Appendix A: Contextual Review

1.1 Overview

A contextual, or situational review was conducted to inform and provide supporting details for topics and actions included within the AMP. The review begins with a detailing of agricultural trends within Sturgeon County and comparatives to Edmonton Metropolitan Region counties. Following this, a clear set of related policies is reviewed to clarify the position of existing policy impacting the agricultural industry and community. This review is accompanied by a review of the Agricultural Master Plans and related policy of comparable municipalities in Alberta. The review concludes with an assessment of the core findings of previously conducted agricultural community engagement. These findings provided a clear starting point for the public and stakeholder engagement conducted for the AMP.

1.2 Agriculture Statistics and Trends

Agriculture is continually evolving in response to market circumstances, growing conditions, available technology, social factors, and government policy. Future-oriented municipal policy, programs, and infrastructure investments should therefore consider agricultural circumstances and trends to ensure that ongoing evolution and the various drivers of change are considered.

Analysis of agricultural statistics pointed to the following major trends occurring within Sturgeon County's agricultural industry:

- Consistent total acres in agricultural use over the last 20 years, which is in contrast to decreases in the Edmonton region and across Alberta;
- Increase in large farms, and a decrease in small farms;
- High degree of parcel fragmentation over last 18 years, particularly in the central portion of the County;
- Strong decrease in all livestock numbers except for bees and turkeys; and a
- Steady increase in specialty crop production.

1.2.1 Farm Statistics

The Census of Agriculture total area of farms in Sturgeon County has increased by 13,000 acres from 2001 to 2021 (Table 14). This 3% increase varies considerably from the significant drop in the number of acres seen in neighboring counties. Over the same period Alberta's land in farms decreased by 2.9 million acres, or 6%. Conversion for non-agricultural uses continues to be an issue affecting agriculture communities, and so the contrasting increase in Sturgeon County's agriculture land base is a noteworthy trend.

Despite a decrease in the total number of farms, there is a noticeable increase in farm size, accompanied by a substantial rise in gross sales per farm. In Sturgeon County, gross sales per farm surged from $139,000 in 2001 to $565,000 in 2021, marking a remarkable 306% increase in farm gross revenue. Sturgeon County also significantly surpassed all neighboring counties with total gross sales increasing by $275M during this time. This was more than double the per acre increase seen across Alberta and was significantly more than in the neighboring counties of Leduc, Strathcona, and Parkland. It is notable that while the number of farms of all, but the largest farms has decreased since 2001, this trend has reversed since 2016 to signal a slight recent increase in farms.

Table 1: Farms Statistics in Sturgeon County and Edmonton Region, 2001-2021

	Sturgeon County					Change 2001-2021				
Agricultural Statistic	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Parkland	Leduc	Alberta
Total Area of Farms (Acres)	499,567	517,537	481,583	479,508	512,832	**3%**	-8%	-23%	-12%	-6%
Total Land in Crops (Acres)	361,288	369,728	362,846	377,722	410,674	**14%**	10%	-14%	-6%	7%
Average Gross Farm Sales per Farm, $'000	139	160	226	316	565	**306%**	163%	201%	141%	190%
Average Capital per Farm, $'000	830	1,577	2,635	3,512	4,153	**400%**	314%	266%	293%	337%
Total Gross Sales (all farms), $'000	146,696	154,789	185,794	230,940	421,971	**188%**	47%	69%	61%	124%
Average Farm Size (Acres)	474	535	585	657	687	**45%**	64%	36%	31%	22%
Total Number of Farms	1,055	967	823	730	747	**-29%**	-44%	-44%	-33%	-23%
Number of Farms by Farm Size Category										
< 10 acres	36	32	30	26	30	**-17%**	-17%	-55%	-50%	-6%
10-239 acres	532	467	402	354	364	**-32%**	-60%	-46%	-32%	-16%
240-399 acres	134	141	96	94	96	**-28%**	-48%	-51%	-48%	-30%
400 to 759 acres	171	147	124	92	91	**-47%**	-40%	-53%	-35%	-33%
760 to 1119 acres	79	63	51	46	44	**-44%**	-38%	-46%	-48%	-38%
Over 1120 acres	103	117	120	118	122	**18%**	2%	111%	26%	-14%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

Farm operators have decreased in Sturgeon County in a similar manner to the Edmonton Region and entire province. Total operators have decreased, with the number of young farmers decreasing most while the number of farmers 55 and older have increased.

Table 2: Farm Operator Statistics in Sturgeon County and Edmonton Region, 2001-2021

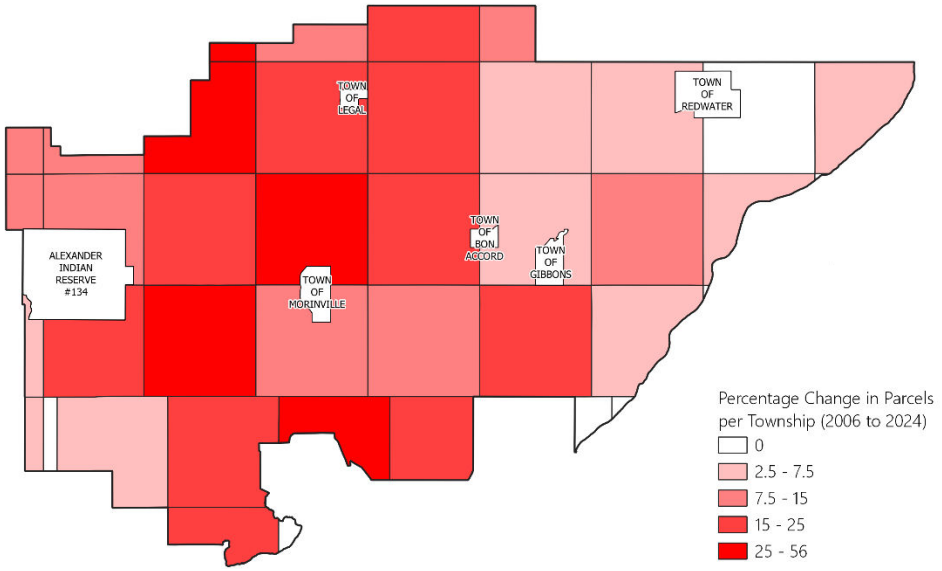
	Sturgeon County					Change 2001-2021				
Agricultural Statistic	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Parkland	Leduc	Alberta
Number of Farmers, operators	1,515	1,410	1,190	1,035	1,020	**-33%**	-48%	-46%	-38%	-25%
Number of Farmers by Age Group:										
Under 35	140	85	60	65	55	**-61%**	-76%	-64%	-58%	-42%
35-54	795	725	500	345	250	**-69%**	-76%	-70%	-69%	-59%
Over 54 (55+)	575	605	640	625	725	**26%**	1%	-6%	13%	32%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

1.2.2 Parcel Fragmentation

Large tracts of agricultural land are valued for broad-acre crop production and extensive livestock rearing, and so subdivision of parcels may be taken as a challenge to agricultural operations. In contrast, smallholding agricultural operations may benefit from the affordability of smaller parcels for primary production. Parcel fragmentation from 2006 to 2024 is shown to have been highest through the central portion of Sturgeon County (Figure 8). Part of this increase in parcels is due to rural residential multi-parcel subdivisions, and a portion is due to parcels in the agriculture (AG) district being subdivided.

Figure 1: Sturgeon County Parcel Fragmentation by Township from 2006 to 2024



Source: Sturgeon County Parcel Datasets as of January 2006 and January 2024

1.2.3 Livestock Statistics and Trends

The trajectory of Sturgeon County's animal agriculture over the past two decades illustrates significant headwinds for the local livestock industry, with strong implications for the agricultural industry. Trends include a substantial decrease in cattle, swine, ovine, caprine, and bison numbers to a stronger degree than has occurred at the provincial level. Bee colonies and turkeys (subset of the Total Hens/Chickens) are the exception and have increased within Sturgeon County.

Table 3: Sturgeon County and Edmonton Region Livestock Inventory, 2001-2021

	Sturgeon County					Change 2001-2021				
Livestock Type	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	**Sturgeon**	Strathcona	Parkland	Leduc	Alberta
Total Dairy Cows	2,074	1,842	1,719	1,147	749	**-64%**	-24%	-67%	-23%	3%
Total Beef Cows	17,857	17,468	9,293	10,421	11,959	**-33%**	-47%	-37%	-43%	-21%
Total Cattle	50,988	47,324	27,184	32,532	32,279	**-37%**	-42%	-32%	-37%	-17%
Pigs	50,370	24,223	16,979	19,764	12,583	**-75%**				-22%
Sheep	6,866	5,170	3,187	1,438				44%		-30%
Horses/Ponies	2,472	2,678	2,444	1,433	1,163	**-53%**	-68%	-56%	-63%	-57%
Goats	692	913	718	360					-13%	-21%
Bison	1,608	1,581	654	728	802	**-50%**	3%		-59%	-18%
Colonies of Bees	9,143	9,570	11,111	10,495	18,396	**101%**	2153%	-44%		55%
Total Hens/Chickens	1,297,666	1,257,061	1,270,204	968,487	754,999	**-42%**	-33%		-14%	22%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

1.2.4 Major Crops

Sturgeon County's reduction in beef and dairy cattle has reduced forage demand, resulting in approximately 35,000 acres that have shifted to annual crop cultivation from 2001 to 2021. This transformation has aided in the expansion of wheat and canola cultivation driven by strong grain and oilseed profitability, especially over the latter part of this period. Canola acreage has more than doubled, reaching 138,000 acres or 34% of cropland, while wheat acreage has witnessed a 28% upswing in Sturgeon County. This wheat increase represents 38% of the overall increase in land allocated to wheat production across Alberta from 2001 to 2021.

Despite representing approximately 1.0% of Alberta's total farmland, Sturgeon County has demonstrated a disproportionate allocation of its land resources to specific crops.

Noteworthy among these are a share of provincial acreage of 1.8% for wheat, 2.1% for canola, and 2.2% for oat crops. The concentration of these major crops indicates the strong profitability of crop production in Sturgeon County.

Table 4: Crop Acreages in Sturgeon County and the Edmonton Region, 2001-2021

	Sturgeon County					Change 2001-2021				
Crop Type	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	Sturgeon	Strathcona	Parkland	Leduc	Alberta
Total Wheat	99,521	86,851	97,666	110,630	127,156	28%	37%	29%	45%	1%
Oats	19,457	19,563	12,318	14,353	19,580	1%	4%	-16%	-30%	-35%
Barley	72,760	57,914	44,883	48,168	55,801	-23%	-25%	-28%	-17%	-19%
Mixed Grains	2,995	2,390	2,244	2,377			-100%	-26%	-62%	-42%
Canola	64,576	111,367	130,518	129,182	137,900	114%	95%	110%	133%	151%
Potatoes	1,609	1,654	1,294	1,127			15%	105%		20%
Dry Field Peas	11,234	5,400	8,400	18,107	5,029	-55%	-53%	74%	192%	142%
Other Dry Peas, Beans, Lentils				2,818	4,313					
Alfalfa	56,544	55,558	40,459	29,829	29,972	-47%	-47%	-54%	-58%	-37%
All Other Hay	27,742	22,949	20,784	13,417	19,248	-31%	-30%	-30%	-39%	-32%
Forage for seed				818	1,615					
Total Vegetables	71	107	89	80						-24%
Total Fruit, Berries, Nuts	172	115	191	149				-64%	-37%	-22%
Area of Nursery Products	404	739	909	447					6%	-18%
Area of Sod Products				1,120	4,548					
Greenhouse Areas (sq ft)	364,118	447,380	344,904	260,712	323,321	-11%	-50%			36%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture

The 2022 Agriculture and Agri-food Canada annual crop inventory dataset shows the evenly distributed production of wheat, barley, oats, and canola across most of Sturgeon County. The exceptions are the western and eastern edges which have a greater portion of pasture/forages and natural forest or wetlands. Notably, there is an area of potato production in the southeastern portion of the County where several seed potato operations are located.

1.2.5 Specialty Crops

The production of several specialty crops is evolving within Sturgeon County including potatoes, faba beans, sod, greenhouse products, bush fruits, and vegetable products.

Potato acreage from 2006 to 2011 declined by 30% within Sturgeon County due to a trade barrier controversy impacting seed potatoes. While 2021 acreage data was suppressed for confidentiality, provincial seed potato sales growth[1] indicates that Sturgeon County production has likely recovered since this downturn.

Sod production has also recently grown with a remarkable 300% increase from 1,120 acres in 2016 to an impressive 4,548 acres in 2021. This substantial expansion positions Sturgeon County as a key player in Alberta's sod production, contributing to nearly half of the province's total sod output in 2021.

Related primarily to potato and sod production, irrigation in Sturgeon County consists of individual infrastructure projects with no irrigation districts or major regional works present. The number of irrigators and acreage decreased from 2001-2011 and then while the number of farms kept dropping, the acreage rapidly increased to the region-leading acreage.

1 Potato Growers of Alberta. *The Alberta Potato Industry – Growing Success in 2022. https://www.albertapotatoes.ca/potato-growers-of-alberta-announce-release-of-economic-impact-report*

Table 5: Irrigation in Sturgeon County, 2001-2021

Category	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Irrigated Acres	2,827	1,713	1,334	1,947	4,059
Farms Using Irrigation	32	27	24	25	13

Sturgeon County has witnessed a substantial uptick of 53% in the cultivation of "Dry Peas, Beans, Lentils" from 2016 to 2021, attributed primarily to the increased cropping of Faba beans. Over 5% of this crop grown in Alberta was seeded in Sturgeon County in 2021.

From 2001 to 2021 Sturgeon County has undergone a notable decrease of approximately 11% in greenhouse production capacity, compared to a provincial increase of 36%. As of 2021, Sturgeon County had 15 greenhouse producers with a total production capacity of 323,000 square feet.

Agricultural data for 2021 reveals a significant uptick in the production of haskap berries within the county, amounting to 70 acres. This constitutes nearly 18% of the province's total haskap berry production. Two out of the fourteen acres of plums in the province were grown in Sturgeon County, and 86 acres of Saskatoons were cultivated, representing approximately 6.5% of the total Saskatoon production in Alberta.

Total field vegetable production rose from 70 acres in 2001 to 107 acres in 2006, followed by a decline to 80 acres in 2016. Unfortunately, data for the total acres of vegetables in 2021 is not available. Nevertheless, the county earmarked a notable area for squash and zucchini, constituting 9% of this crop's Alberta area. Furthermore, the County emerged as a significant contributor to pumpkin production, with a total of 7 farms cultivating a combined 14 acres. This accounts for 6% of the province's pumpkin production, by area. Beyond pumpkins, Sturgeon County demonstrated diverse vegetable production, encompassing crops such as broccoli, celery, cauliflowers, brussels sprouts, peppers, cabbage, rhubarb, onions, kale, turnips, spinach, carrots, and tomatoes. This diversified vegetable portfolio highlights the adaptability and versatility of agricultural practices within the county.

1.3 How does the AMP relate to existing policy?

The AMP is a non-statutory guidance document for Sturgeon County meant to coordinate the implementation of actions supportive of agriculture. Actions included within the Plan must, however, consider existing policy that may supersede or intersect with the actions included within the plan. The following section outlines federal, provincial, regional, and municipal policy that may be relevant to the topics addressed within the AMP.

1.3.1 Federal Policy

Many federal departments and agencies set and oversee policies, regulations, and initiatives that impact the Canadian agricultural industry. Given the broad range of departments and agencies, we've included three prominent policy, regulations, and initiative examples that have the potential:

- To encourage and enable change of practice in the agriculture industry
- To support agriculture business development

- For synergies with actions and initiatives at the municipal level, and/or
- To further protect the local environment

1. The Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership is a five-year (2023-2028) federal-provincial-territorial initiative to strengthen the agricultural sector. Farmers and agriculture and agri-food sector organizations are eligible to leverage funding from this program to enhance competitiveness, build resiliency, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and facilitate market development and trade.

   For example, Sturgeon County producers can participate in the Efficient Grain Handling Program to upgrade their grain handling systems and therefore improve their energy efficiency. Producers could also participate in the Water Program to undertake such projects as upgrading their irrigation systems to increase their water use efficiency.

2. The Emergency Management Framework for Agriculture in Canada is a comprehensive and collaborative approach to emergency management, focused on prevention and mitigation for current/future emergencies the agricultural sector will face. The Framework ensures the long-term sustainability and viability of Canada's agricultural sector by helping farmers prepare for and manage emergencies. This reduces the potential for financial losses and ensures the sector has support from a variety of agricultural stakeholders (e.g., governments, producer organizations, etc.).

   Sturgeon County producers could benefit from collaboration across governments to help reduce the impacts and risks of pests for crops and diseases for livestock. Producers could also benefit from government collaboration in mitigating the impacts of extreme weather, such as droughts or hailstorms.

3. The Agricultural Climate Solutions (ACS) Program enables producers to contribute to meeting the 2030 emissions reduction target. The ACS program is part of the Natural Climate Solutions Fund and is led by AAFC.

   Two streams exist under the ACS: the Living Labs Initiative and the On-Farm Climate Action Fund (OFCAF). These programs support producers in adopting management practices that can reduce emissions and increase carbon storage. Farmers can leverage funding from relevant delivery organizations to change their practices. For example, Sturgeon County producers could undertake cover cropping projects or develop nutrient management plans under OFCAF through Results Driven Agriculture Research.

1.3.2 Provincial Policy

Provincial legislation and decisions made by provincial authorities supersede policies within Sturgeon County's statutory and regulatory documents. Legislation that enables and lays the framework for Municipal planning and jurisdiction include the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) and the Municipal Government Act (MGA). ALSA, proclaimed in 2009, is the legal basis for seven watershed-based regional land use plans in Alberta. The applicable regional plan to Sturgeon County, the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP), has undergone two rounds of consultation in 2014 and 2018, but the draft is still in progress with no anticipated date of completion.

The MGA defines the laws and rules under which municipalities in Alberta can operate, including three main areas of focus:

- Governance and Administration;
- Assessment and Taxation; and
- Planning and Development.

Other provincial legislation relevant to Sturgeon County and its agriculture industry include:

- Weed Control Act;
  "Enabling legislation that allows the local authority to manage introduced plant species that affect agricultural production." This legislation details the duties of municipalities for prevention, control, and destruction of weeds. Details of the powers and process of weed inspectors are included; as well as offences and penalties for contravention of the Act.
- Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA);
  "*AOPA and its associated regulations apply to all agricultural operations in Alberta. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that the province's livestock industry can grow to meet the opportunities presented by local and world markets in an environmentally sustainable manner. Part one of the Act defines how nuisance issues such as odor, dust, noise and smoke resulting from agricultural activities are addressed. Part two of the Act sets the permitting process for the construction or expansion of confined feeding operations, the compliance process, and offences related to, and penalties for contravening, the Act. The Natural Resources Conservation Board is responsible for delivering AOPA, permitting of confined feeding operations, and addressing complaints regarding the management of manure on agricultural operations in Alberta.*"
- Highways Development and Protection Act;
  "*The Act provides for the administrative structure of Alberta's highway network and emphasizes public safety through regulating the physical condition of the highway network. The Act was developed with the intention of replacing the administrative structure for highways described in the Public Highways Development Act. The Act also coordinates the administrative relationship between city transportation systems and the province's highway network.*"

Provincial authorities that also have relevance to Sturgeon County's agricultural industry, include the following:

- Alberta Utilities Commission;
  Regulatory agency for utilities, including gas, electricity and water. This includes regulating the development of power plants on agricultural land (including solar, gas, and others) and transmission.
- Natural Resources Conservation Board
  Regulator for confined feeding operations in Alberta.
- Alberta Energy Regulator
  Regulator responsible for regulating energy infrastructure including pipelines, wells, and gas or oil processing plants and facilities, many of which co-locate with the agricultural landscape.

1.3.3 Regional Policy

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region enacted the Growth Plan[2] in 2017 (amended in 2020) as an update to the 2010 Capital Region Board Growth Plan. The regional plan coordinates growth across the 13 rural and urban member municipalities in the Edmonton area. Six interrelated policy areas are addressed which include:

1. Economic Competitiveness & Employment
2. Natural Living Systems
3. Communities & Housing
4. Integration of Land Use & Infrastructure
5. Transportation Systems
6. Agriculture

With regards to Agriculture, the major regional policy area is 'Agriculture'. Policies in this area are captured within three objectives:

1. Identify and conserve an adequate supply of prime agricultural lands to provide a secure local food source for future generations;
2. Minimize the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses;
3. Promote diversification and value-added agriculture production and plan infrastructure to support the agricultural sector and regional food system.

A subset of the individual policies under each of these objectives indicated the requirement to develop a Regional Agriculture Master Plan to include a more detailed set of Agriculture policies.

RAMP was developed under the direction from the Growth Plan with the direction to: "conserve and maintain a secure supply of prime agricultural lands with the aim to support the regional food system, diversify the agri-food production base, contribute to the growth of the value-added sector of the agri-economy and guide agriculture supportive infrastructure investment."

An important component of RAMP is the identification of *Prime Agricultural Lands* by use of a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) tool. This tool was developed in alignment with the policies in the Growth Plan and in collaboration with the EMRB member municipalities.

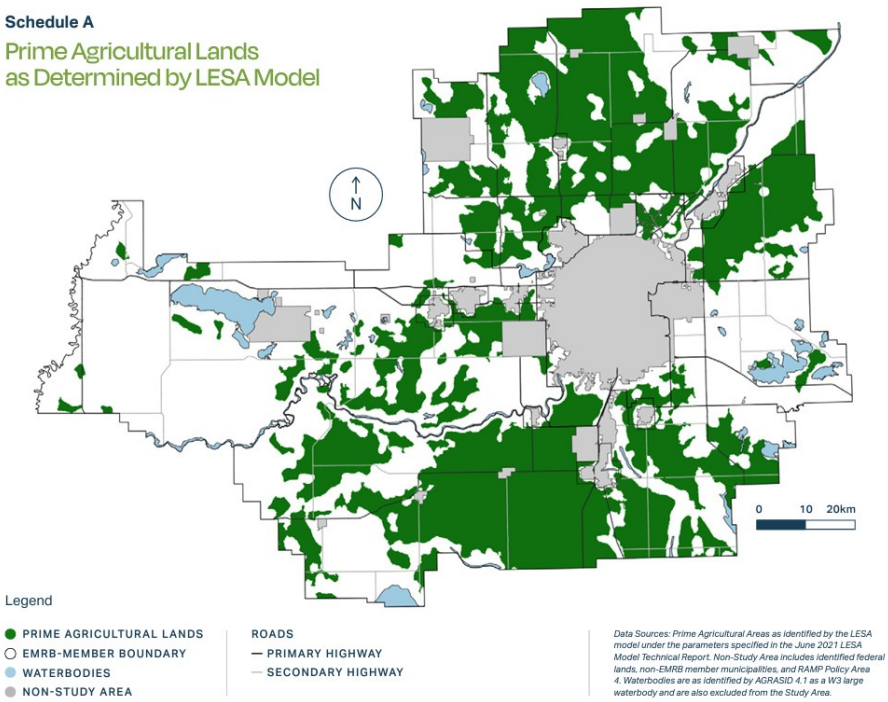
The LESA tool identified 255,001 acres, (or 103,195 hectares) of prime agricultural lands within Sturgeon County.

The RAMP's policies are applied to the region's land base differentially based on four Policy Areas as follows:

- Policy Area 1: Rural Agriculture
- Policy Area 2: Agriculture – Coexisting with Other Land Uses
- Policy Area 3: Agriculture in Future Transition Lands
- Policy Area 4: Urban Agriculture

2 Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board. 2020. Growth Plan. emrb.ca/growth-plan

Figure 2: Prime Agricultural Lands as Determined by LESA Model



1.3.4 Municipal Policy

Sturgeon County has a set of policies including statutory, regulatory, and advisory documents that outline, prescribe, and guide the activities of Council and administration. This AMP will need to align with some documents and recommend adjustments to others, so a comprehensive review is required for the contextual development of the AMP.

Development of Sturgeon County's AMP is also taking place alongside various related corporate initiatives that include updating statutory plans and visionary planning documents. Below is a list of recently completed and projected future Sturgeon County initiatives that will be considered in the development of the AMP.

1. Infrastructure Master Plan (2019)
2. Transportation Master Plan (2023)
3. Land Use Bylaw Updates (Ongoing)
4. Municipal Development Plan Regional Alignment (2024-25)

The forthcoming review highlights select portions of municipal policy with direct relevance to Sturgeon County's agriculture industry.

1.3.4.1 Council Strategic Plan 2022-2025

The current Strategic Plan outlines Council's 30-year vision and provides a path for the organization over a 4 to10 year period to implement this vision. From the five community outcome goals of: Planned Growth, Thriving Communities, Environmental Stewardship, Collaborative Governance, and Operational Excellence, Council identified 10 strategic priorities. Each is detailed below with related Corporate Business Plan (2024-2027) *initiatives* noted as follows:

- Diverse Business Hub (*Villeneuve Airport Development Mobilization)*
- Safe-Beautiful Communities *(Municipal Development Plan: Regional Alignment)*
- Carbon Neutral Municipal Operations

- Modern, Adaptive Administration
- Diversified Revenue and Partnerships
- Meaningful Community Connections
- Clean Energy Economic Ecosystem
- Sustainable, Thoughtful Decisions
- Reliable, Effective Infrastructure (*Asset Management, Broadband)*
- Economical, Desirable Services

1.3.4.2 Municipal Development Plan

Sturgeon County's Municipal Development Plan (MDP) was last updated in 2014 and is intended to begin being updated in 2024. The MDP substantiated a 'Neighbourhood' concept with 10 identified portions of the County delineated so that development strategies could be differentiated according to considerations specific to each neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood-specific targeted outcomes fall under a planning framework with a community vision of:

> *"A DIVERSE, ACTIVE COMMUNITY THAT PIONEERS OPPORTUNITIES AND PROMOTES INITIATIVE, WHILE EMBRACING RURAL LIFESTYLES"*

This vision is captured within five 'Community Guiding Principles' as follows:

1. Responsible Governance
2. Residential Character
3. Cultural Vitality
4. Environmental Stewardship
5. Economic Health

Each Guiding Principle has corresponding specific targeted outcomes, which in the implementation portion of the MDP are applied according to high priority outcomes for each neighbourhood and are further accompanied with detailed actions.

Many of the targeted outcomes and associated detailed actions are relevant to the agricultural industry, as agriculture contributes economically, culturally, environmentally, and interacts with residential land uses. There are notable targeted outcomes and actions within each neighbourhood that are specifically addressed to the agriculture industry and community.

Figure 3: Sturgeon County Neighbourhood Map (MDP, 2014)



1.3.4.3 Land Use Bylaw

The Land Use Bylaw's (LUB) purpose is to regulate and control the use and development of land and buildings and is informed by the MDP. The Bylaw applies land use districts to all parcels of land within Sturgeon County and includes a set of permitted and discretionary uses variably applied to each district. These uses are strictly defined, which may apply constraints or uncertainty for some diversified agricultural uses.

Several recent adjustments to the LUB have taken the initiative to add or adjust Use categories that accommodate agriculture and agriculture-related industry changes. These changes include the additions of the following Use categories and the corresponding land use districts they apply to:

- Diversified Agriculture (2022)
  AG (Permitted); **AG 2** (Permitted)
- Event Venue (2022)
  AG 2 (Discretionary)
- Farm Help Accommodation (2019)
  AG (Permitted); **AG 2** (Permitted)
- Visitor Accommodation (2021)
  AG (Discretionary for Ag-Major and Ag-Minor); **AG 2** (Permitted)
- Solar Farms (2021)
  AG (Discretionary)

1.3.4.4 Economic Development Incentives and Value-added Attraction

Sturgeon County's Economic Innovation & Growth department employs a value-added agriculture attraction document that highlights key competitive attributes of the County including the available tax incentives. Key competitive attributes include the following:

- Connectivity and logistics advantage – road and rail linkage to the two major West Coast ports
- High value primary production – highest County-level operating revenues in Canada for 2021
- Strong labour force access – access to 840,000 people within 1 hour drive
- Existing value-add cluster – Canadian Oats, Legal Alfalfa, Faba Canada, Nutrien fertilizer plant, G3 terminal

Sturgeon County currently offers a 'Value-Added Agricultural Incentive' for a municipal tax exemption of 1.5 to 2.0 percent of eligible capital costs. Eligibility is for new construction or expansion projects with eligible capital costs greater than $20 million CAD and those that employ at least 50 workers during construction or 30 workers once operational.

This incentive may be stacked with the province's currently offered "Alberta Agri-Processing Investment Tax Credit" which provides a 12 percent non-refundable tax credit against capital expenditures for corporations investing at least $10 million in new construction or expansions of eligible agri-processing facilities.

1.4 What do other AMPS include?

Several other municipalities in Alberta have developed AMPs to strategically respond to agricultural priorities of their communities. Each AMP incorporates a broad swath of possible programs, policies, and initiatives to support, enable, or facilitate thriving agricultural communities. Communities have unique topics to address, but there are many commonalities driven by broad economic and social drivers and so it is useful to review other agricultural plans. The plans of the other rural municipalities bordering Edmonton are assessed as they have similar agricultural opportunities and proximity to an urban center. The following reviews summarize the topic areas addressed and the corresponding actions identified within each municipality's agriculture or general planning documents.

Each of the other three rural member municipalities within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board have developed Agriculture Plans or Strategies to guide their respective Councils and administration with regards to agricultural policy, programs, and services.

The Agriculture Master Plans or Strategy documents of Parkland, Leduc, and Strathcona Counties present a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture in the region. Each plan reflects the unique characteristics of its respective county, yet several common themes and challenges emerge. In all counties, stakeholder perspectives reveal concerns about the future of agriculture, challenges of farming in areas with urban encroachment, the economics of traditional and value-added farming, and differing views on agricultural land conservation. The plans highlight the necessity of balancing agricultural uses with urban development and the imperative to remove barriers to diversified and value-added agricultural opportunities.

In summary, these master plans collectively underscore the need for strategic planning and action to ensure County policy, programs, and initiatives are responding to the shifting needs of the agriculture industry. They emphasize the importance of agriculture

in regional economies and communities, despite the challenges posed by urban growth, changing markets, and technological advancements.

1.4.1 Parkland County – Future of Agriculture

The "Future of Agriculture Study"[3] (FOA) of Parkland County, published in July 2016, presents a comprehensive look at the agricultural sector, acknowledging the evolving nature of agriculture and its critical role in the regional economy and community. The report meticulously examines the changes in the structure of agriculture, highlighting positive developments and pairing these with insights from various stakeholders to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the sector's current state and its potential future. Developed in the context of macroeconomic factors, trends within Parkland County, stakeholder consultations, and fulfilling the plans of the various levels of government, the FOA aims to address three main questions:

Agriculture is defined as "The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, foods, horticulture and agri-food related value-added enterprises including education, motivated either by profit or lifestyle."

1. What is the future for agriculture in Parkland County and what types of agriculture have a long-term sustainable future in the County?
2. What is the vision for agriculture within Parkland County?
3. What policies and tools facilitate, or at the very least support, the types of agriculture that have the best future fit for Parkland County?

A key aspect of the FOA is its focus on the changing structure of agriculture. It details how technological advances, market dynamics, and societal changes have transformed traditional farming practices, leading to new opportunities and challenges. The FOA contains valuable data detailing the positive changes, offering a factual basis for understanding the sector's evolution. Stakeholder input is also a crucial component of the study, providing various perspectives on the issues and opportunities facing Parkland County's agriculture. These inputs, coupled with empirical data, form the foundation for the FOA's key findings, which include the identification of emerging trends, potential growth areas, and areas requiring policy attention. The following opportunities for sustainable agriculture initiatives were identified within Parkland County:

1. The continuation of crop/large field agriculture (including dairy farms).
2. Increasing the beef cow-calf sector and other grazing livestock, particularly in the western part of Parkland County where there is ideal grassland conditions/pasture for grazing.
3. Specialty operations—potatoes, vegetable production, fruit, market gardens, specialized livestock (sheep, goats, pasture poultry, bees, etc.) to respond to the growing demand for local food. Parkland County is considered to be ideally located.
4. Agri-tourism including equine enterprises and attractions—destinations for day visits, stables, events, and a dedicated park for equine activities. Again, location is ideal.
5. Value added enterprises---the opportunity to attract companies in primary processing, food processing, beverage, and bio-products industries; professional and/or technical service companies operating in the food and agriculture sector as well as growing local businesses.

3 Toma and Bouma Management Consultants; Stantec (2016). "Future of Agriculture Study Final Report," Parkland County, Alberta

Parkland County had a substantial 23% decrease in agricultural land use of its farmland from 2001 to 2021 - over 111,000 acres

The FOA identifies opportunity areas and implications for planning, emphasizing the need for a strategic approach that accounts for barriers or challenges to their development. The following barriers or challenges to agriculture were highlighted in the report:

1. A questionable future – Many farmers expressed views that agriculture has a low priority in the county and have been overshadowed by policies that favour industrial and residential growth.
2. Lack of awareness and appreciation – Many stakeholders were concerned that agriculture is not well known, respected or considered a mainstream aspect of municipal life. This has led to increasing conflict with non-farm residences, including complaints specific to noise, dust, and agriculture-related traffic.
3. Loss of Local Dealers, Support Services, and Markets – the agriculture communities have been in decline, leading to loss of essential local services for maintaining farm operations.
4. Lack of knowledge regarding new or merging opportunities including the Equine Sector – sizable agriculture sectors are not well known, preventing value added enterprises such as tourism.

The vision for agriculture in Parkland County is, "A vibrant agriculture and food community characterized by its development, creativity, and entrepreneurship, focused on sustainability as well as new opportunities.

The FOA outlines four principles under the section "4.4 Policy Requirements," providing a strategic framework for agricultural development and policy implementation. These principles are designed to guide decision-making processes, ensuring that agriculture remains a vibrant and sustainable sector in Parkland County. They focus on areas of land use, environmental stewardship, economic viability, and community engagement, offering a roadmap for future agricultural policy and practice. The FOA provides a vision for agriculture in Parkland County is, "A vibrant agriculture and food community characterized by its diversity, creativity and entrepreneurship, focused on sustainability as well as new opportunities." This vision is supported by four key implementation principles:

1. Integrated approach - the recognition that a viable agriculture and food sector requires an integrated and supportive set of policies including land use, economic development, and infrastructure investment and not one policy alone.
2. Supportive land use policies - the design and implementation of land use policies that assure the long-term future of agriculture.
3. Entrepreneurial culture - building and supporting an entrepreneurial business culture for the development and attraction of diversified progressive agri-businesses, emerging enterprises, and agritourism opportunities.
4. Fostering local leadership - the creation of new momentum for a range of potential new directions and initiatives requires strong committed local leadership both within the community and politically.

The FOA also details how the outlined strategies and policies may be effectively implemented. This includes addressing challenges such as resource allocation, stakeholder collaboration, and regulatory compliance. A future-focused section further explores these themes, projecting potential scenarios and outlining strategic steps to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of agriculture in the region. This study address three key dynamics affecting the evolution of agriculture in the county in respect to economics and community:

1. The continuing growth of large-scale commercial farms in response to global forces which demand cost competitiveness and the ability to compete with world prices.
2. The emergence of specialty enterprises in response to the growing demand for local food as well as "country" experiences.

3. The non-agricultural pressures on the agricultural land base resulting in land fragmentation and more conflicts with non-agricultural residents.

With regards to land use, the Study aligns with the Parkland County Strategic Plan, linking agricultural land use with broader economic, environmental, and community goals. This Strategic Plan was initially developed for 2014-2018, but was updated in 2016 and lists agriculture as one of its five strategic priority areas, followed by economic diversification, healthy communities, regional strategy, and the environment. It is highlighted that although agriculture is its own strategic priority, it is a significant factor playing into the four other areas. This showcases how agriculture plays a larger role than simply being a means of production within the food industry. In other words, agriculture is not just an economic activity, but an integral part of Parkland County's overall strategic vision, contributing to the region's prosperity, environmental health, and community well-being.

In conclusion, the FOA offers a detailed and insightful analysis of agriculture in Parkland County, which provides a solid foundation for understanding the current state and future potential of the sector. It is not a policy plan, but serves as a foundation for developing specific actions to effectively support and enable a thriving agriculture industry in Parkland County.

1.4.2 Leduc County – Agricultural Strategy

Completed in 2016, the "Leduc County Agricultural Strategy"[4] (LCAS) presents a comprehensive plan to promote and sustain agriculture within the region. The strategy is rooted in the historical and economic context of Leduc County, acknowledging the significant shifts in the agricultural landscape due to factors like the discovery of oil reserves, the development of the Edmonton International Airport, and the establishment of industrial parks. These developments have reshaped the region's economy and land use, necessitating a redefined approach to agriculture. It is intended to provide a general strategy for land use and planning in the County and is intended to be one of the key drivers shaping the Municipal Development Plan.

In 2006, there was a 6% increase in farmland area from the prior census in 2001. For the 2011, 2016, and 2021 there were losses of total farm area of 2%, 10%, and 7%, respectively from the previous census year.

Agriculture is broadly defined in the LCAS to encompass the growing, raising, managing, and/or sale of livestock, crops, foods, horticulture, and agrifood-related value-added enterprises, including educational activities. This definition is motivated by both profit and lifestyle considerations. This expansive definition aims to balance various interests and be consistent with definitions used by neighboring municipalities.

The engagement of stakeholders in the development of the LCAS was crucial in ensuring an effective approach to key concerns in the region. Through consultations, critical issues were identified and then addressed more broadly in the strategy through the adoption of four guiding principles. This inclusive process fostered a sense of community ownership and commitment to the vision for the future of agriculture in Leduc County. Consultations highlighted several strong convictions of stakeholders including:

Leduc County's cattle herd decreased by 36,000 head from 2001 to 2021, along with decreases in pork and poultry production.

1. Enshrining the right to farm.
2. Prioritizing fertile soils while recognizing that part of the intrinsic value lies in the speculative nature of industrial and residential development.
3. Leduc County is well situated to develop more intensive food producing operations.

4 Serecon Inc; Toma and Bouma Management Consultants; Stantec, (2016). "Leduc County Agriculture Strategy," Leduc County, AB, CAN

4. Valuable agriculture land is being lost and this is of significant concern.
5. There is a need to limit the impact of subdivisions that fragment farmland.
6. Rules need to be enforceable and then enforced.
7. "Lack of championship" for agriculture, which was expressed as a low priority for Leduc County.
8. Balanced approach needs to be implemented with regards to land use.
9. Education is an important element that can be leveraged to communicate how agriculture influences the economic, social, and environmental structure of Leduc County.

Leduc County's vision for agriculture is, "A vibrant and resilient agri-food future built on a proud agriculture history."

The vision for agriculture in Leduc County, as stated in the report, is "A vibrant and resilient agri-food future built on a proud agriculture history." This vision reflects the county's desire to create a future that acknowledges the historical significance of agriculture in the community while also embracing the opportunities for agricultural development in both local and global economies. The vision aims to build upon the solid agricultural foundation that has shaped the present state of the county, recognizing agriculture as a significant and integral part of Leduc County's fabric.

In alignment with the above vision, the LCAS is anchored by four main principles which have associated recommended actions for Leduc County Council and administration to implement, as follows:

1. **Recognition and Support of Agriculture:** Leduc County's actions under this principle focus on integrating the Agricultural Strategy into broader municipal planning and policy frameworks. This involves explicitly recognizing agriculture as a key policy area within the County's Strategic Plan, complete with defined indicators, targets, and monitoring processes. Key actions include the development of specific agriculture-supportive policies, updating evaluation and reporting processes to assess impacts on agriculture, establishing a county-wide advocacy group for agriculture, collaborating with regional partners for a consistent approach to agriculture, and implementing targeted education and communication strategies to underscore the value of agriculture in the County.
2. **Protection of Priority Agricultural Areas:** The actions here aim to firmly establish and protect long-term priority agricultural areas, providing certainty for the agricultural sector. Leduc County plans to enshrine these areas within the new Municipal Development Plan and future area structure plans. Specific actions include establishing clear boundaries for these areas, considering land quality and existing pressures to minimize fragmentation, and requiring formal agricultural impact assessments for any development in these areas. This comprehensive approach is designed to safeguard contiguous agricultural lands and reduce conflicts with non-agricultural land uses.
3. **Limiting Land Fragmentation:** To address the issue of land fragmentation, Leduc County intends to amend its Land Use Bylaw in priority agricultural areas, setting strict limits on subdivision and dwellings as outlined in the strategy. This will necessitate agricultural impact assessments for proposed subdivisions, ensuring that the impact on typical farming operations is minimal. These measures are aimed at preserving the continuity and productivity of agricultural lands, maintaining the integrity of farming operations against the pressures of development.

4. **Support and Education Programs:** Under this principle, Leduc County plans to actively promote the significance of agriculture through clear and consistent messaging and comprehensive education programs. This includes formal consideration of agriculture's impact in all county decisions, collaboration with various stakeholders to support the agricultural sector, and the implementation of agricultural strategies in partnership with economic development associations. The County also aims to leverage synergies with other economic drivers and form advocacy groups to champion agriculture. Initiatives like an annual agricultural forum and dedicated resources for economic development in agriculture are also part of the plan, all designed to bolster the agricultural sector and its contribution to the County's overall well-being.

The Strategy culminates with a focus on implementation, which will shape future policy decisions, including the Municipal Development Plan. The strategy is envisioned as a dynamic framework, adaptable to changing circumstances and aimed at fostering a robust agricultural sector that contributes significantly to Leduc County's economy and community fabric.

1.4.3 Strathcona County – Agriculture Master Plan

Completed in 2015, the "Strathcona County Agriculture Master Plan" [5] is the county's strategic document designed to address the unique challenges and harness the potential of agriculture in a rapidly evolving metropolitan region. The development of this plan involved broad consultations with stakeholders, alongside a detailed analysis of trends, statistics, and benchmarking against similar municipalities. This collaborative approach led to several critical conclusions, setting the stage for a robust set of priorities and recommended actions.

Globally, urban agriculture involves over 800 million people, providing 5-10% of the world's food supply. The combined value of this food, energy savings, nitrogen sequestration, avoided storm water runoff provides an annual value of $33 Billion.[6]

The plan reviews major trends affecting the agricultural sector, providing insights into the broader context in which Strathcona County's agriculture industry operates. These trends include the consolidation of farms and operations, the rising interest in local food and sustainability, increasing global food demand, the critical role of cost management in commodity markets, technological advancements in agriculture, and the ongoing debate over land use and agricultural land conservation.

Stakeholder perspectives provide a multi-faceted view of the agricultural landscape in Strathcona County. These perspectives reveal a spectrum of concerns and aspirations, ranging from the Agriculture Service Board's call for a clear policy framework to commercial farm owner's apprehensions about the viability of farming in the county. The diverse viewpoints of various groups, including non-agricultural residents, the equine industry, acreage owners, and the Food Processing/Value-Added Sector, reflect the complex interplay of interests and challenges in shaping the future of agriculture in the region.

Strathcona County is recognized for its abundant agricultural opportunities. Backed by fertile agricultural land and a diverse agricultural potential, the region is well-positioned to capitalize on these assets. However, it's not without its challenges. Similar to Leduc and Parkland County, the location is within a growing metropolitan area with inherent land use challenges for the agricultural sector.

5 Toma and Bouma Management Consultants; Stantec, 2015. "Strathcona County Agriculture Master Plan: A Time to Choose." Strathcona County, AB, CAN

6 Pradhan, et al. (2023). "A systematic review highlights that there are multiple benefits of urban agriculture besides food." Global Food Security V38

The plan provides its own unique vision statement as follows: "Strathcona County as 'Canada's most livable community' is distinguished by its agricultural heritage that builds on history and responds to opportunities as a leader in the Capital Region in the provision of a broad range of agricultural and food opportunities as well as agri-food related services to one of Canada's fastest growing metropolitan regions." The elements of the vision are composed of:

- A strong presence of acreages comprising a mix of specialty production operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, specialized livestock (sheep, goats, bees, llamas, alpacas, poultry, etc.).
- A thriving equine sector with related activities such as stables, training, trail riding, community engagement, and emerging opportunities in the field of recreation and therapy.
- Home to numerous value-added operations including primary and secondary processing, related services, research and the development of unique local markets and market channels for Strathcona County based food and agricultural products and services.
- Urban agriculture - both individual and collective undertakings (gardens, roof tops, bees, etc.) and community gardens.
- Destination/experience and agritourism opportunities such as food festivals, major equine events, trail riding, one day or multi-day outings.
- Leader in the Capital Region specific to agriculture and food related promotional activities.

Agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic, and environmental heritage.

The plan is anchored by the overarching principle that, "Agriculture will continue to be an integral part of Strathcona County's historical, cultural, economic and environmental heritage." Its plan is further expanded to include four fundamental operating principles, each serving as a cornerstone for the strategic approach to agricultural development in the county. These principles address critical aspects of agricultural sustainability and growth:

1. The long-term success of agriculture in a metropolitan context can only be assured with strong supporting and integrated land use, food and agriculture sector development and infrastructure policies.
2. The conversion or fragmentation of large tracks, primary or unique agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses to accommodate growth (residential, commercial, industrial) will only be done as a last resort.
3. The advancement of agriculture requires *shared leadership* including the municipality residents and stakeholders within Strathcona County, and the Capital Region.
4. Changes in agriculture are both continuous and considerable, requiring a dynamic and proactive approach in response to emerging trends and opportunities both urban and rural.

Strathcona County's Census of Agriculture farmland decreased by 36,000 acres from 2001 to 2011, and then increased by 14,000 acres from 2011 to 2021.

Identifying priority areas is a significant component of the plan, guiding where efforts and resources should be concentrated. These priority areas include:

- The continuation of field cropping for the long term, especially on Class 1 and 2 soils in the northern part of Strathcona County.
- Development of specialty production operations, such as greenhouses, horticulture, and specialized livestock operations through small acreages.

- A thriving equine sector, with potential for expansion into areas like recreation and therapy.
- Fostering value-added operations, including primary and secondary processing and agricultural research.
- Embracing urban agriculture, including individual and community initiatives.
- Agritourism, leveraging the county's potential as a destination for various agricultural experiences.
- Preserving agriculture land and developing local food initiatives.

To translate these priority areas into action, the plan delineates eight specific implementation strategies as follows:

1. **Governance**: The plan emphasizes the critical role of governance in supporting agriculture. This includes the need for consistent and strong backing from councils and senior administration and the establishment of a dedicated Food and Agriculture Institute. These governance structures are instrumental in steering agricultural policies and ensuring their effective implementation.
2. **Communications:** The county would benefit from developing a comprehensive communications and public relations program to articulate the county's commitment and vision for agriculture. Additionally, there needs to be a focus on educational programs to inform citizens, particularly youth, about the meaning, opportunities, and diversity of agriculture and food. The county is encouraged to lead in exploring agricultural opportunities in urban areas and to regularly host forums or conferences.
3. **Land Use and Development Planning:** Key actions include requiring Agricultural Impact Assessments for any rezoning of agricultural lands, ensuring new developments minimize or enhance the impact on agricultural land, and advocating for the reclamation of lands to agriculture post-resource extraction. The county should develop customer-focused permitting for agriculture. Community plans include provisions for farmers markets. Agriculture commercial areas be developed within the county. Strathcona County would benefit from an established mechanism for the purchase of agricultural protection easements.
4. **Food & Agriculture Sector Development**: The strategy outlines initiatives for developing two priority areas: the equine sector and local food strategies. It also highlights the importance of establishing the agri-food value-added sector as a business development priority, which is crucial for diversifying and strengthening the agricultural economy.
5. **Urban Agriculture**: The plan advocates for fostering urban agriculture through supportive development policies and strategies. This involves creating an environment where urban agriculture initiatives can thrive, bridging the gap between rural and urban agricultural practices.
6. **Agri-Tourism**: Developing marketing programs and encouraging the creation of a Strathcona County Agri-Tour aligns with the aim to enhance agri-tourism. This not only serves to promote the county's agricultural assets but also integrates agriculture into the broader tourism and cultural fabric of the region.
7. **Infrastructure**: Identifying and addressing the infrastructure needs specific to the priority areas is key. This includes evaluating the feasibility of facilities like a Multi-Purpose Agricultural Facility to serve a wide range of interests. Further

planning needs to be done to ensure that transportation and road planning support agricultural activities.

8. **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment**: The plan stresses the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This involves tracking agricultural trends and developments and adjusting strategies as necessary, ensuring that the plan remains dynamic and responsive to changing conditions.

In conclusion, the Strathcona County Agriculture Master Plan presents a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy aimed at navigating the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities in the agricultural sector. By integrating a diverse range of perspectives, trends, and strategic actions, the plan lays a solid foundation for sustainable agricultural development in a rapidly growing metropolitan area. Its success hinges on the collective efforts and commitment of all stakeholders, ensuring that agriculture remains a vibrant and integral part of Strathcona County's identity and economy.

1.5 What Priorities have the Community Raised?

Several recent engagements have occurred within Sturgeon County with the aim to understand key opportunities and barriers in agricultural and agriculture-related businesses. The most prominent of these was an Agricultural Engagement Strategy developed in 2018. To prepare Sturgeon County's representatives to provide a voice reflective of County residents for the EMR's RAMP development, the County proactively engaged with the agricultural community. Input from these sessions provided guidance to Sturgeon County elected and administration representatives as RAMP was developed from 2018-2021.

In 2020, an agriculture and agri-food business study was conducted within Sturgeon, Parkland, and Leduc Counties with the objective of developing a coordinated approach to attract value-add agri-food industry investment. This study identified targeted opportunities for all three counties, and included stakeholder consultation with three Sturgeon County farmers and the Morinville Municipal Seed Cleaning Co-op.

In response to growing demand for agritourism and other on-farm value-add products and services, a task force was deployed by Sturgeon County in 2021-2022 to assess barriers to development for these emerging opportunities. Together, the input received from these prior engagements informs topic areas for validation and further exploration, in addition to providing background to ensure engagement for the AMP is continuous with prior engagement.

1.5.1 Agriculture Engagement Strategy, 2018

In the spring of 2018, a series of one-on-one interviews, an online survey, and four in-person forums were held to gather input on key agriculture issues related to the EMR's RAMP development. Roughly 80-100 people participated and provided input on the following:

1. Trends and developments in agriculture;
2. The state and relevance of agriculture in the County;
3. Opportunities and discussion of 'best fit' for the County; and
4. Their opinions on the key issues and constraints faced by the sector.

Engagement Themes

Seven themes emerged through the engagement and supporting review of agricultural statistics, and are as follows:

1. Sturgeon County's agricultural community has a deep sense of history and pride;

2. Agriculture, and the nature of farm enterprises, is changing fast with less farmers, bigger operations, emergence of specialty, novel, and diverse enterprises which come with succession, labour, and future viability concerns;
3. Increasing rural-urban conflicts due to a changing rural community, continued urban encroachment, and decreasing farmer numbers and corresponding representation;
4. Regulatory complexity from municipal, provincial, and federal governments induces uncertainty which reduces investment by imposing actual or perceived risks to agricultural enterprises;
5. Support for finding a balanced approach to economic growth and protecting high-quality agricultural land that isn't too restrictive of subdivision and development, but supports agricultural uses on highly productive agricultural land;
6. Concerns with transportation and drainage infrastructure challenging transport and field access for farm equipment
7. A sentiment that Sturgeon County is advantageously situated for agricultural development with its deeply rooted agricultural community, volume of high-quality agricultural lands, robust experience developing value-add businesses, excellent transportation access and location, prepared agri-food business sites, and adaptive land use planning position.

Following from the consolidation of these themes, the consultants crafted four concluding areas of action for Sturgeon County's consideration. Each of these supports the recommended assertion that agriculture is a priority within Sturgeon County:

1. **Education and Awareness** to address the rural-urban conflict
2. **Regulatory Review** to make it easier to do business in a variety of ways
3. **Nuanced Land Use Strategies** to ensure availability of agricultural land
4. **Value-Added Clustering** to foster the development of new businesses

1.5.2 Tri-County Agriculture Business Study, 2020

This Study took place during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which significantly disrupted agri-food supply chains. As a result, the study took into consideration some changing macro drivers of agri-food economic opportunities as well as long-standing drivers as follows:

1. Technological Innovation;
2. Consumer Demand for Quality Assurance;
3. Consumer Demand for Connection to Food;
4. Demographics;
5. Climate Change and its Impacts and Perceptions; and
6. COVID-19 shock to Food Supply Chains.

Engagement with agri-food business owners across the Edmonton Metropolitan Region, Alberta, and Canada provided insights into specific opportunities for the Tri-Counties, and the corresponding critical success factors for each. A total of nine specific opportunity areas were identified within three categories of economic development opportunity as follows:

1. Higher Value Primary Production

i. Agri-food Technology (autonomous field and product handling equipment, field and product handling sensing and processing equipment;
ii. Irrigation (form irrigation district, coordinate localized producer capital investment, support funding access);
iii. Vertical Farming and Aquaponics (leafy green and aquaponic tied farms)

2. Value Added Processing
   i. Food Processing (Frozen foods, Ethnic Foods, locally-sourced premium foods);
   ii. Protein Fractionation (wet or dry pea fractionation);
   iii. Meat Processing (Conventional beef or pork processor to provide supply chain redundancy, specialty processing of lamb)
   iv. Hemp Fibre (decortication facility, bast fibre refining, manufactured product facility)
   v. Oat Processing (oat milk processing, oat fractionation)

3. Novel Opportunities
   i. Automated Grocery Fulfilment Centers (automated warehouse, local production aggregation food hub)

From these identified opportunities, nine overlapping critical success factors were also identified as the following:

- High bandwidth broadband
- Pre-serviced appropriate lots
- Transportation and amenities for labour force
- Cold storage availability
- Clear permitting and bylaws for identified opportunities
- Competitive Tax rates
- Build collaborative relationships with existing businesses with clear points of contact
- Facilitating networks between prospective businesses and existing businesses
- Facilitate partnerships between researchers and businesses

With identified opportunities and critical success factors considered, the engagement was leveraged to detail three recommendations with supporting sub-points:

1. Employ Principles of Effective Agri-food Economic Development
   a. Support existing agri-food businesses in their growth;
   b. Use a proactive and targeted approach for economic development;
   c. Labour forces require transportation and amenities;
   d. Collaboration needed between research institutions and businesses.

2. Employ a Structured Agri-food Economic Development Strategy
   a. Consider opportunity categories
   b. Employ principles of agri-food economic development;
   c. Focus on common critical success factors

3. Collaborate sub-regionally on project with specific goals and boundaries
   a. Cross-County Agri-food economic development committee;
   b. Tri-County Agri-food Database

1.5.3 Agribusiness Agritourism

This review was conducted by a community-based Task Force which was engaged by Council in March 2021 to support Council in evaluating related economic opportunities,

Review Task Force, 2021

regulatory requirements, landowner perspectives, and overall best practices in the area of agri-business and agritourism. Over a year of review, stakeholder engagement, and summary of input, the Task Force prepared a summary of issues identified and optional regulatory solutions. These findings then informed a set of five recommendations for Sturgeon County Council.

Issues Identified

- **Event Regulations** – Determination of which event types are considered related to an agribusiness/agritourism activity, and which should be separately defined. Additionally, whether limits placed on the number of events are appropriate.
- **Noise and Hours of Operation** - Improve differentiation between agricultural and intensified uses to manage noise impacts and hours of operation.
- **Proximity to neighbors** – Distance between intensified uses and adjacent landowners is an important consideration for potential impacts. This may be impacted by the size of parcels with the intensified uses.
- **Parking and Traffic –** Sufficient parking and consideration for traffic volumes on public roads need to be considered for intensive agri-business or agritourism.
- **Enforcement** – Consideration for how any applied regulations will be enforced.
- **The right to farm** – Opinions vary on whether 'traditional primary agriculture' is exclusively farming, or whether agri-business and agritourism opportunities are also considered part of the farm.
- **Educating the public** – Communication with the public will be of the utmost importance to ensure clarity for permitted and discretionary uses, and the implications of these definitions.
- **Consultation with Neighbors –** Consultation is important to ensure all opinions are considered with respect to intensified uses.
- **Business Components for consideration –** New opportunities to diversify income and provide jobs to the region.

Regulatory Options

To address the current regulatory gaps, the Task Force identified the following regulatory options:

1. **Create a Blended Agri-tourism and Diversified Agriculture Use**
2. **Create Separate Agri-tourism & Diversified Agriculture Uses**
3. **Create a new Agriculture District** – which allows for diversified uses including processing, value-added activities, and agritourism.

An additional consideration was added to the regulatory options regarding the addition of an 'Event Venue' definition in the LUB to provide an opportunity for commercial events, such as weddings, to be operated on agricultural lands.

Task Force Recommendations

The Task Force recommended the following actions by Sturgeon County Council:

1. Amend the LUB by:
   i) Adding 'Event Venue' and 'Diversified Agriculture' as Use definitions;
   ii) Update the 'Event' and 'Guest Unit' terms;
   iii) Amend the AG district to include 'Event Venue' as a discretionary use and to include 'Diversified Agriculture' as a permitted use;

iv) Create a new AG-2 District to support more intensive and diversified agricultural uses as permitted uses.

2. Develop a public communication plan regarding these LUB updates;
3. Council to support municipal fee waivers for re-zoning and/or development-permitting fees for 2022, for existing agritourism operators, agri-business and event venue operators needing to come into compliance with the new regulations.
4. Ongoing agri-business and agritourism opportunities should be considered through the Economic Development and Agricultural Services Boards, and that additional sub-committees be considered for agritourism and agri-business.
5. County administration internally trials an Impact Matrix for new 'Diversified Agriculture' applications to assess for tangible effect of applications and their appropriate use classification.

1.6 Topic Areas

The analysis of local and regional agricultural trends, related policies, case studies and recent engagement priorities provides a thorough preliminary summary of topic areas that should be considered within the AMP. Findings from this analysis were paired with the stakeholder and public engagement for the AMP to determine a set of possible topic areas, or issues, that may be addressed.