Sturgeon
COUNTY



2025 – 2034

Agriculture Master Plan

The Path Forward: Sustainable Growth, Innovation, and Resilience

Agriculture and Environment
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1.0 Executive Summary



1.1 BACKGROUND

Sturgeon County has developed its first Agriculture Master Plan (AMP) to provide a comprehensive strategy to guide council and administration in navigating agricultural policy development, land use planning, investment decisions, and program direction over the next 10 years (2025-2034).

1.2 DEVELOPMENT

The AMP was developed by jointly considering agricultural trends, reviews of policy and other municipalities, and barriers and opportunities identified through public and stakeholder engagement. The first round of engagement compiled priority topics to address and possible actions. These inputs were used to craft feasible County actions to address priority topics, and then stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on these potential topics and actions in the second round of engagement. Surveyed feedback informed which topics and actions were included in the Plan, and how actions were prioritized.



1.3 TOPIC GROUPS

23 priority topics to address were organized into 5 topic groups as follows:

1. Agricultural Land	i. Agricultural land rules should consider the different agricultural values of land. ii. Agricultural land subdivision policy creates uncertainty for the agricultural land base. iii. Confined Feeding Operations in Sturgeon County are limited by residential developments. iv. Public is unaware of how varying types of development are responsible for losses of agricultural land.
2. Small/ Specialty Farms & Value-added Agriculture	i. On-farm value-added agriculture activities are difficult to start due to commercial requirements and tax implications. ii. Uncertain allowable activities for agri-tourism operators. iii. Policy and programs may not adequately consider small farms.
3. Infrastructure	i. Development, construction, and management of drainage ways are not always adequate for flood events. Some bridge guardrails and road widths are not sufficient for wide agricultural equipment. ii. Roads are at times too busy from industrial or residential traffic to safely transport agricultural products and equipment. iii. Field access is not always sufficient for safe transportation. iv. Water availability for crops and livestock may become a more important issue in a changing climate. v. High speed internet access is increasingly important for farm business and farm families. vi. Landowner actions may alter surface drainage and negatively impact neighbouring agricultural land.
4. Agriculture and Support Services	i. Disconnect between Agricultural Producers and Agricultural Services offered by the County. ii. There is sometimes conflict between agricultural uses and beaver management. iii. Farm Fire and Safety is important for the entire County community. iv. Disposal options for agricultural plastics are limited v. Rural crime is an increasing issue for farm equipment and properties.
5. Community & Policy	i. Farmer and non-farmer resident conflict increases as residents understanding of agriculture decreases. ii. Local and Regional Politics are sometimes not effectively informed by the agricultural community. iii. Locally applied research and demonstrations support adoption of new farm practices and technology. iv. Federal or Provincial emissions policies challenge farm activities.

One target outcome for each topic represents the goal which related actions aim to achieve.

1.4 IMPLEMENTATION

The 29 actions included within this plan each have corresponding high-level estimates and recommendations for the timeframe, priority levels and details to consider when implementing them. Detailed project planning for each action will be required to support successful implementation. The plan also includes a monitoring and review framework to ensure the County's progress is clearly communicated on a regular basis.

1.5 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

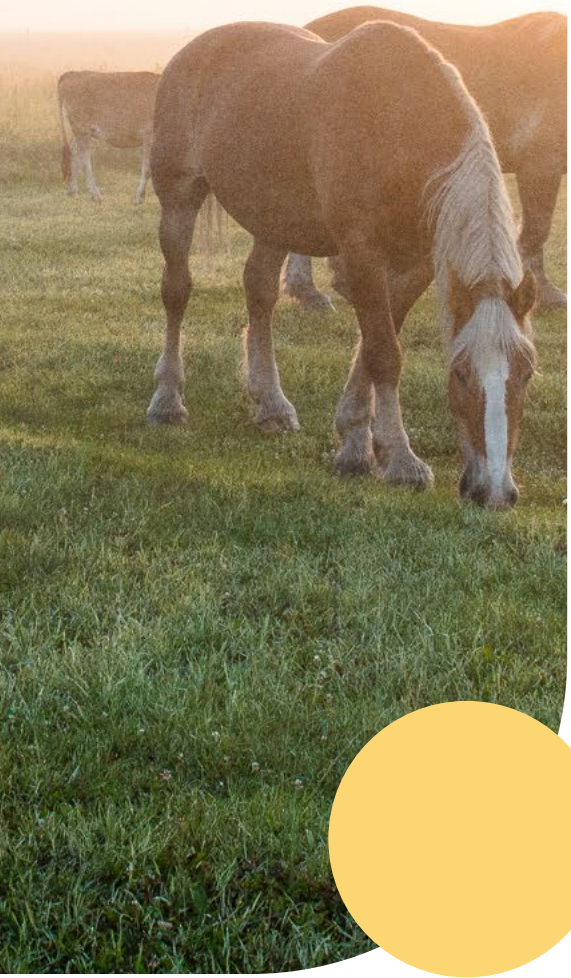
It is recommended that Sturgeon County implement the Plan by undertaking more detailed project planning based on the action timelines and priorities. At the conclusion of each segment of the Plan's timeline, we recommend a review and publication of a progress report. If either of the first two reports indicate high levels of action completion, we recommend new actions be considered in alignment with the target outcomes for each of the topics addressed by the Plan.



2.0 Background and Development

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sturgeon County has developed an Agriculture Master Plan (AMP or 'The Plan') to provide a comprehensive strategy to guide council and administration in navigating agricultural policy development, land use planning, investment decisions, and program direction over the next 10 years (2025-2034).

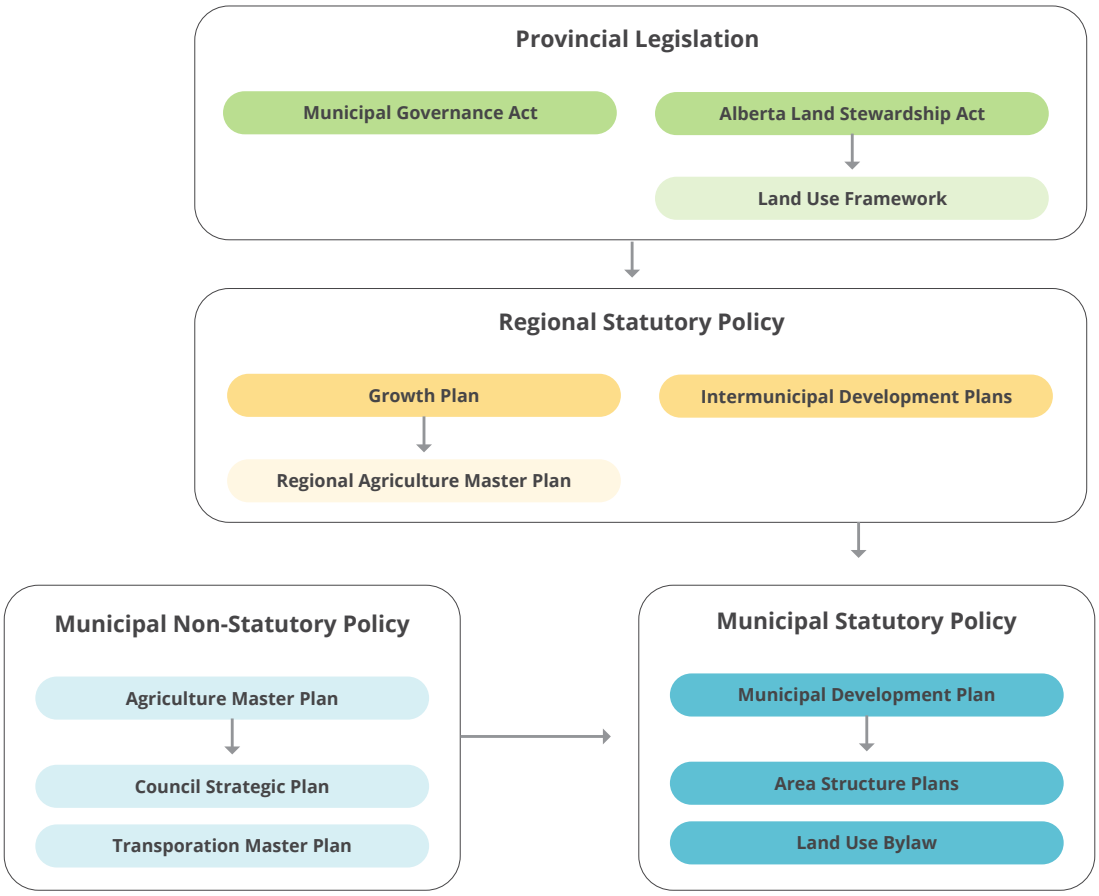


2.2 HOW IS THE PLAN USED?

The AMP is a non-statutory document, which can be used to guide municipal statutory documents. For policy, this Plan is intended to inform the development of agricultural components of statutory documents such as the Municipal Development Plan. It is important to note that the approval of statutory plans requires a separate public process. The County's municipal policy must also comply with provincial and regional policies.

In addition to policy, the Plan is to be used to guide program direction, initiatives and investment decisions that affect the agricultural community.

Figure 1: AMP Relations to Existing Policy



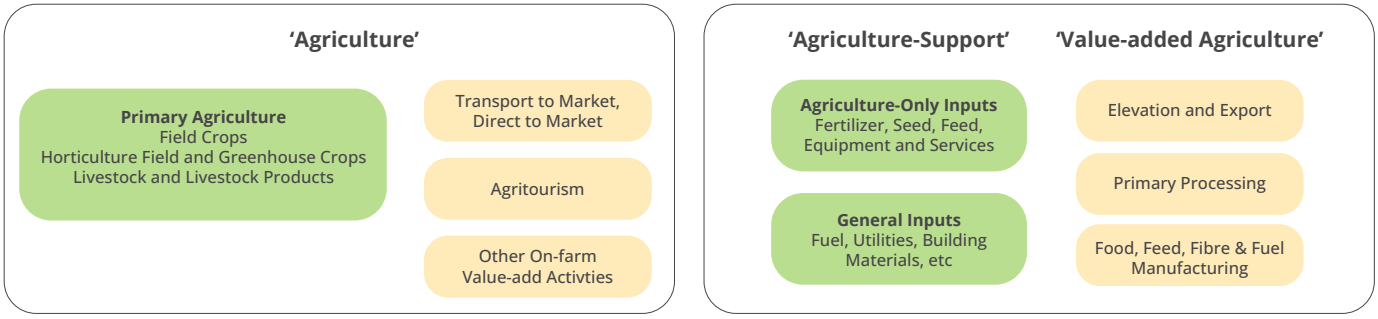
2.3 WHAT'S INCLUDED IN 'AGRICULTURE'

There are many elements of agriculture occurring within Sturgeon County, and so it is important to clearly define what is included within the agriculture industry to clarify the scope of the AMP. This plan uses the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB) Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) definition : "The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, horticulture and agriculture related products or services including food, feed, fibre, energy and other complementary value-added activities."

For Sturgeon County's AMP, only the elements of the agri-food system included within the 'agriculture' industry are directly considered. The 'Agriculture-Support' and 'Value-added Agriculture' elements are strongly related to agriculture, however their consideration within the AMP is in regard to their impact to 'agriculture'.

[1] It is important to note that definitions for tax assessment purposes or within the Alberta Safety Codes Act do not align with the planning definitions described above or illustrated within Figure 1. Buildings, or the portion of a building that are used for/or house a process which results in a 'change in nature, state or form' of an agricultural product are no longer exempt as 'farm buildings' and are taxed based on the non-agricultural use. Buildings that are therefore assessed as commercial are required to meet different standards as detailed within the Alberta Safety Codes Act

Figure 2: Scope of Agriculture



2.4 PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Development of the topics to address and recommended actions was iterative and included two phases of public and stakeholder engagement and contextual analysis.

2.1.1 Contextual Review

Analysis of County agricultural trends, regional comparisons, and existing policy context were incorporated into a core set of findings. These preliminary findings were used to structure engagement sessions and inform the topics addressed and actions included within the AMP.

Figure 3: Plan Development Summary

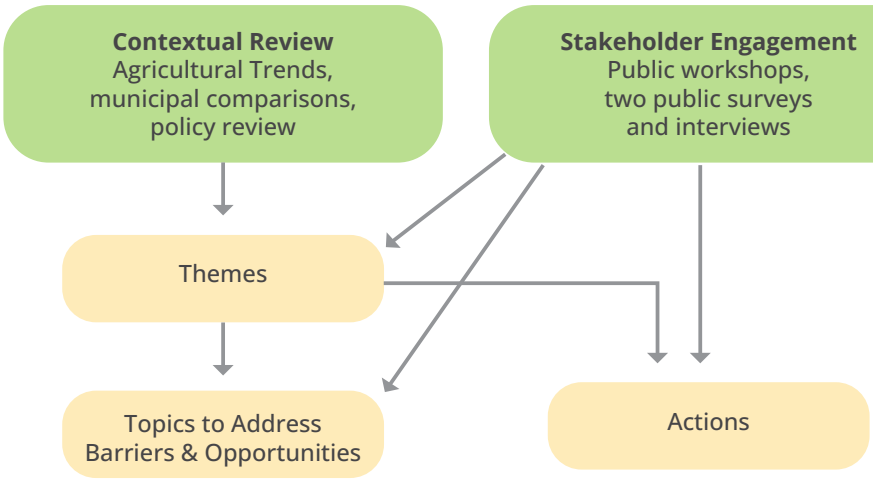
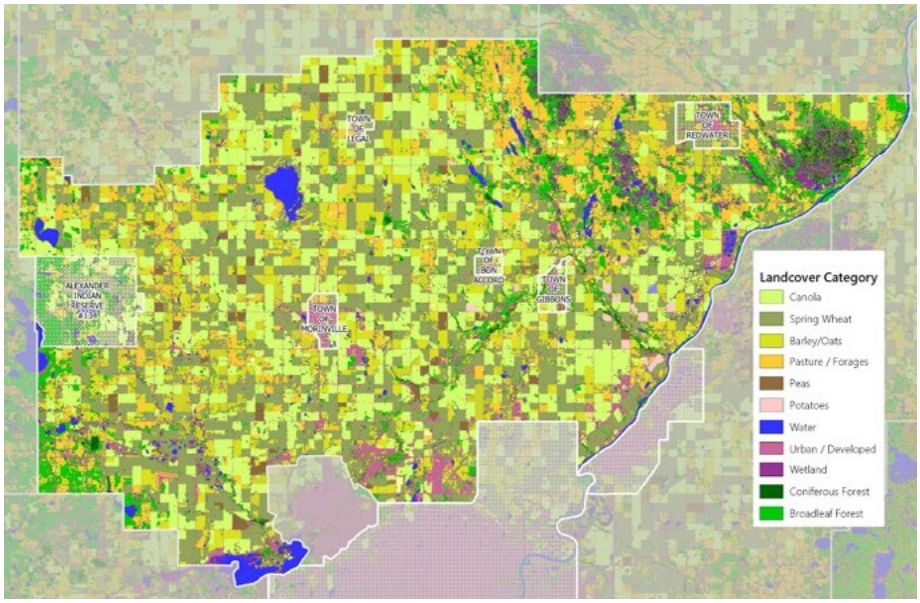




Table 1: Context Review Key Findings (8-10)

Finding	Description
Decrease in livestock numbers	Except for turkeys and bees, all livestock numbers decreased from 2001 to 2021
Shift from forage to cereal and oilseed production	Forage acreage decreased from 2001 to 2021, while canola and wheat acreage increased
Specialty crops have grown at province-leading rates	Expanded specialty crops include haskaps, saskatoons, pumpkins, field vegetables, and sod
Parcel Fragmentation continues	Central Sturgeon County has experienced the greatest fragmentation from 2006 to 2024, and the eastern portion has experienced the least.
Agricultural policy in the MDP requires an update	The 2021 Regional Agriculture Master Plan includes agricultural land policies that the MDP must comply with
Federal policy and programs impact agriculture	Emissions policies challenge and create uncertainty for agri-food businesses in the County, and programs provide opportunities for environmental projects and climate change adaptations
Strong primary and value-added agricultural economic opportunities	A value-added cluster site has been identified at the Villeneuve Airport Development, the County has a value-added incentive program and diversified agriculture operations have been supported by recent bylaw changes.
Industry leadership is critical	Fostering local leadership and encouraging an entrepreneurial culture are priority components of a strong approach for supporting economic development.
Diversified agriculture is an evolving opportunity	Other municipalities have a variety of policy definitions for on-farm value-added and agri-tourism activities; marketing support is commonly practiced.

Figure 4: Sturgeon County Landcover, 2022



Source: Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. Annual Crop Inventory 2022

Table 2: Sturgeon County and Edmonton Metropolitan Region Farm Attributes, 2001-2021

	Sturgeon County					
Farm Attribute	**2001**	**2006**	**2011**	**2016**	**2021**	**Trend**
Total Area of Farms (Acres)	499,567	517,537	481,583	479,508	512,832	
Number of Farms	1,055	967	823	730	747	
Average Farm Size (Acres)	474	535	585	657	687	
Total Land in Crops (Acres)	361,288	369,728	362,846	377,722	410,674	
Average Gross Farm Sales per Farm, $'000	139	160	226	316	565	
Average Capital per Farm, $'000	830	1,577	2,635	3,512	4,153	
Total Gross Sales (all farms), $'000	146,696	154,789	185,794	230,940	421,971	

	Sturgeon County	**Edmonton**	**Strathcona**	**Parkland**	**Leduc**	**Alberta**
Farm Attribute	**Change 2001-2021**					
Total Area of Farms (Acres)	**3%**	-24%	-8%	-23%	-12%	-6%
Number of Farms	**-29%**	-33%	-44%	-44%	-33%	-23%
Average Farm Size (Acres)	**45%**	14%	64%	36%	31%	22%
Total Land in Crops (Acres)	**14%**	-12%	10%	-14%	-6%	7%
Average Gross Farm Sales per Farm, $'000	**306%**	323%	163%	201%	141%	190%
Average Capital per Farm, $'000	**400%**	163%	314%	266%	293%	337%
Total Gross Sales (all farms), $'000	**188%**	182%	47%	69%	61%	124%

2.4.2 Public Engagement

Phase 1 of the engagement process was held in 2024 and extended from January 30 to April 10. Local producers, processors, landowners, distributors and consumers provided feedback on how Sturgeon County may address local needs through agriculture-related initiatives. Throughout the course of this phase, we heard from 202 individuals. Phase 2 gauged the level of support for the topic areas and actions developed in the first phase of engagement. The phase consisted of an online survey that gathered feedback from 121 additional respondents from July 3 and July 31, 2024.

Table 3: Engagement Themes

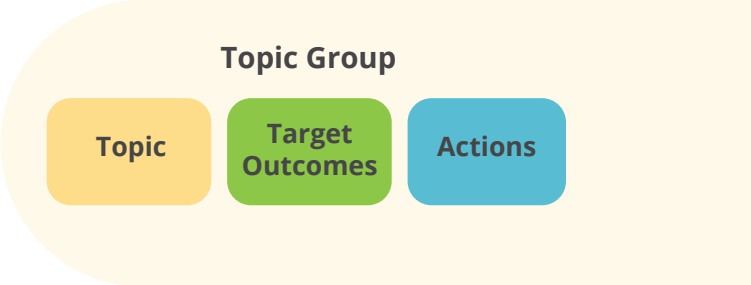
Finding	Description
Negative impacts from regulations and bureaucracy	Many participants were adamant about the need to limit government involvement in farm operations and fewer restrictions
Support for small family farms	Desire for more support and initiatives to help sustain and promote small family farms, which were noted as vital to the local agricultural community.
Land use and preservation of farmland	The need to protect high-quality cropland from conversion to non-agricultural uses was a major theme
Water supply management	Issues related to water supply, including the quality and availability of water for agricultural purposes, were noted as challenges
Infrastructure needs	Support for improved infrastructure, including roads, internet and water services
Economic pressures	Challenges from high operational costs and overall economic uncertainty
Technological advancements	The adoption and impact of new agricultural technologies were frequently discussed, with a focus on both challenges and opportunities.
Educational and community engagement	More agricultural education and community engagement to enhance agricultural literacy and foster a connection between the agricultural community and non-farm residents.
Environmental concerns	Concern for the impacts of climate change on agricultural production, stressing the need to manage and mitigate the effects of drought and other extreme weather events.

2.4.3 Topics

Consideration of the contextual review and both rounds of engagement informed the priority topics included in the Plan.

2.5 PLAN STRUCTURE

The Plan is structured to clearly indicate the priority topics, target outcomes, and actions. Target outcomes are designed to align with the engagement findings and the County's strategic guiding principles and associated target community outcomes.



3.0 Action Plan

3.1 VISION STATEMENT

Sturgeon County's deep agricultural history continues to drive innovation, sustainable growth and resilience. This vision for agriculture is aligned with the County's broader Strategic Vision:

'Offering a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and natural experiences, Sturgeon County is a municipality that honours its rural roots and cultivates desirable communities. Uniquely situated to provide world-class agricultural, energy, and business investment opportunities, the County prioritizes responsible stewardship and dreaming big.'



3.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

In keeping with this Vision, the following set of Council's strategic guiding principles inform the target outcomes for each topic addressed by the Plan:

1. Collaboration
2. Accountability
3. Flexibility
4. Excellence
5. Safety
6. Future Readiness
7. Affordability
8. Innovation



3.3 TOPIC GROUPS

Identified topics to address within the AMP draw on the wide range of issues identified from contextual analysis, engagement, and further analysis of barriers and opportunities. These topics are aggregated into the following five 'Topic Groups' to effectively summarize the focus areas of the Plan:

- **Agricultural Land**
- **Small/Specialty Farms & Value-added Agriculture**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Agriculture and Support Services**
- **Community Support & Policy**

3.3.1 Agricultural Land

Land is integral to agriculture and many policy elements impacting its use are within the jurisdiction of the County. The County regulates land subdivision and uses, tax assessment, and manages many elements of infrastructure which impact the uses of agricultural land. Four specific topics have been identified to be addressed by the AMP.

Topic	Target Outcome	Actions
Agricultural land rules should consider the different agricultural values of land.	Agricultural land policy considers the differing agricultural values of land	AL1; AL2; AL3
Agricultural land subdivision policy creates uncertainty for the agricultural land base.	Agricultural subdivision policy reviewed to improve certainty and encourage efficient agricultural use	AL1; AL2; AL3
Confined Feeding Operations (CFO) in Sturgeon County are limited by residential developments.	Inform land use policy regarding any need to better accommodate CFOs	AL4
Public is unaware of how varying types of development are responsible for losses of agricultural land.	The County tracks where agricultural land is lost to development and communicates the data to policy makers and the public.	AL5

This set of actions were identified to address the summarized topics and achieve the target outcomes. These actions are intended to ensure agricultural land policy is well informed and strikes a balance between maintaining flexibility and supporting long-term agricultural use.

Number	Action
AL1	Improve accessibility of information for how landscape factors are considered in the subdivision review process
AL2	Improve how agricultural impacts are assessed to inform agricultural land subdivision and re-districting decisions
AL3	Review agricultural land subdivision policy to ensure allowable parcel number, size and orientation support agricultural uses
AL4	Review municipal policy constraints for Confined Feeding Operation development and expansion
AL5	Inform agricultural land policy review with information on fragmentation and agricultural use

3.3.2 Small/Specialty Farms and Value-added Agriculture

The agriculture industry includes a wide range of primary production types and a set of on-farm value-added agriculture and agri-tourism enterprises, which have been referred to as 'diversified agriculture'. The variation in business types provides a challenge to delivering policy and programs to address the many issues facing these operations. Three specific topics have been identified to be addressed by the AMP.

Topic	Target Outcome	Actions
On-farm value-added agriculture activities are difficult to start due to commercial requirements and tax implications.	On-farm value-added agriculture activities are clearly defined and supported by Sturgeon County	SV1
Uncertain allowable activities for agri-tourism operators.	Qualified agri-tourism activities are clearly defined	SV2
Policy and programs may not adequately consider small farms.	Small and specialty farms are clearly considered in County policy and programs	SV3; SV4; SV5

3.0 Action Plan

This set of actions were identified to address the summarized topics and achieve the target outcome. These actions are intended to ensure the County collaborates with agricultural innovators to respond with flexibility to diversified agricultural enterprises, while maintaining fairness to the entire community.

Number	Action
SV1	Review opportunities to incentivize on-farm value-added processing investments under the $20 million
SV2	Improve supports for current and potential on-farm value-added and agri-tourism businesses in navigating County approval processes
SV3	Promote on-farm diversified agriculture operations in the County
SV4	Review subdivision policy constraints for small and specialty farms
SV5	Review current services and programs for applicability to small and specialty farms



3.3.3 Infrastructure

Sturgeon County manages roadways, drainage paths, potable water access, and fibre optic internet. For most of these infrastructure types, including municipal roads, drainage paths and potable water fill stations, the County invests and maintains the infrastructure. In contrast, broadband internet is invested in by the County, but resident access is administered by a separate service provider.

Infrastructure is critical for all forms of agriculture, and the consideration of changing agricultural needs is a critical aspect of effective service delivery. Seven specific topics have been identified to be addressed by the AMP.

Topic	Target Outcome	Actions
Some bridge guardrails and road widths are not sufficient for wide agricultural equipment.	Bridge and road infrastructure design considers transportation of agricultural equipment.	IN1
Development, construction, and management of drainage ways are not always adequate for flood events.	Drainage planning considers flooding risks for agricultural production	IN1
Roads are at times too busy from industrial or residential traffic to safely transport agricultural products and equipment.	The County provides information and support for the safe transport of agricultural products on busy roads	IN2; IN3
Field access is not always sufficient for safe transportation.	Field access and intersection safety are assessed in high traffic agricultural areas	IN4
Water availability for crops and livestock may become a more important issue in a changing climate.	Water management planning considers agricultural producers	IN5; IN6
High speed Internet Access is increasingly important for farm business and farm families.	Improved high speed internet access for Sturgeon County Agricultural producers	IN7
Landowner actions may alter surface drainage and negatively impact neighbouring agricultural land.	Surface drainage conflicts between agricultural landowners have clear options for resolution	IN8

The identified actions below are intended to ensure the County continues to deliver excellent, affordable, and safe infrastructure that considers the specific needs of the agriculture industry.

Number	Action
IN1	Develop strategy to support effective consideration of agricultural operation needs in infrastructure planning and maintenance.
IN2	Identify advocacy opportunities for provincial road infrastructure enhancements that enhance agricultural transportation safety.
IN3	Review opportunities to minimize traffic impacts of industrial firms operating in Sturgeon County.
IN4	Review opportunities to enhance County vegetation management practices where sightlines have been compromised.
IN5	Ensure agricultural needs are considered in the development of the County's water management strategy.
IN6	Review access requirements for irrigation license holders to support long-term water access.
IN7	Explore opportunities to improve broadband access in rural portions of the County.
IN8	Consider policy options to address off-site flooding impacts to agricultural land.



3.3.4 Agriculture and Support Services

The County provides services to manage pests, accept waste, prevent or combat crime, and address fire and emergency incidents. Agricultural residents have specific needs for each type of service that are likely to change with evolving agricultural activities, shifting weather, and emerging social pressures. Five specific topics have been identified to be addressed by the AMP.

Topic	Target Outcome	Actions
Disconnect between Agricultural Producers and Agricultural Services offered by the County.	The County provides effective communication channels to engage agricultural producers on an on-going basis.	AS1
There is sometimes conflict between agricultural uses and beaver management.	The County provides effective support to address negative impacts to agriculture from beaver dams.	AS2; AS3
Farm Fire and Safety is important for the entire County community.	The County provides fire and safety support to agricultural producers.	AS4
Disposal Options for Agricultural Plastics are limited.	The County will plan for improved recycling opportunities for agricultural plastics .	AS5
Rural crime is an increasing issue for farm equipment and properties.	Risk of theft and damage to agricultural property specifically addressed in County crime approach.	AS6

This set of actions have been identified to address the summarized topics and achieve each target outcome. These actions are intended to ensure the County continues to provide services that are affordable and ready for future conditions by responding to evolving agricultural conditions and trends.

Number	Action
AS1	Review and validate County services targeting agricultural producers and improve communication and engagement opportunities.
AS2	Review Drainage Master Plan and Registered Ditch Asset Plan for appropriate agricultural land considerations.
AS3	Review of wildlife conflict management resourcing and protocols to ensure impacts to agricultural land are mitigated
AS4	Enhance agriculturally-focused resources to improve awareness and resilience to wildfire
AS5	Consider agricultural waste management needs in the development of a County-wide Waste Management Strategy
AS6	Engage agricultural producers to develop farmyard and farm equipment crime mitigation strategies.

3.3.5 Community and Policy

Agricultural operations and activities continue to rapidly evolve, and the barriers and opportunities faced by the industry also change. Accounting for these changes, the County has a role in mitigating landowner conflict, advocating to other levels of government on agricultural issues, and supporting local agricultural priorities. Five specific topics have been identified to be addressed by the AMP.

Topic	Target Outcome	Actions
Farmer and non-farmer resident conflict increases as residents understanding of agriculture decreases.	Provide opportunities for residents to enhance their connection to, and knowledge of agricultural operations.	CS1
Local and Regional Politics are sometimes not effectively informed by the agricultural community.	Sturgeon County agricultural issues are effectively communicated to Council and the EMRB.	CS2
Locally applied research and demonstrations support adoption of new farm practices and technology.	Support provided for Sturgeon County agricultural producers to access information on evolving agricultural practices.	CS3
Federal or Provincial emissions policies challenge farm activities.	Agricultural producers are supported in understanding and adapting to emission reduction policies.	CS4; CS5

This set of actions have been identified to address the summarized topics and achieve each target outcome. These actions are intended to ensure the County supports the agricultural community by collaboratively advocating for priority policy.

Number	Action
CS1	Implement a communication strategy to improve residents' awareness and connection to agricultural operations.
CS2	Review Agricultural Service Board mandate and function and identify opportunities to improve advocacy on behalf of agriculture community.
CS3	Review opportunities to provide financial and/or in-kind support for locally applied research and technology extension activities applicable to Sturgeon County's agricultural context.
CS4	Enhance agricultural producer awareness of emission reduction technologies eligible for Clean Energy Improvement Program.
CS5	Review municipal policy barriers that prevent farms from taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

4.0 Plan Implementation

4.1 IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Upon approval of the AMP, the County will develop an implementation roadmap to guide the prioritization, timing and resources allocated to support implementation of the actions outlined in the AMP.

The implementation roadmap will be a living document, which will be adaptable to align to current and emerging conditions and municipal priorities.

4.2 TIMING

Actions will be categorized based on which segment of the Plan's timeline they be completed within:

- Short-term (2025-2027)
- Medium-term (2028-2030)
- Long-term (2031-2034)

4.3 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The County will integrate annual reporting of AMP implementation into its Corporate Business Plan reporting process. Additionally, plan progress and accomplishments will be reviewed and summarized at the conclusion of each segment of the implementation timeframe: 2027, 2030 and 2034. Further engagement of key stakeholders may be necessary to gauge the degree to which topics have been successfully addressed. A contextual review may be completed at the time of the 2027 and 2030 reviews to ensure that any emerging opportunities or challenges are considered.

