POSITION STATEMENT

June 26, 2026

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. In recent years, rural municipalities have also been at the forefront of attracting and supporting growth in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, data centres, and nuclear energy. RMA advocates for policies that sustain the municipal role in supporting the continued growth of the rural-based industries that drive Alberta's economy 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, build research capacity, 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 over 4 million barrels of 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. Maintaining municipal jurisdiction in relation to resource development ensures sustainable land use alongside economic growth.
- 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, agritourism, critical minerals, and data centres.

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

- Rural municipalities undertake land use planning and provide services and infrastructure that are central to Alberta's agriculture and resource development, making local municipal decision-making in these areas vital to growing the provincial economy.
- 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. RMA is optimistic that implementation of the recommendations from the Property Tax Accountability Strategy will address this ongoing issue.
- 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, agritourism, 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 decision-making 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

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management, soil health, and pest control programs, ensuring municipalities have the tools and expertise to sustain agricultural productivity and resilience.
- 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 rural industry and economic development?

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.
- Seek improved methodology for grant funding and allocation to ensure that proper support flows to infrastructure with direct economic benefits in the form of supporting new or expanded industrial activity.

Economic Diversification

- Support PrairiesCan initiatives that advance business development and regenerative agriculture and strengthen connections with other groups to better reflect Prairie perspectives in national decision-making.
- Promote rural entrepreneurship and small business growth to create new markets and attract investment.
- Encourage development in emerging sectors such as agri-food processing, agritourism, 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.
- Advocate effective solutions to address pests and nuisances such as Richardson's ground squirrels to prevent significant damage to crops, soil and livestock and maintain agricultural productivity.

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