planning capacity.
- ◆ Agricultural Service Boards: RMA works closely with Agricultural Service Boards to advance rural agricultural priorities. Through this collaboration, RMA supports initiatives that strengthen crop management, soil health, and pest control programs, ensuring municipalities have the tools and expertise to sustain agricultural productivity and resilience.

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- ◆ The Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies (AAAS): RMA works with AAAS to promote community-based agricultural development. This collaboration enhances rural capacity by supporting local events, education programs, and agri-food innovation, helping to maintain vibrant communities and foster economic diversification.

What are RMA's current priorities on municipal governance?

Infrastructure Investment

- ◆ Advocate for continued provincial funding through STIP, AMWWP, and Water for Life to maintain critical roads, bridges, and water systems.
- ◆ Ensure rural municipalities have equitable access to provincial and federal grants to deliver infrastructure that supports industry and community needs.
- ◆ Promote enforceable broadband service standards so rural businesses and residents can fully participate in the digital economy.

Economic Diversification

- ◆ Support PrairiesCan initiatives that advance Indigenous-led business development and regenerative agriculture.
- ◆ Promote rural entrepreneurship and small business growth to create new markets and attract investment.
- ◆ Encourage development in emerging sectors such as agri-food processing, tourism, and renewable energy.

Agriculture Resilience

- ◆ Advance irrigation expansion and drought mitigation under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP).
- ◆ Advocate value-added processing facilities in rural Alberta to strengthen market access and drive innovation.
- ◆ Support programs that enhance climate resilience and next-generation participation in agriculture.

For more information visit: rmalberta.com