

Agricultural Land Use Planning in Canada

Case Study of Rocky View County

FINAL REPORT

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FINAL REPORT: ROCKY VIEW COUNTY

Executive Summary

In this report we present the preliminary results of a case study of agricultural land use planning for Rocky View County, which surrounds the City of Calgary on three sides. The case study of Rocky View County involved an assessment of the breadth and quality of the legislative framework that governs agricultural land use planning, including policies, legislation, and governance. The case study also involved an assessment of the political context within which agricultural land use planning takes place and decisions are made. This part of the assessment included documentation and analysis of three policy regimes: farmland preservation, global competitiveness, and food sovereignty. A policy regime refers to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors, and institutions that are involved in formulating policy and for governing once policies are devised.

The aim of the case study is to contribute to three areas of knowledge. The case study lends insight to the state of agricultural land-use planning in Rocky View County. It contributes to an understanding of the state of agricultural land use planning in Alberta. Finally, the case study is part of a broader national project to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland.

Overall, the legislative framework for protecting farmland within Rocky View County is fairly weak, as it is from a provincial perspective. We found that the lack of binding provincial legislation to protect agricultural land, and the delegation of land use planning decisions to municipalities, has created an unstable policy framework with a high degree of uncertainty. The new *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, a plan developed under Alberta's Land-Use Framework, contains several statements of principles that could be beneficial for protecting agricultural land, and serves as an important policy document for guiding local land use planning. However, without any provincial mechanism to ensure compliance, the SSRP's effectiveness in practice remains to be seen. The local agricultural land-use planning framework is more stable and better integrated locally and with provincial policies. While planning policies and legislation in Rocky View County do not specifically prioritize the protection of agricultural land, this objective is addressed through nodal growth management strategies that concentrate future residential and business activities to serviced areas already impacted by land fragmentation. Ultimately one of the key principles for accommodating diverse interests in the local agricultural land-use planning context is flexibility. Rocky View County continues to recognize and support conventional large-scale farming and the consolidation of large land holdings, thus enabling a competitive domestic and international agri-food industry. However, because of the high cost of farmland surrounding the City of Calgary, and in part to take advantage of opportunities presented by rising interest in local food, the County has also provided for smaller-scale agricultural parcels, more diversified agriculture and a more regionally based food system.

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Abbreviations

ALSA	Alberta Land Stewardship Act
AOPA	Agricultural Operation Practices Act
ARD	Agriculture and Rural Development (Alberta Government)
AMP	Agriculture Master Plan (Rocky View County)
CFO	Confined Feeding Operation
CMP	Calgary Metropolitan Plan
CP	County Plan (Rocky View County)
CRP	Calgary Regional Partnership
GMS	Growth Management Strategy (Rocky View County)
IDP	Intermunicipal Development Plan
LUB	Land Use Bylaw (Rocky View County)
LUF	Land Use Framework
MGA	Municipal Government Act
NRCB	Natural Resources Conservation Board
NSF	National Food Strategy
RVC	Rocky View County
SSRP	South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

About the project

The national project is a three-year study to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent integrated land use planning solutions that protect farmland in Canada. We have three objectives related to this purpose:

1. To undertake case studies to fill strategic gaps in our understanding of how agricultural land use planning policies and processes at a local level protect farmland while also integrating public priorities across jurisdictions.
2. To analyse three inter-related policy regimes within Canada's agri-food system: the long-standing policy regimes of global competitiveness and farmland preservation; and the nascent regime of food sovereignty. The aim is to understand how these three policy regimes influence agricultural land use planning at local, provincial, and national levels of policy. A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved.
3. To mobilise knowledge gained from the research by hosting a series of regional workshops across Canada. Workshop results will culminate in a national forum to formulate policy recommendations for protecting farmland.

The relation between agriculture, food, and social priorities is connected to the society we want and the place of food and farmers within it. Historically, the decline in the economic and social role of agriculture has accompanied a significant loss and degradation of the agricultural land base. This trend appears to be reversing. The growth of the local food movement, as evident by the increasing number of farmers markets and citizen-based initiatives like community gardens and local food councils, has been the forerunner of recent calls at the national level for a Canada-wide food policy. Although drastic policy changes are not likely to happen immediately at the national level, changes are already occurring at local and regional levels, with all of Canada's major metropolitan regions having launched food plans and policy councils (Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal). These changes suggest that the place of agriculture and food within Canadian society has shifted to be much more aligned with public priorities.

Sorting out relations between agriculture, food, and society falls, in part, within the domain of land use planning because every act of producing and consuming food has impacts on the land base. Yet, in spite of forty years of farmland protection policies, the agricultural land base still faces growing pressures from urban development and the pursuit of other economic priorities, with few indications that this trend will be significantly curtailed. Will this trend be halted if Canada adopts a national food policy that gave citizens more influence over domestic food supplies? If Canada adopted such a policy, do governments have the ability to protect the agricultural land base in order to support these new public priorities?

We anticipate that the greatest potential benefit of the research is to make a positive contribution to the development of agricultural land use plans, planning processes, and policies in Canada to protect farmland and promote farming as the highest and best use of these lands. Our assessment will be of benefit to land use decision makers, planning practitioners, to non-government organisations, industry groups, farmer organisations, farmers, and the general public.

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Principles for guiding agricultural land use planning

An agricultural land use planning legislative framework provides the context and constraints for what local governments must and can do to protect its agricultural lands. An effective framework of policies, legislation, and governance structures presents an opportunity for local governments, which can then choose how much they want to take advantage of this opportunity. Within this context it is helpful to be able to assess the quality of an agricultural land use planning framework and understand how well it works and why. For this purpose we have identified the following four principles, which are described below:

- Maximise stability
- Minimise uncertainty
- Integrate across jurisdictions
- Accommodate flexibility

The concepts of stability and uncertainty must be understood with a view of the world as unpredictable and essentially unknowable. This contrasts with a rational view of the world as something that we can understand fully – if only we had all of the right data and the ability to process the information. This worldview of an open future presents challenges because planning, by its very function, is focussed on making a desirable future a visible part of today's land use decision-making processes (Connell, 2009). The aim of planning is not to predict the future or claim to be all-knowing but to envision a desirable future with the information available. The functions of planning are to maximise what we can know about the future and to minimise what we do not know, thereby establishing a domain of understanding within which to make the best possible land use decisions in the present. This leads to the first two principles of agricultural land use planning.

Maximise stability

Something that is stable is difficult to topple; it stands strong and cannot be easily moved. Likewise, a stable legislative framework for protecting farmland is one that is not easily changed at the whim of shifting political interests; it is well-entrenched in acts of legislation, policy, and governance structures that are based on clear, concise language, and can hold up to court challenge. It is something that people can count on to secure the land base for agriculture and to know what the rules are. In this sense, a measure of stability is a measure of the thing itself – the legislative framework – as it is written in its present form. Thus, stability is a critical measure of the strength of an agricultural land use planning framework.

Minimise uncertainty

In addition to maximising the stability of a legislative framework through clear rules and regulations we must also consider how the framework will be implemented and applied to land use decisions. People want to know they can rely on these rules and regulations to be applied consistently and to know how it will be applied under different circumstances. In this sense, people want not only a stable land base for agriculture but also a legislative framework that provides some certainty about how it will be used to make agricultural land use decisions. However, what we do not know is boundless so we must accept that we cannot eliminate uncertainty. What governments can do is to minimise uncertainty by eliminating loop-holes, ambiguous language, and open-ended conditions. Perhaps more importantly, uncertainty can be minimised through consistent interpretations and applications of the legislative framework. In this sense, a measure of uncertainty is a future-oriented measure of expectations about how the legislative framework will be applied to land use decisions. Thus, the presence of uncertainty is a critical measure of the weakness of an agricultural land use planning framework.

Integrate across jurisdictions

Integrating policies and priorities across jurisdictions is a foundation for building cohesion across provincial, regional, and local governments. This principle of integration can be viewed as a “policy thread” that weaves together traditional areas of responsibility (Smith, 1998). One can also think of integration as a formal “linkage” between policies that provides consistency among them. Such formal linkages can come in the form of a provincial policy that requires a lower-level policy “to be consistent with” provincial statements. The aim of such vertical mechanisms is to ensure that lower-level policies are set within the context of broader public priorities. The same principle of integration applies horizontally, too, so that plans and strategies are coordinated and consistent across local governments. In order to successfully integrate policies across jurisdictions there must be sufficient details about the legislative context that guides and constrains local government plans and strategies.

Accommodate flexibility

Creating an effective legislative framework is an act of balance without being too stable so that it cannot be changed when needed, or too strict so that it cannot be applied in a range of

circumstances. Thus, flexibility is necessary in order to moderate the restrictive effects of maximising stability and minimising uncertainty. The principle is to enable decision-makers to accommodate a controlled level of flexibility without compromising the primary functions of the legislative framework to provide stability and reduce uncertainty. The means to accommodate flexibility is typically done through governance mechanisms, such as quasi-judicial provincial commissions, advisory committees, and application processes.

Strength of Alberta's provincial legislative framework

Alberta became a province on September 1, 1905, and as observed by Climenhaga (1997, p. 19), “officials of the new province showed an early interest in town planning, setting out their first town planning regulations in 1906, establishing a municipal affairs department in 1911 and enacting the province’s first planning legislation in 1913”. By the early 1950s, regional scale planning was formalized with the establishment of two regional planning bodies; the first one was in Edmonton (1951) and then in 1952 in Calgary. Regional Planning Districts, as they were first called, became Regional Planning Commissions during the 1960s and in 1963 the Planning Act was amended to require the preparation of regional plans. By the late 1960s subdivision authority had been delegated from the Province to the Regional Planning Commissions and legislation also required that land-use plans developed by lower-tier municipalities were to be consistent with the broader-scale plans developed by the Regional Planning Commissions.

According to the recent report prepared by the Alberta Professional Planners Institute (2014) the Regional Planning Commissions, and the legislative framework within which they operated, were reasonably effective in dealing with the growth pressures stemming from Alberta’s OPEC embargo inspired oil boom of the 1970s. However, as the economy slowed during the 1980s, regional planning bodies, and indeed the very idea of regional planning itself, came under mounting criticism. Much of this criticism was expressed by rural municipalities, striving to gain greater control over planning and the subdivision of land in their jurisdictions.

At the political level, the Provincial Government, which was led by Ralph Klein at the time and which also derived considerable support from rural parts of the province, was sympathetic to these concerns. In 1994, as part of a sweeping package of policy changes, the *Municipal Government Act* was passed. The MGA subsumed the 1977 *Planning Act* in Part 17, abolished regional planning commissions and devolved responsibility for land-use decisions to municipalities. With these changes, local governments became responsible for enacting and maintaining regulations for protecting agricultural land (Kaplinsky & Percy, 2014).

Having taken a very large step away from the idea that local-scale plans should be compelled to take into account broader considerations, some of which may be provincial in scale, the Provincial government attempted to fill the void with the adoption in 1996, by way of an Order in Council and pursuant to Section 622 of the MGA, a document entitled “Land Use Policies”. The document’s intent was to enunciate the Province’s perspective on a wide range of planning and resource management matters. Under the section dealing with agriculture (Section 6.1), the stated goal of the policy is to “contribute to the maintenance and diversification of Alberta’s agricultural industry (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 1996, p. 9). The 1996 provincial Land Use Policies or “Policy Statement”, as it is widely known, is written using relatively weak language. For instance, municipalities are “encouraged” to address various concerns, rather than directed to do so. Similarly, the policy assigns to municipalities the responsibility to “interpret

and apply the Land Use Policies” in a “locally meaningful and appropriated fashion” (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 1996, p. 3). And finally, neither the 1996 Policy Statement nor the MGA contain provisions stipulating or even making possible provincial approval of statutory plans.

Elimination of the regional planning commissions and the near total erosion of regional planning resulted in an increase in intermunicipal disputes, especially in the rural-urban fringe, a functional region well known as a zone with a complex of land-use conflicts and disputes (Furusest & Lapping, 1999; Beesley, 2010). To address such situations another statutory instrument was introduced by the Province: intermunicipal development plans (IDP). According to the Alberta Professional Planners Institute (2014, p.4), “many of the first generation on IDPs were weak policy documents,” although “some workable examples did emerge, but only after years of protracted conflict.”

The next major change to the legislative framework pursuant to agricultural land-use planning came in 2002 when the development control authority for livestock feeding operations was transferred from municipalities to the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), a quasi-judicial board established in 1991. Oversight responsibility for confined feeding operations (CFO’s), which falls under the Agricultural Practices Operations Act (AOPA), was assigned to the NRBC at the same time. Concomitant with these changes, was the establishment of province-wide regulations focused primarily on manure management, one of the key issues that prompted a review of the existing legislation in the first place. The rationale for these changes was grounded in the view that a growing number of municipalities were adopting planning policies and regulations that were regarded in some quarters as restricting expansion of the intensive livestock feeding sector.

The most recent change to the institutional arrangements pursuant to land-use planning occurred in 2008 when the Government of Alberta released a *Land Use Framework* (2008), given legal effect through the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (ALSA) in 2009, to manage the cumulative effects of recent unprecedented growth in the province and to help achieve long-term economic, social and environmental goals for land and natural resources. The Act establishes a province-wide mandate for protecting agricultural land through conservation and stewardship strategies, and through policies to prevent the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land. It also provides for a stronger level of provincial oversight through the creation of seven statutory regional land-use plans. Two of these regional plans have now been released, including the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* (Government of Alberta, 2014), which covers much of southern Alberta. Planning and development decisions are still made at the municipal level; however local policies are now required to align with the regional plan to achieve regional outcomes. Thus the new *Land Use Framework* introduces a more coherent planning hierarchy and a more centralized way of managing and monitoring both public and private land use.

Despite the intent of the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, however, there are limitations that undermine its stability. A significant contextual factor is the highly contentious issue of landowners’ property rights in the province. The regional plans authorized by the ALSA are legally binding on private lands and every land use authority in the province. So long as a reasonable use of the land is left to the property owner when the Province imposes land-use restrictions, no compensation is required, except where a “conservation directive” is employed to enhance conservation, scenic or agricultural values (Kaplinsky & Percy, 2014). Because of strong public opposition, the Alberta Government amended the ALSA in 2011 to allow for greater compensation to landowners (see Section 19.1) and initiated a Property Rights Task

Force that same year. In its report the task force noted that “rather than establishing greater certainty about how land and resources are managed, the new legislation and processes have generated confusion and concern” (Government of Alberta, 2012, p.15). Many Albertans agreed with the need for regional planning as a way to protect prime agricultural land, but felt the approach was too “heavy-handed and restrictive” (p.15). Ultimately the report noted property owners’ desire for a more comprehensive compensation framework when land rights were appropriated for the public good, and a clear definition of property rights that was enshrined in legislation. These concerns are reflected in the final version of the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, released in September 2014 after three phases of public consultation. The plan includes no legally binding regulations for agricultural land protection and is thus considerably watered down from the original intent of the *Land Use Framework*.

Key informants generally agree that the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* represents a beneficial document for agricultural land management and introduces greater stability than the prior provincial policies. However, the lack of enforceability perpetuates uncertainty in the local land-use decision process, particularly in areas experiencing diverse development pressures. One Rocky View County representative commented that,

The South Sask Plan I think is a great document. The only thing that is missing is that link to require compliance. [...] The Provincial policy needs to be there. Whether it’s weak – weakly enforceable or not, at least it is there and so at the staff level we can keep holding up this provincial policy [...] as we develop things (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

Municipalities continue to have authority for land-use planning and development decisions on all lands within their boundaries, so long as they comply with the regional plan where required. Key informants generally agree that this local control is a beneficial aspect of Alberta’s *Land Use Framework*, given that municipalities have an in-depth knowledge of their immediate context and needs and can therefore make decisions that make sense locally (Rocky View County Stakeholders 1 & 5; External Stakeholder 1). However, land uses set out in municipal planning policies are often discretionary and open to interpretation by local development authorities and councils. Therefore some informants feel that stronger provincial leadership is required in order to make it easier for the municipality to turn down applications that are unsympathetic with County plans. As one stakeholder commented,

There’s plus’s and minus’s on the local control, because you do have a better overall perspective on the immediate area in question. But it’s sometimes harder to say no to local demands. [...] So when you have a higher provincial level they’re sometimes – they’re sometimes – able to make harder decisions that wouldn’t be made at the local level (Rocky View County Stakeholder 1).

Some further uncertainty exists at the provincial level because the legislative framework lacks a certain level of horizontal integration; as the SSRP notes, planning and decision-making in Alberta are carried out under various provincial legislation and policies, applied by a range of decision-makers (Government of Alberta, 2014). As of May 24, 2015, when Alberta’s new cabinet was sworn in and several ministries were reorganized, the *Land Use Framework* and *Water for Life* will be managed by Alberta Environment, formerly the Ministry of Environment

and Sustainable Resource Development. The *Agricultural Operations Practices Act* will continue to be the responsibility of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, which now falls under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It is noted that rural development has not been retained in the name of the latter ministry; whether this signals a change in the ministry's mandate remains to be seen. One could argue that many of the policies and programmes pursued in the name of rural development in the past related either directly or indirectly to the international competitiveness and food sovereignty policy regimes.

One area of the framework that has had stronger provincial oversight and a higher level of stability since 2002 is confined feeding operations (CFOs), which are exempt from municipal planning approval. To help site large-scale intensive livestock operations and to minimize conflicts between these operations and other non-agricultural land uses, the province introduced the *Agricultural Operations Practices Act* (AOPA) in 2001. Under the current system, the Natural Resources Conservation Board is responsible for approving, subject to among other things an approved manure management plan, and monitoring CFOs; the AOPA also sets minimum distance separation zones and serves as Alberta's right-to-farm legislation. Because primary responsibility for CFOs rests with the NRCB, which follows a process supported by strong and clear regulations, and which places tight constraints around the appeal process, this aspect of the legislative framework is much more stable and less subject to political influence than others.

As of May 2015, the status of the agricultural land-use framework in Alberta is in flux as a result of a major change in government. After more than four decades in power, the PCs were recently defeated by the NDP, led by Premier Rachel Notley, with the Wildrose Party making up Alberta's Official Opposition. The future policy direction for agricultural land-use planning remains to be seen.

Political context and policy regimes

To understand how political contexts and multiple public priorities influence agricultural land use planning in Canada, and to what extent it has already had an impact, we will examine the interaction of three current policy regimes: global competitiveness, farmland preservation, and food sovereignty. A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved. Actors of agricultural policy regimes include a wide range of interests represented by citizens, all levels of government, local organisations, professional organisations representing producers, farmers and ranchers themselves, unions, industry trade associations and environmental groups, among others. In Canada, the two policy regimes of global competitiveness and farmland preservation have influenced policies for several decades. The recent emergence of food sovereignty as a policy regime reflects growing public concerns about the security and safety of Canada's domestic food supply, and may have significant implications for Canada's global competitiveness and the conservation and use of agricultural land. In this section we described each of these three policy regimes. A description of the criteria we used to determine the level of influence of each policy regime is provided in the appendix.

Global competitiveness

A policy regime of global competitiveness has strengthened over the past forty years at both the national and provincial levels, usually in the context of pressures on industry viability in the face of freer trade. An interest in global competitiveness often requires policies and strategies to successfully integrate into the global economy. A recent report on competitiveness by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food focussed on access to new markets, barriers to trade, food safety and product labelling, and market concentration within sectors. Input to this report was provided by national and regional commodity trade associations, meat and other food processors, transportation associations, and policy institutes, among others. Scholars in this field, such as Grace Skogstad, have noted that, although the membership of the agri-food policy community in Canada is strong individually, the community is nationally fragmented and organisationally divided, as national policies do not always serve all members or geographic regions equally. For example, export-oriented policies may promote the export of raw food products at the risk of higher prices for domestic food processors. Such policies also have regional differences, where policies may benefit one region (food processing in central Canada) to the disadvantage of food producers in another region (food producers in the prairies). Notwithstanding these internal challenges, the competitiveness policy regime continues to strengthen, as evident in the Growing Forward 2 (GF2) policy framework announced on September 14, 2012.

Key ideas from GF2:

- Competitiveness and Market Growth: The sector needs to continually increase productivity, to reduce costs and to respond to consumer demands, such as for high-value products with specific attributes. Competitiveness also means increasing our share of domestic and international markets.
- The key drivers are:
 - o Innovation: The sector adopts and implements new technologies and innovations, creating and using knowledge to develop new products, technologies and business management practices that drive down costs, increase productivity and respond to consumer demands.
 - o Institutional and Physical Infrastructure: Effective rules, regulations, standards, organizations, and physical infrastructure allow firms to operate and markets to function efficiently for a profitable sector and the well-being of Canadians.
- Competing on cost: One factor in assessing the competitiveness of Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector is how cost-efficient Canadian agricultural producers, manufacturers and exporters are in relation to competitor suppliers. This is influenced by a number of factors, including natural resource availability and use, input prices, labour availability and cost, and scale of operation.
- Innovation is critical for improved cost competitiveness. Innovation can lead to improved productivity and reduced costs. However, despite significant agricultural research, the sector could be more effective in applying knowledge and innovating along the supply chain.
- Focus on the role of innovation for productivity growth and the ongoing efforts to access emerging growth markets.

- Continual innovation and adaptation has contributed to increased yields and the creation of new products and production methods
- Increased trade, globalization of supply chains, and more exacting consumer demands have increased the importance of rules, regulations, and other market infrastructure
- Additional industry capacity and infrastructure investments, such as information and communication technologies, will be required to enable producers, processors, buyers, and government agencies to adjust effectively to new food safety regulations and buyer assurance standards.
- Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and trade promotion efforts are essential.

Food sovereignty

For our purposes, food sovereignty is a broad term that focusses on the right of citizens to have greater control over its food supply. The term encompasses food security and food safety. Food security is concerned about the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food.

While the control of food supplies were among the earliest drivers of nation-building and human settlements, food sovereignty, as defined by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, is about the right of peoples to define, protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and land policies that promote safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable food production that is culturally appropriate. Within Canada, the growth of the local food movement, as evident by the increasing number of farmers markets and citizen-based initiatives like community gardens and local food councils, has been the forerunner of recent calls for citizens having greater control over national agri-food policies. The National Farmers Union, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and Food Secure Canada are some of the national actors calling for changes. Adopting agri-food policies that promote greater food sovereignty could easily reach into people's daily lives, with economic, social and environmental implications, both positive and negative. Such policy will be regarded quite differently depending on a person's values and priorities, and where agriculture fits among them.

Farmland preservation

Different terms are used in this policy regime including farmland conservation, farmland preservation, and farmland protection. For our project we will use farmland protection and farmland preservation in two specific ways:

- Farmland protection: a narrower term that we will use to refer specifically to land use planning policies that aim to *protect* farmland so that it is available for farm uses; we will use farmland protection in relation to the contents of a legislative framework.
- Farmland preservation: is a broader term that concerns all aspects of policies related to farmland including policies that not only protect farmland but are also concerned with soil and landscape conservation, etc.; can be synonymous with farmland conservation; we will refer to all that is related to farmland preservation as a policy regime.

As a policy regime, preserving farmland first garnered serious public attention in Canada in the early 1970s with most provincial and local jurisdictions having some form of legislation or

guidelines in place by the end of the 1970s. The historical development of farmland policies in Canada were accompanied by a wide range of economic, environmental, and social issues that were associated with and re-inforced tensions among different land uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, and natural resource development.

Correspondingly, motivations for preserving farmland are influenced by factors such as food production, market value for land, environmental issues, amenity of rural landscapes, agrarian ideals and land use conflicts on the urban fringe. In spite of efforts over the past forty years, Canada has experienced a continual loss of prime farmland across the country. The issue is especially acute in Ontario, which contains the country's largest supply of prime agricultural lands, but concerns for the preservation of farmland exist across the country, albeit to varying degrees. But is also acute in other jurisdictions due to a much more limited and declining agricultural land base, such as in British Columbia and Québec.

Concern about the loss and fragmentation (parcelisation) of farmland continues to be an issue in the face of ongoing urban sprawl and alienation of farmland (i.e., farmland that is not being farmed or no longer suitable for farming). These issues often lead to further problems, such as conflicts or tension with residential, recreational, infrastructure, and industrial land uses. Loss of farmland is often associated with concerns about the supply of local food and, increasingly, it is concerned with "land grabbing" through foreign or out-of-province ownership of land.

Introduction

Purpose and scope of case study

In this report we present the results of a case study of agricultural land use planning in Rocky View County, which surrounds the City of Calgary on three sides. This case study contributes to three areas of knowledge. First it is part of a national project to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland. For our purposes, the case study contributes to an understanding of the state of agricultural land use planning in southern Alberta, where farmland protection faces pressures from urban expansion, countryside residential development and various natural resource developments. Finally, the case study lends insight to the state of agricultural land use planning in Rocky View County.

The case study of Rocky View County involved an assessment of the breadth and quality of the legislative framework that governs agricultural land use planning, including the documentation of policies, legislation, and governance structures and a detailed analysis of the contents of these documents. The case study also involved an assessment of the political context within which agricultural land use planning processes are completed and decisions are made. Our assessment of the political context included documentation and analysis of three policy regimes: farmland preservation, global competitiveness, and food sovereignty (see the appendix for a description of each policy regime).

Methods

Legislative framework:

The methods used to complete the preliminary assessment involved several activities:

- Document agricultural land use planning legislative framework:
The legislative framework consists of policies, legislation (and by-laws), and governance structures related to agricultural land use planning at local, regional (or upper-tier), and provincial levels of government. The policies and legislation were identified as enforceable, aspirational, or enabling. Refer to the appendix for definitions of these and other terms.
- Content analysis of legislative framework documents:
After identifying the relevant documents the next step was to analyse the level of detail of each document's contents. The aim of the content analysis is to assess the breadth and quality of the legislative framework.

Political context:

- Policy regimes
We analysed the contents of documents with regard for the presence and importance of policy regimes. The documents included those identified in the legislative framework. The aim is to assess the extent to which agricultural land use planning accommodates the three

policy regimes, influences land use decisions, and encompasses a comprehensive view of food systems planning, activities, and issues.

Overview of Rocky View County

Rocky View County is located in southern Alberta, surrounding the City of Calgary to the west, north and east of its urban boundaries. The County also shares a border with the city of Cochrane, six rural municipalities, two First Nation Reserves and five towns (see Figure 1). The County has a population of 38,055, which represents an increase of 9.9% since 2006 (Rocky View County, n.d.). Overall, 39% of the population lives in agriculture areas, 47% in country residential and 14% within hamlets. Agriculture remains the dominant land use in Rocky View, accounting for 90 per cent of its land base; however, the County places increasing importance on diversifying its tax base through natural resource development, and regional industrial and commercial development (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a).

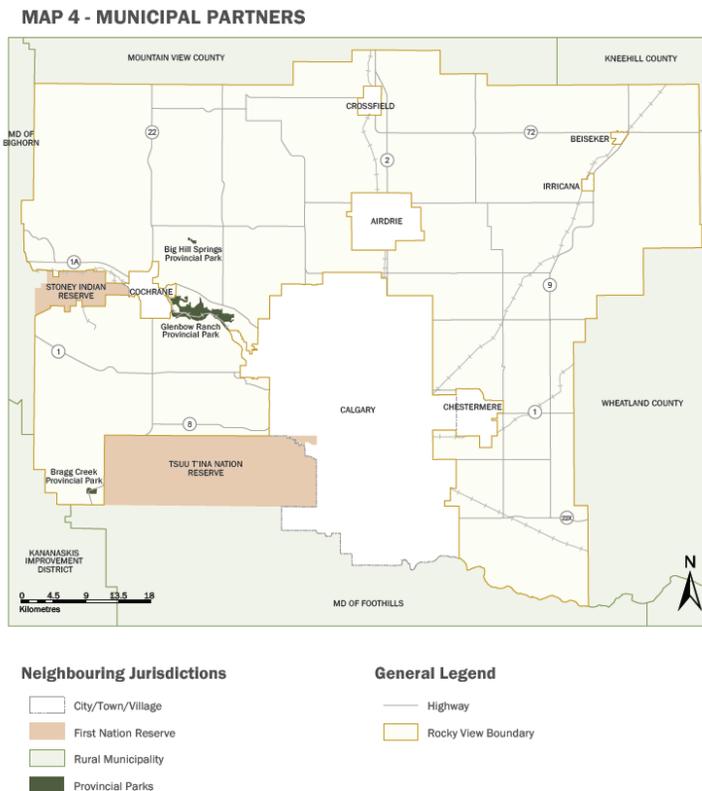


Figure 1: Rocky View County Municipal Partners (Rocky View County, 2013)

The City of Calgary has had a major impact on the landscape of the County, which experienced a 93% overall population growth between 1991 and 2011 (Rocky View County, 2013). Annexations from neighbouring jurisdictions reduced the size of the County and the availability of productive farmland; within the region over 105,000 acres were annexed between 1980 and 2010. The second largest factor in the loss of farmland is the growth of oil and gas activity in the region. Since 1980, 18,000 acres of land have been sequestered for this industrial

activity (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). In addition to the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land, growth creates a number of other challenges including high speculative land values beyond agricultural productivity values, resulting partly from the expectation that land will be annexed and developed for urban uses, and partly from increased demand for country residential development (Calgary Food Committee, 2012). On the other hand, growth presents significant opportunities for Rocky View County, such as the potential to play a key role in a more regional food system. Rocky View County has implemented area structure plans and conceptual schemes to manage development in several communities (Rocky View County, 2013). The County has also developed a *Growth Management Discussion Paper* outlining modest growth targets (2.5% of projected regional population) and identifying specific residential areas and hamlets as primary growth areas (Rocky View County, 2012).

Rocky View's current *County Plan* (Rocky View County, 2013) identifies four distinct regions within the County: West, Central West, East and Central East Rocky View. The region of West Rocky View has a higher elevation and a moist climate creating a shorter growing season; therefore the main agricultural activities include large-scale ranching and forestry. Within its boundaries are the Bow River, Elbow River and Red Deer River watersheds, which are significant areas for natural ecosystem conservation. The Central West region is defined by the dramatic landscape of the foothills transitioning into the grasslands, which has attracted country residential developments. There are two provincial parks within the boundaries of the Central West region, and numerous recreational amenities. Agricultural activities include ranching, equestrian operations and smaller-scale forms of agriculture such as greenhouses and nurseries.

The East Rocky View region has experienced the lowest rate of population growth, and ecologically is defined by prairie grasslands and major wetland complexes. The region's dry climate and high water table provide a longer growing season and ideal conditions for the production of cereal crops, oil seeds and hay. A complex network of irrigation canals allow for agricultural activity on smaller parcels of land, and many of the intensive farming operations (dairy and feedlots) within the County are found in this region.

Central East Rocky View is ecologically similar to the East; however it is dominated by the Queen Elizabeth II highway and interactions with adjacent cities and towns. Central East Rocky View, which is part of the Calgary-to-Edmonton corridor, is the commercial hub of the County and growth is expected to continue exerting pressures on the region's large and small-scale agricultural operations (Rocky View County, 2013).

Agricultural profile

The dominant agricultural land uses in Rocky View County include ranching (primarily beef cattle) and large scale cropping (Rocky View County, 2011). Black chernozemic soils are found throughout the county; however each region has unique biophysical attributes and climate, and therefore different edaphological soil capabilities. As outlined in the County's *Agricultural Context Study* (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a), approximately 60% of Rocky View's land base has no significant limitations to crop production. The majority of this productive soil is found in the eastern regions of the County, which are included in the Western Irrigation District and thus have a reliable water source for producers (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). Large farms (1120-3519 acres) and very large farms (3520+ acres) together constitute 66% of the

overall land area in the County. Of the total 1,551 farms, more than 900 produce tame hays, and a majority of these are found in the Northern regions. The key field crops produced in Rocky View County are cereal grains (567 farms) and oil seeds (191 operations). Cereal grain acreage accounts for over one third of the total area of Rocky View County.

The western regions of Rocky View contain soils with limitations to crop production that range from low to very severe. Characterized by their native fescue grasses, these areas support ranching and grazing activities, representing a continuation of the historical uses of that region since approximately 1880 (Kariel, 1997; Evans, 2004; Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). Although cattle-ranching is still the primary activity, restrictions in the cattle market due to the 2005 Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis created challenges for beef producers and reduced the number of cattle operators (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). The popularity of equestrian activities in the County, conversely, has contributed to an increasing number of horse and pony operations (Rocky View County, 2011). Additionally, a small percentage of farms are dedicated to poultry, sheep, goat and specialty livestock production (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). Beyond these predominant agricultural practices there are a variety of vegetable and potato farms and nearly 100 operations in the County that produce other specialty crops (Rocky View County, 2011).

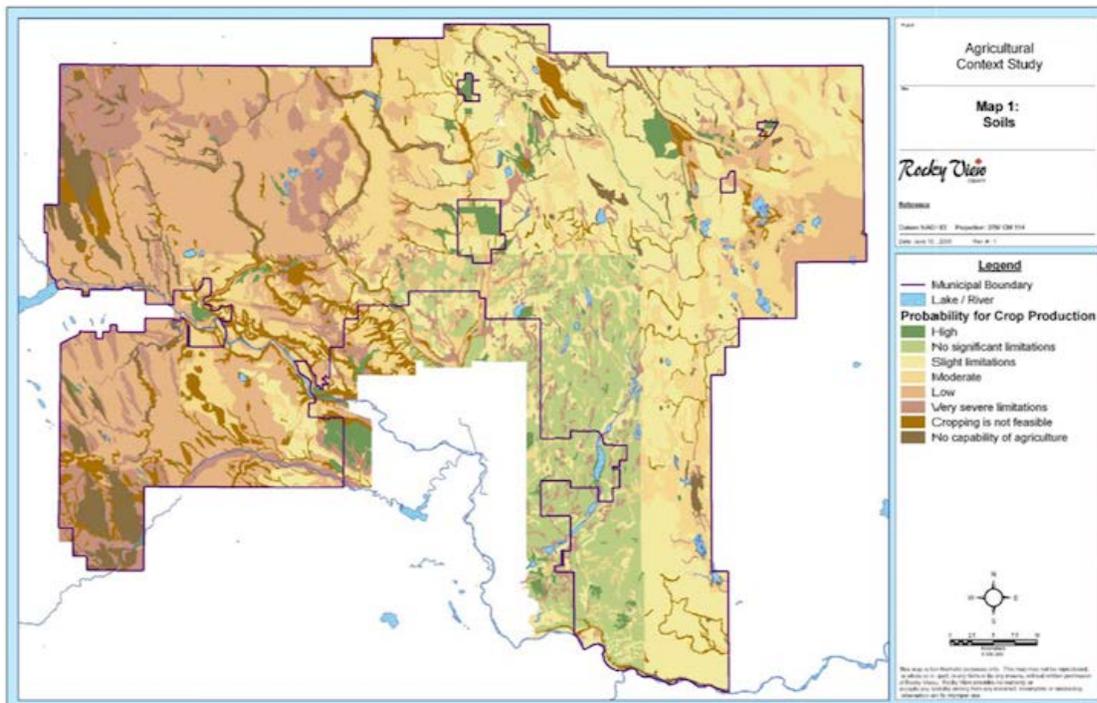


Figure 2: Rocky View County Soils Classifications (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a).

Agriculture continues to evolve and diversify in the county, creating a balance between conventional farming and new areas of production. The number of greenhouse, nursery and organic products have increased dramatically in response to demand for locally grown food (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a). Though overall there is a notable tendency toward larger corporate farms and consolidation of land holdings, the County's *Agricultural Context*

Study (2009a) also notes a recent trend toward smaller holding agricultural parcels, for use in hobby-based farms, smaller farm enterprises, and more unconventional farming operations.

The agricultural industry has a significant economic impact on Rocky View County. Capital investment is estimated at \$260,346,000 in machinery and equipment; \$124,682,110 in livestock and poultry; and \$2,792,119,581 in land and buildings (Rocky View County, 2011). Agriculture employs 1465 people in Rocky View County, excluding general labourers, with a total of 2295 farm operators (Rocky View County, 2011). Of concern to the viability of the agriculture industry is the increasing average age of agricultural operators in the county, which in 2006 was 54 years, and the fact that fewer young people are becoming primary operators (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a).

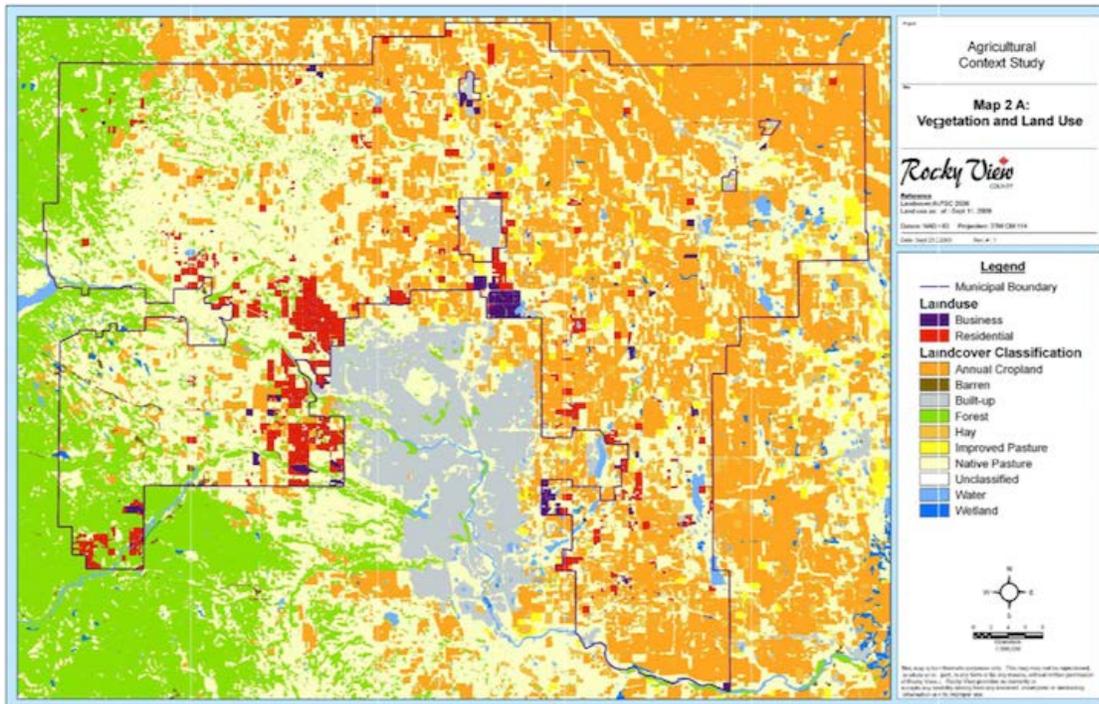


Figure 2: Rocky View County Vegetation and Land Use (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a).

Results

In this section we present the final results for the case study of Rocky View County. We begin with the results of our assessment of the legislative framework of the case study site within the context of regional and provincial policies and legislation. We then present the results of the content analyses of local government policies and legislation followed by the results of the political context, which includes our assessment of the influence of the three policy regimes (farmland preservation, food sovereignty, and global competitiveness). The section ends with results of the stakeholder analysis. We discuss the significance of these results in the next section.

State of agricultural land use planning

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, concerns about agricultural land in Alberta were focused on three issues resulting largely from population growth and urban sprawl: The conversion of prime farmland to other uses, the fragmentation of the farmland base, and the right to farm (Resource Planning Group, 2002). In response to these concerns, several initiatives were introduced as a way to monitor land use and to minimize farmland loss in Alberta. Alberta's *Planning Act* came into effect in 1977 to ensure long-term planning at the regional and municipal level. This Act provided for the establishment of ten regional planning commissions, each of which adopted a regional plan containing general discussions on protecting agricultural land. However, these regional plans included vague, permissive and uncontroversial language, such as "may" and "should," leaving the detailed planning and regulation to local governments. Thus the regional plans had only a minimal impact on municipal autonomy with regards to land use choices (Laux, 1990).

The Province also initiated Agricultural Land Base Monitoring studies in the late 1970s to measure the amount of farmland taken out of production (through urban annexations, roads, oil and gas wells, and other non-agricultural uses) and new land brought into production (primarily through public land dispositions) over five-year periods. One of the significant findings of the first reporting period from 1976 to 1980 was that land with the highest capacity for production was being removed at a faster rate than less productive land, often due to urban annexations (Woloshyn, 1983). Partly in response to this trend, the Alberta Government initiated a task force in 1982, followed by the Alberta Agricultural Land Base Study, to develop an approach for expanding the provincial agricultural land base and increasing the intensity of production (Birch, 1987).

A severe economic downturn during the 1980s to 1990s resulted in many farm abandonments and prompted a new provincial focus on economic diversification; at the same time, conflicts arose due to the insufficiency of the government's multiple use approach to managing various industrial resource development, agricultural, recreational and traditional uses of public land. These conflicts intensified with the upswing in Alberta's resource development activities, and the related pressures caused by unprecedented flows of people into the province (Hanson, 2013). Provincial monitoring of Alberta's agricultural land base during this period confirms again that, while the net loss of farmland was fairly minimal (less than one tenth of one percent over any five-year reporting period), most of the land taken out of production had the highest capability for cereal and oilseed production. Between 1991 and 1995, for example, over half of the agricultural land loss occurred on higher quality soils (Resource Planning Group,

2002).

A significant change in the land-use planning framework occurred in 1994, when the *Planning Act* was integrated into the provincial government's new *Municipal Government Act* (Section 17). This move abolished regional planning commissions and transferred the responsibility for agricultural land protection to municipalities (Resource Planning Group, 2002).¹ Two years later, the Province approved a set of Land Use Policies, pursuant to Section 622 of the *Municipal Government Act*, in order to guide municipalities in their land use decisions. The 1996 Land Use Policies described land use planning as both a provincial and municipal responsibility (note the omission of a reference to regional planning), and outlined an overall goal to foster land use patterns that included a mix of agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, public and recreational land uses. Section 6.1 of the Land Use Policies encouraged four specific policies for municipalities pertaining to agriculture, which included identifying areas where agricultural activities should be a primary land use; limiting fragmentation of agricultural lands and their premature conversion to other uses; directing non-agricultural development to areas where it would not constrain agricultural activities; and minimizing conflicts between intensive agricultural operations and incompatible land uses. At no point in the 1996 document is agriculture, or any other land-use activity for that matter, assigned a privileged position in terms of the allocation of land to competing uses. Under the prevailing political culture of the day, the view was widely held both within government and amongst a great many of the general public, especially in rural parts of the province, that this process was best left to the market place.

A report compiled in 2002 by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development found that rural municipalities in the province universally recognized the protection of agriculture and agricultural land as a fundamental goal; however, the success of their farmland protection objectives depended on how policies were interpreted and enacted by the planning and approving authorities, municipal councils and appeal boards (Resource Planning Group, 2002). A majority of rural municipalities identified country residential development as the greatest pressure being exerted on agricultural land. Urban growth was creating high demand for land, particularly along the corridors from Calgary to Edmonton and Calgary to Canmore, thus driving up land values and encouraging landowners to sell part or all of their land; across Alberta over three quarters of subdivided farmland was being converted to country residential developments (Resource Planning Group, 2002). While country residential development tended to increase conflicts between agricultural operations and neighbouring non-farm residents, many municipalities felt pressured to allow it in order to diversify their revenue base and reduce their reliance on tax revenue from farmland. These land allocation decisions established a difficult environment for agricultural producers to perform daily operations and also created challenges in finding locally acceptable sites for new intensive livestock operations. Growth pressures were exacerbated by the concern that the agricultural "voice" was inadequately represented in municipal council chambers; in Rocky View County, for example, only about one-third of councilors as of 2002 were farmers or ranchers (Resource Planning Group, 2002).

Under the provincial Land Use Policies, municipalities were "encouraged" to limit

¹ While Regional Planning Commissions were abolished altogether under the MGA, their roll vis-à-vis regional scale planning had been slowly eroding in the year leading up to the new act. By the time the MGA received Royal Assent, Regional Planning Commissions were largely advisory bodies. For many, their principle task involved providing planning services to those member municipalities lacking human resources in this area.

farmland fragmentation and conversion, but the effectiveness of the PLUPs and local bylaws was not monitored (Cathcart, 2013). Accurate provincial data on the loss of agricultural land are not available after 1996, but estimates compiled by consultants for the Government of Alberta suggest that between 1996 and 2009 Alberta experienced a net loss of approximately 400,000 acres of agricultural land – a significant amount of which (183,000 acres, or 86% of the total provincial loss) occurred along the Edmonton-Calgary corridor (Cathcart, 2013). One farmland protection advocacy group suggests that Alberta lost 95 quarters (15,200 acres) of land per year to development between 1996 and 2009, and that the trend continues (MacArthur, 2014). Others emphasize the concern that, as in previous years, most of the land being lost to urban expansion and oil and gas developments continues to constitute the most suitable land for crop production (Glen, 2013).

The provincial Land Use Policies' lack of clarity and specificity resulted in significant variation in terms of how municipalities managed land use decisions. Criteria for first and subsequent parcel out subdivisions, for example, were often unclear and difficult to interpret. A 2002 survey found that half of municipal development officers across the province felt the land use policies provided too little guidance in their land use planning and practice. They called for more regulations for urban fringe and highway corridor development; stronger provincial guidelines paired with local-level decision making; more inter-municipal planning with regional advisory boards; and stronger, more prescriptive provincial land use policies. Elected municipal officials likewise advocated for provincially supported guidelines surrounding intensive livestock operations, provincial incentives to protect farmland and minimize fragmentation, provincial guidelines to assist with long-term planning, and other changes to the provincial land use policies (Resource Planning Group, 2002).

In response to these issues, as well as broader public demand for ecosystem management, the Alberta government released a new Land-Use Framework (LUF) in 2008, followed by the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* in 2009. The LUF calls for the creation of seven regional plans to deal with the cumulative effects of various types of development, and the conservation and stewardship of both public and private lands (Hansen, 2013). The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, which incorporates the Calgary and Rocky View County area, is the second of these regional plans to be completed. The Alberta Government's new policy direction includes a continuation of the intent of the Land Use Policies through regional planning; however, it also calls for the implementation of regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of agricultural land fragmentation and conversion (Cathcart, 2013). The LUF also provides for voluntary strategies for conservation and stewardship on private and public lands, including conservation easements and land trusts, transfer of development credits, and other market-based incentives and tools to provide ecological goods and services (Government of Alberta, 2008).

In addition to demands for ecosystem management, other public priorities have an influence on agricultural land use planning processes in Rocky View County. Major issues surround the County's need to diversify its tax base, as agriculture generates only 2% of revenues despite occupying approximately 90% of the County's land base (Spruit, 2013). Some of the proposals for commercial or industrial development, however, conflict with agricultural uses. Many residents are opposed to development such as the Rockyview Motorsports Park, for example, which is proposed for an agricultural and rural residential area in the County. While the project forecasts \$500,000 in annual taxes, residents are concerned about issues such as noise, disruption to the rural way of life, and fragmented farmland (ruralrights.ab, 2014). The County's

modest growth targets (which aim to lower the County's share of the projected regional population to 2.5%) are strongly supported by residents, but not by developers who want the flexibility to build at higher densities and capture more of the growth benefits in the region. At the heart of the issue is the question of whether landowners should have the right to make decisions about how their properties are used (Massot, 2013a; Massot, 2013b). Public consultations and media reports regarding current development proposals suggest that many Rocky View residents oppose large development projects, and place a high value on preserving prime agricultural and grazing farms (Duckworth; 2014; Massot, 2013a; Massot, 2013b; Massot, 2014; Rocky View Municipal District, 2009b).

Other concerns influencing the local agricultural land use planning framework center on the issue of food security. Within the City of Calgary there is an increasing interest in local food, small-scale, sustainable agriculture, and innovative food culture. Many restaurants have begun to source their produce from local producers or to experiment with growing their own food on rooftop gardens (Elliott, 2013). SPIN (Small Plot Intensive Farming) producers borrow neighbours' yards to cultivate vegetable gardens (Pike, 2014), and grocery stores are collaborating with local producers to offer pop-up farmers markets (Richards, 2014). Farmers markets more generally have seen significant growth in the province, with visitors spending an estimated \$878 million in 2012 (Kienlen, 2014). In 2009 the City of Calgary established the Calgary Food Committee, which produced the *Calgary EATS! Food System Assessment and Action Plan* (2012). This is a comprehensive plan for creating a "sustainable and resilient food system for the Calgary region so that every Calgarian has access to local, healthy and environmentally friendly food" (Calgary Food Committee, 2012, p.2). The basis of the food plan are six food-related targets previously established in the imagineCALGARY sustainability plan; these include that Calgarians support local food production by 2036; and that, by the same year, the consumption of urban and regionally produced food by Calgarians increases to 30% (imagineCALGARY, n.d.). The largely urban demand for local, healthy, and sustainably produced food has significant potential implications for agricultural land use planning in Rocky View County. The County recognizes that development puts significant pressures on its agricultural land; however, it also realizes its strategic position relative to City of Calgary, and the opportunity for agricultural producers to play a key role in a regional food system (Rocky View County, 2013).

Legislative framework

The legislative framework consists of policies, regulations, and governance structures related to agricultural land use planning at local, regional, and provincial levels of government. Policy documents were identified as enforceable, aspirational, or enabling (refer to the appended glossary for definitions of these and other terms).

Currently, the *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) is the primary legislation governing planning on private lands in Alberta. Part 17 of the MGA, Planning and Development, delegates responsibility and authority to municipal governments for local land-use planning and development on all lands within their boundaries; this includes the creation of municipal development plans, area structure plans and land-use bylaws. As far as specific protection for agriculture or agricultural uses of land, the MGA states that, "municipalities must consider the protection of agricultural operations" (part 17, article 639.1).

Under the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, municipal governments continue to have authority for land-use decisions. However, local government bodies and decision-making bodies are required to ensure their regulatory instruments comply with the SSRP, and must also use the regional plan to inform their policies. The SSRP's objective for agriculture is that "the region's agricultural industry is maintained and diversified." The first strategy under this objective is to "maintain an agricultural land base by reducing the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land" (Government of Alberta, 2014, p.44). According to the SSRP's implementation plan (Government of Alberta, 2014, p.109), municipalities are "expected" to:

- Identify areas where agricultural activities, including extensive and intensive agricultural and associated activities, should be the primary land use in the region.
- Limit the fragmentation of agricultural lands and their premature conversion to other, non-agricultural uses, especially within areas where agriculture has been identified as a primary land use in the region. Municipal planning, policies and tools that promote the efficient use of land should be used where appropriate to support this strategy.
- Employ appropriate planning tools to direct non-agricultural subdivision and development to areas where such development will not constrain agricultural activities, or to areas of lower-quality agricultural land.
- Minimize conflicts between intensive agricultural operations and incompatible land uses by using appropriate planning tools, setback distances and other mitigating measures.

These policies do not represent a dramatic departure from the previous Land Use Policies, and have no binding legal effect. However, there is a stronger directive, as municipalities are "expected" rather than "encouraged" to comply. There is also greater emphasis on the use of appropriate municipal planning, policies and tools to accomplish the overall objective of reducing agricultural land fragmentation and conversion. The SSRP also includes regulatory details for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on specific indicators, indicating a shift to greater oversight for agricultural land management at the provincial level. One notable change enabled by the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and supported by the SSRP is the introduction of voluntary tools to protect agricultural land. Section 29 of the ALSA recognizes the "protection, conservation or enhancement of agricultural land or land for agricultural purposes" as a valid purpose for conservation easements. The ALSA further allows for conservation directives within a regional plan to permanently protect agricultural values, amongst other values (see Section 37), as well as permitting Transfer of Development Credit schemes that recognize agricultural land protection as a primary purpose (Section 49).

As specified in both the MGA and the ALSA, agricultural land-use planning decisions are made primarily at the local government level. Within Rocky View County there are a number of key plans and policies that inform agricultural land-use decisions. The County completed an *Agricultural Context Study* in 2009, followed by an *Agriculture Master Plan (AMP)* in 2011 (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009a; Rocky View County, 2011). Specific agricultural land use planning recommendations from the AMP were incorporated into the *Rocky View County Plan* (Rocky View County, 2013), which replaced the County's previous *Municipal Development Plan* (Rocky View Municipal District, 1998) in 2013. Local land use decisions are governed by the County's *Land Use Bylaw* (Rocky View County, 2014), which establishes the development permit process, regulates the size and use of land and buildings, classifies land use

districts and determines permitted and discretionary uses for each land use district. Regulations are further outlined in numerous Intermunicipal Development Plans and Area Structure Plans that provide a framework for proposed land uses in specific areas. Meanwhile, the *Rocky View 2060 Growth Management Strategy* (Municipal District of Rocky View, 2009b) and *Rural Growth Management: A Discussion on Growth* (Rocky View County, 2012) provide broad strategic direction to manage residential and business growth. Rocky View's Agricultural Service Board, operating under the provincial *Agricultural Service Board Act*, serves as an advisory body to Council on agricultural matters affecting residents, and also promotes and develops agricultural policies.

The *Calgary Metropolitan Plan* (CMP; Calgary Regional Partnership, 2014) is a regional document created by the Calgary Regional Partnership (CRP) to address long-term growth in the Calgary region. The CMP includes policies on agricultural lands, and member municipalities have committed to minimizing fragmentation and conversion of "better" agricultural lands to other land uses (policy 3.c.1). However, the CMP has no jurisdiction over municipal development planning. Further, Rocky View County is not currently a signatory to the plan, having left the partnership in 2009 over concerns about governance, development densities and water (Calgary Regional Partnership, 2013). To date the Province has not required the three non-participating municipalities, Rocky View County, and the MD's of Foothills and Wheatland, to collaborate.

Agriculture in Alberta is impacted by a number of other policies and legislative instruments. The *Soil Conservation Act* (Government of Alberta, 1935; revised 2000) encourages sound soil conservation practices to preserve Alberta's agricultural land base, and to ensure long-term productivity in the farming sector. The *Water Act* (Government of Alberta, 1999) gives agricultural users permission to divert water through water licenses, and the *Irrigation Districts Act* (Government of Alberta, 2000) deals with water use and conveyance agreements; these are crucial to the success of agriculture in Alberta as they provide a reliable supply of water to increase crop yields, as well as supporting food, feed and bio-industrial processing plants (Government of Alberta, 2014). The *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* (AOPA), which became law in 2001, transferred primary jurisdiction for large-scale livestock operations from municipalities to the Natural Resources Conservation Board. In addition to providing a consistent framework across the province for approving and monitoring Confined Feeding Operations (CFOs), the AOPA protects agricultural operators who are following generally accepted industry practices from liability nuisance suits, and establishes minimum distance separation zones for confined feeding operations. In comparison to the previous municipal system, the AOPA has simplified the process for producers to site or expand CFOs by narrowing the definition of "directly affected" parties who have legal standing in the application process (Wilson, 2008). Agriculture in the province is further supported by Federal-Provincial-Territorial agricultural policies including Growing Forward 2; through this cost-sharing initiative, the provincial government commits to supporting agriculture with strategic investments.

In general Alberta's agricultural land use policies are framed by renewed Provincial Government efforts to enhance Alberta's competitiveness in the global economy (Alberta Competitiveness Council, 2011). In 2011, the Alberta Competitiveness Council's *Moving Alberta Forward* strategic plan identified Grains and Oil Seeds as one of four specific sectors requiring actions to enhance competitiveness, most of which involve policy change, innovation and marketing initiatives (Alberta Competitiveness Council, 2011). The current focus of the

agriculture industry is on innovation, maximizing value-added agricultural production, developing local, national and international markets, overcoming trade barriers, attracting investment and positioning Alberta as the preferred global supplier of agricultural products and services (Government of Alberta, 2014). Thus land use policies articulated in the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* favour the reduction of fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land specifically because of its value to the sustainable growth and diversification of the agriculture industry (See SSRP Strategy 1.1, Government of Alberta, 2014).

Table 1: Legislative Framework for Rocky View County

	POLICY	LEGISLATION	GOVERNANCE
PROVINCIAL	<p>Land Use Framework (2008)</p> <p>Growing Forward 2 (2013)</p> <p>Moving Alberta Forward (2011)</p>	<p><i>Municipal Government Act (1994; rev. 2000)</i></p> <p><i>Alberta Land Stewardship Act (2009)</i></p> <p><i>Water Act (1999; rev. 2000)</i></p> <p><i>Irrigation Districts Act (2000)</i></p> <p><i>Agricultural Operation Practices Act (rev. 2002)</i></p> <p><i>National Resources Conservation Board Act (1991; rev. 2000)</i></p> <p><i>Soil Conservation Act (1935; rev. 2000)</i></p> <p><i>Agricultural Service Board Act (2000)</i></p>	<p>Alberta Economic Development Authority</p> <p>National Resources Conservation Board</p>
REQUIRED INTEGRATION	<p>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, p.3: Municipal governments under part 17 of MGA are delegated with responsibility and authority for local land-use planning and development on all lands within their boundaries; this includes creation of development plans, area structure plans and land-use bylaws. Under the SSRP delegated authority remains with municipalities; however, municipal planning and development decisions “will have to be” in alignment with the regional plan.</p>		
REGIONAL		<p>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (2014)</p>	
REQUIRED INTEGRATION	<p>SSRP p.5: local government bodies and decision-making bodies will be required to ensure their regulatory instruments comply with the SSRP. They must also use the regional plan to inform their policies.</p>		
LOCAL	<p>Agriculture Master Plan (2011)</p> <p>Rocky View 2060 Growth Management Strategy (2009)/ Rural Growth Management: A Discussion on Growth (2012)</p> <p>Agriculture Right to Farm Policy (2013)</p>	<p><i>Rocky View County Plan (2013)</i> [Bylaw C-7280-2013]</p> <p><i>Rocky View County Land Use Bylaw (1998; rev.2014)</i> [Bylaw C-4841-97]</p>	<p>Rocky View County Agricultural Service Board</p> <p>Subdivision and Development Appeal Board</p>

Acts (provincial laws), bylaws (local government laws, e.g., official municipal plan) [italicised]

Enforceable policy, regulations pursuant to acts [bold]

Aspirational policy at all levels [plain text]

Content analysis of documents

After documenting the legislative framework we assessed the contents of the documents. The results of this content analysis reflect the breadth and quality of the legislative framework. For this we used a three-point (check mark) scale indicating different levels of detail from minimal (✓) to moderate (✓✓) to high (✓✓✓). The criteria we used for this part of the assessment are included in Appendix: Criteria for Evaluating Content of Legislative Framework.

Local government legislation documents

Analysis of the local Agricultural Land Use Planning legislative framework reveals a high level of integration among Rocky View County's local planning documents. The County uses a hierarchy of planning instruments to create a community- and site-specific policy framework designed to minimize uncertainty in the development process (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009b).

The County's *Agriculture Master Plan* (AMP) articulates an aspirational policy framework for agriculture and land use planning for agriculture. It was developed and accepted by Council as a strategic document to guide future planning decisions and policy development, specifically the new municipal development plan that was then in the early stages of creation. The development of the AMP involved extensive public and industry stakeholder consultations resulting in a broadly agreed upon vision for agriculture in the County. The new *County Plan*, approved in 2013, is a statutory document that refers directly to this vision and integrates many of the recommendations and principles contained in the AMP. Based on opportunities identified in the AMP, the *County Plan* articulates five clear goals for agriculture, 32 policies, and six action items. Enabling policies for agriculture are grouped into distinct themes and include:

- Partnering, Education and Food Production
- Business
- Land Use
- Farmstead
- Agriculture First Parcel Out
- Residential First Parcel Out
- Redesignation and Subdivision for Agricultural Purposes
- Confined Feeding Operations
- Minimize Land Use Conflict

Specific action items for agriculture in the *County Plan* include reviewing and revising the existing *Land Use Bylaw*, developing new policies and guidelines, and exploring provincial tools to achieve County goals for agriculture. For example, the goal to “support agricultural operators in going about their day to day business with minimum adverse impacts from non-agricultural land uses” is supported by policy 8.27, which states that incompatible land uses “shall not be supported” within the minimum distance separation of a confined feeding operation; the goal is further supported by the action item to develop a Right to Farm policy that aligns with provincial legislation and objectives (Rocky View County, 2013). An *Agriculture*

Right to Farm Policy (Rocky View County, 2013) was subsequently developed and implemented.

The policies in the *County Plan* are enacted through the *Land Use Bylaw* (LUB), which is a prescriptive regulation controlling individual property development. Adopted in 1998, the *Land Use Bylaw* has undergone numerous amendments by County Council, most recently in 2013-14 to reflect policies in the new *County Plan*. The LUB includes specific regulations governing activities such as subdivision and development, and provides clear guidelines for land use decisions. The LUB establishes permitted and discretionary uses within distinct Land Use Districts, which include five agricultural land use districts. The purpose and intent of these districts are clearly related to goals articulated in the *County Plan*. The Agricultural Holdings district, for example, “provides for traditional agricultural pursuits on large parcels of land, [also recognizing] the emerging trends towards new agricultural uses which may be successfully developed on smaller parcels of land” (p.110). The Ranch and Farm Three District, meanwhile, provides for a range of smaller parcel sizes for agricultural uses “to accommodate traditional and emerging trends in agriculture” (p.108). These uses support the *County Plan*’s land use policy 8.15, to “support and encourage the viability and flexibility of the agriculture sector by allowing a range of parcel sizes, where appropriate” (Rocky View County, 2013).

Another significant aspect of Rocky View County’s agricultural land use framework relates to “first parcel out” regulations. The AMP found that the County’s policy framework for agriculture first parcels out was overly restrictive and needed to be simplified in order to increase agricultural land management flexibility, and to provide opportunities for new operators to enter the industry on smaller scales (Rocky View County, 2011). Among other policy adjustments, the AMP recommended that the new municipal development plan support the subdivision of an agriculture first parcel out greater than 50 acres from previously unsubdivided land as a subdivision that did not require redesignation approval (Rocky View County, 2011). This simplified procedure was a major policy shift incorporated into the *County Plan* (see policy 8.18) and enabled through amendments to the *Land Use Bylaw* (see section 43.2, Minimum Parcel Size). The AMP notes that most countries around the world are moving in the opposite direction of increasing, rather than decreasing minimum farm size thresholds, and recognizes the concern that promoting the subdivision of smaller agricultural parcels could further fragment the land base. These risks are mitigated, however, by the lack of road infrastructure in many parts of the County and by the fact that farmers are likely to minimize the land taken out of production because of higher land values for smaller residential parcels. Further, the AMP points out that in any case final decisions for subdivision are at the discretion of the Province’s Subdivision Authority (Rocky View County, 2011).

Overall, Rocky View’s *Land Use Bylaw* states that in making its decisions, the Development Authority, which governs development and permit regulations, shall consider an application’s consistency with the *County Plan* and other Intermunicipal Development Plans, Area Structure Plans, Conceptual Schemes, Master Site Development Plans and County Policies (Rocky View County, 2014). From the perspective of the policies, this ensures a high degree of stability in land use decisions. On the other hand, the County policies are subject to review on an annual basis, and key informants generally agree that they are susceptible to political influence and development pressures (Rocky View County Stakeholders 2 & 4). One mitigating factor, however, is the provincially administered *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, which may help to minimize that political influence. While the SSRP did not come into force until September 2014,

the Province's *Land Use Framework* (the basis of all regional plans) was influential in the development of County policies (Rocky View County, 2013). The SSRP's Implementation Plan, though not legally binding, establishes a clear expectation for municipalities to identify areas where agriculture should be the primary land use; to limit the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land; to direct non-agricultural development away from agricultural lands; and to minimize conflicts between intensive agricultural operations and incompatible land uses (Government of Alberta, 2014, Strategies 8.19 to 8.22). Municipalities are required to ensure their regulatory instruments comply with the SSRP, within a period of either two or five years depending on the relevant section of legislation (Government of Alberta, 2014). While the strength and enforceability of these requirements are yet to be tested, municipal planners agree that the SSRP nevertheless serves as a beneficial document to guide local policy development (Rocky View County Stakeholders 1 & 2). As one planner and policy specialist with Rocky View County stated,

Hopefully [...] we'll be able to use [the SSRP] as support for the County Plan when we're trying to stick to the plan and not allow development everywhere within the region, sort of on an ad-hoc basis. So, you know, I'm hoping that because there is a bit higher expectation in the SSRP that that also buttresses what we are trying to do in the County Plan (Rocky View County Stakeholder 1).

Local government policy documents

Within the *County Plan*, agricultural strategies are balanced with other County priorities, which are primarily focused on growth. Growth management strategies recognize the broader development pressures and land use tensions facing the County and take a proactive approach that includes specific recommendations for agriculture. Among other purposes, the *Rocky View 2060 Growth Management Strategy* (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009b) helps to conserve agricultural land through the development of "growth nodes" that feature concentrated populations and more complete communities (p.18). Under the *Growth Management Strategy*, "lands not recognized as growth areas will retain their agricultural land-use priority" (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009b, p.250). The *Rural Growth Management Discussion Paper* (2012), based on the *Growth Management Strategy*, likewise supports agriculture through strategies that focus residential, business and industrial growth to strategic locations. Within the *Rural Growth Management Discussion Paper*, however, agriculture strategies are set within a broader strategic framework that recognizes the three fundamental principles of rural character, fiscal sustainability and environmental responsibility. Thus the growth management strategies for agriculture are less focused on protecting land than on supporting existing agricultural operations and providing opportunities to diversify the agriculture industry and the County's tax base through flexible agricultural land management policies and, again, focusing residential, business and industrial growth to strategic locations (Rocky View County, 2012).

Table 2. Contents of local agricultural land use legislative documents

	Legislative Context	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Regulations (enforceable policies, procedures)	Maps
<i>RVC County Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (a)	✓✓ (d)	✓✓✓ (g)	✓✓✓ (i)	✓✓ (l)
<i>RVC Land Use Bylaw</i>	✓ (b)	✓ (e)	X	✓✓✓ (j)	✓ (m)
<i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (c)	✓✓ (f)	✓✓✓ (h)	✓ (k)	✓✓✓ (n)

- (a) P.11 lists plans and legislation informing and guiding development of County Plan; Section 2.0 Planning Framework
- (b) Brief reference to compliance requirements in Section 4
- (c) Extensive legislative context set out in Introduction, pp.1-8.
- (d) Background described in 1.0, Context
- (e) Some context given within each section of Bylaw.
- (f) Background succinctly described on p.1.
- (g) Section 2.0, Vision and Principles (Agriculture is point 3); Action Items outlined in each policy section
- (h) Vision (strategic plan) and actions (implementation plan) form the majority of the SSRP.
- (i) Section 30.0, Implementation: Action Summary includes 22 Regulations among the action items to be carried out, primarily through amendments to the Land Use Bylaw or development of new regulatory policies. Policies within the County Plan itself are mandatory, without discretion, where “shall” is used (this occurs frequently throughout CP)
- (j) Land Use Bylaw is primary regulatory document for County; Section 18 defines Contravention and Enforcement
- (k) The only binding provisions in the SSRP are included in the relatively brief Regulatory Details section; the majority of the document consists of strategic and implementation plans.
- (l) Maps include: 1, Managing Growth; 2, Transportation; 3, Regions; 4, Municipal Partners; and 5, Growth Corridors/Areas
- (m) Maps include Schedule 2, lands in Calgary International Airport Vicinity; Schedule 7, Flood Risk Maps (set)
- (n) Fifteen maps included throughout SSRP, covering both public and private lands in the province and region.

Table 3. Breadth and depth of legislative context

	Legislative context (legislation and policies) (a)						Land use planning tools			Gov.	
	LUF/ ALSA (b)	GF2	MGA	WA	IDA	AOPA	Land Use Bylaw			NRCB	ASB
<i>RVC County Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (c)	X	✓✓✓ (f)	✓(i)	X	✓ (l)	✓✓✓ (o)			X	✓(q)
<i>RVC Land Use Bylaw</i>	X	X	✓✓✓ (g)	X	X	✓ (m)	n/a			✓ (p)	X
<i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (d)	✓✓ (e)	✓✓ (h)	✓✓ (j)	✓ (k)	✓✓ (n)	X			X	X

- (a) The *Calgary Metropolitan Plan* is not included in this framework analysis because currently Rocky View County is not a signatory.
- (b) The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* was not yet created when the County Plan and Agriculture Master Plan were developed.
- (c) County Plan guided and informed by LUF, p.11; reference to LUF in Section 7.0 Environment; Action item re. policy 7.26 to access Transfer Development Credits; Policy 13.12 re. conservation easements

- (d) SSRP was developed pursuant to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and the Land Use Framework.
- (e) GF2 named on p.11 (strategic plan) and p.75 (implementation plan)
- (f) County Plan guided and informed by MGA, p.11; 4.0 Planning Framework (cites Act); extensive other references throughout
- (g) Extensive definitions and references to MGA throughout
- (h) Named on p.3 (as main legislation governing private lands) and p.30 (listing of legislation).
- (i) Compliance with *Water Act*, Policy 17.6; Water For Life Strategy as context for Plan, p.11; reference p.29
- (j) *Water Act* referenced numerous times in policy, including p.30.
- (k) *Irrigation Districts Act* named once in listing of legislation, p.30.
- (l) Act not named, but reference to “provincial legislation” in Policy 8.0, Actions
- (m) Section 24, Livestock Regulations refers to AOPA
- (n) Described in detail with reference to competitiveness in agriculture (p.11) and listed as provincial legislation p.30.
- (o) Extensive references to Land Use Bylaw throughout plan
- (p) Section 24, Livestock Regulations; reference to NRCB
- (q) Refers to ASB’s strategic plan, p.11

Table 4. Contents of local land use policy documents

	Legislative Context	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Regulations (enforceable policies, procedures)	Maps
<i>RVC Agriculture Master Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (a)	✓✓✓ (c)	✓✓✓ (e)	X (h)	✓✓✓ (i)
<i>RVC Rural Growth Management. A Discussion on Growth.</i>	✓✓✓ (b)	✓✓✓ (d)	✓✓✓ (f)	X	✓✓ (j)
<i>RVC Agriculture Right to Farm Policy</i>	X	X	✓ (g)	X	X

- (a) Diagram and description of Planning Policy Framework, p.11; provincial and local policy framework referenced extensively throughout
- (b) Section 8.0 outlines and described Plan Alignment; Section 9.0 outlines Municipal Partnerships
- (c) Background described in Executive Summary and Section 1.1, Background; also extensive context given in section 2
- (d) Section I, Introduction, describes growth pressures giving rise to need for Growth Management Strategy; Section II also describes Background & Strategy Directions
- (e) Plan Vision, 1.5; Plan Goals, 1.6; Section 4, Recommendations and Implementation Strategy
- (f) Goals and recommendations outlined within each section of strategy and summarized in Executive Summary
- (g) One-page policy includes purpose and definitions of agricultural operations.
- (h) Regulations not included in AMP, but references to existing county regulations given throughout
- (i) Figure 3, Rocky View County Annexation History; Figure 8, Annual Solar Radiation of Alberta, 1971-2000; Figure 9, Agriculture Regions; Figure D1, Agriculture Regions; D3, Agriculture Education; D4, Field Crops; D5, Organic Farming; D6, Greenhouses; D7 Cattle and Calf Operations; D8, Horses and Ponies; D9, Poultry Farms; D10, Sheep and Goat Farms
- (j) Maps include: 1, Change in Population, 2001-2006; 2, Residential Development Plan; 3, Business Development Plan; 4, Municipal Neighbours

Table 5. Breadth and depth of legislative context: policy documents

	Legislative context (legislation and policies) (a)						Land use planning tools			Gov.	
	LUF/ ALSA (b)	GF2	MGA	WA	IDA	AOPA	Land Use Bylaw			NRCB	ASB
<i>RVC Agriculture Master Plan</i>	✓✓✓ (c)	✓(e)	✓ (f)	✓ (h)	X	✓✓(i)	✓✓✓ (k)			✓(l)	✓✓✓ (m)
<i>RVC Rural Growth Management. A Discussion on Growth</i>	✓✓✓ (d)	X	✓ (g)	X	X	X	X			X	X
<i>RVC Agriculture Right to Farm Policy</i>	X	X	X	X	X	✓✓✓ (j)	X			X	X

- (a) The *Calgary Metropolitan Plan* is not included in this framework analysis because currently Rocky View County is not a signatory.
- (b) The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* was not yet created when the County Plan and Agriculture Master Plan were developed.
- (c) AMP created proactively to align with Land Use Framework; *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* is the supporting legislation. Further references in sections 3.2.2.1, 3.2.2.3 (opportunities) and Category 5 (recommendations)
- (d) Reference to efficient use of land, p.9; Section 5.1, policy options for Agricultural Communities to follow directives of LUF; Section 8.0 Policy Context: Plan Alignment with LUF/ALSA
- (e) Access to grants, p.91
- (f) Reference to Subdivision and Development Regulation in *Municipal Government Act*, p.54
- (g) 4.0 Planning Framework (cites requirement under MGA that all County plans be consistent with each other)
- (h) Reference to *Water for Life Strategy* goals, p.32
- (i) Refers to *Agriculture Operation Practices Act*, p.32; AMP Recommendation to support practices in accordance with AOPA, p.72
- (j) Refers to Natural Resources Conservation Board’s responsibilities in regulating CFOs, p.32
- (k) Extensive references to Land Use Bylaw throughout plan
- (l) Policy Statement 1 acknowledges existing provincial legislation and confirms County-level support; Statement 2 states other policies will abide by AOPA.
- (m) Agricultural Service Board strategic plan forms background to AMP, p.7; Section 3.3.2.2 to empower ASB to assist with educational programming; recommends frequent communication/consultation with ASB, p.120

Table 6. Status of local agricultural land use policy documents

	In progress	Aspirational	Enforceable		
		Received by Council	<i>RVC County Plan</i>		
			Named in plan	Led to revisions of plan	Adopted as by- law (sub-area plan)
<i>RVC Agriculture Master Plan</i>		✓ (a)	✓	✓	X
<i>RVC County Plan</i>		✓	n/a	X	✓ (b)
<i>RVC Rural Growth Management. A Discussion on Growth</i>		✓ (c)	✓	✓ (d)	X
<i>RVC Land Use Bylaw</i>		✓	✓	X	✓ (e)

<i>RVC Agriculture Right to Farm Policy</i>		✓ (f)	✓	X	X
<i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>		✓ (g)	✓	✓	X

(a) Approved; accepted by Public Services Standing Committee

(b) Approved Oct. 1, 2013 (Bylaw C-7280-2013)

(c) Prepared by Council; update to GMS

(d) See County Plan, p.11

(e) Adopted Sept. 29, 1998 (Bylaw C-4841-97)

(f) Effective June 4, 2013.

(g) SSRP is a provincial policy, which came into effect September 1, 2014

Policy regimes

The two policy regimes of farmland preservation and global competitiveness have influenced agricultural land use policy and legislation for over forty years. Food sovereignty, and its associated concerns with food security and demand for local food, is a nascent policy regime that is influencing agricultural land use planning. Within this context, the aim of our analysis was to assess how issues, ideas, interests/actors and institutions associated with the three policy regimes influence local agricultural planning processes, including decisions about zoning, official plans, boundary adjustments, land division and servicing, and, as well, to assess the extent to which agricultural land use planning encompasses a comprehensive view of food systems planning, activities, and issues.

To complete the assessment of the presence and importance of the policy regimes we examined the documents that comprise the legislative framework. Presence and importance were measured as a function of both the level of influence of words, concepts, and statements that appear in the documents and of the placement of these words, concepts, and statements within each document. The criteria for measuring the policy regime statements are presented in Appendix: Criteria for determining level of influence of policy regimes.

Based on the analysis of the three policy regimes at the local level, the preservation of agricultural land emerges as a significant priority in Rocky View County. Five of six key informants interviewed agree that farmland preservation is the most influential of the three policy regimes examined in this study (Rocky View County Stakeholders 1, 2, 3, 4 and External Stakeholder 1). Provincially, maintaining an agricultural land base is recognized for its value to the sustainable growth and diversification of the agricultural industry (Government of Alberta, 2014). The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* sets expectations for municipalities to minimize the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land, and encourages the use of voluntary tools to encourage private landowners to practice good land stewardship. Under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*, it is now possible in Alberta to designate conservation easements for agricultural land; however, land trusts have not yet taken advantage of this use because of the difficulty of prioritizing and resourcing easements for agriculture, and because of the challenge of determining appropriate restrictions (External Stakeholder 1). Nevertheless, conservation easements, Transfer of Development Credits, and other voluntary incentives represent significant potential farmland protection tools within the province.

At the local level, all land use documents in Rocky View contain references to the importance of protecting agricultural land, in particular the County's *Agriculture Master Plan*, which articulates specific concerns about the fragmentation or loss of agricultural land. However, like the SSRP, Rocky View's *County Plan* prioritizes support for agricultural operations (rather than protecting the land itself), and flexibility in land use as a way of diversifying local agriculture. In keeping with the provincial *Land Use Framework*, the *County Plan* recognizes the "natural capital" of land, and notes the potential of provincial tools to compensate landowners for the natural capital of agricultural land (Rocky View County, 2013). Further support for protecting agricultural land is provided through the County's broader growth management strategies. Two strategies stand out in particular for managing growth, which have the ancillary benefit of preserving land for agriculture. These include the efficient use of land by concentrating residential growth into "nodes" where fragmentation and growth have already occurred; and minimizing land use conflicts through measures such as right-to-farm policies,

designating agriculture priority roads, and developing agriculture boundary design guidelines.

Global competitiveness is also important in Rocky View County. The *Agriculture Master Plan* situates its objectives within the National Food Strategy (NFS)'s guiding principles, mission and strategic objectives for agriculture including making Canadian grown products the preferred choice of international markets. Other NFS objectives that support global competitiveness involve ensuring that regulatory processes don't impose high costs and competitive disadvantages, and securing infrastructure to support the production, processing, sale and distribution of food in Canada and abroad (Rocky View County, 2011). The AMP also cites provincial priorities to promote a strong, competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry as part of the Alberta Government's goal of a diversified and prosperous economy (Rocky View County, 2011). The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* includes numerous policies and strategies that help to position the province as a competitive global supplier of agricultural products and services, largely through irrigation, efforts to maximize value-added agricultural products and a focus on export markets. These strategies are supported by Federal-Provincial-Territorial agricultural policy frameworks such as *Growing Forward 2* (Government of Alberta, 2014).

These broader provincial goals enable the County's efforts to ensure that agriculture is competitive within both domestic and international markets. The *County Plan* and growth management strategies frame agriculture as a business and an important economic driver that will continue to be vital to the County's future. While recognizing the need to accommodate smaller-scale, innovative agricultural operations, the AMP supports the continued evolution toward large corporate farms and the consolidation of land holdings (see 3.1.3.1 Opportunity: Conventional Agriculture). Several land use policies provide for the continuation of traditional agriculture on larger parcels of land (see *County Plan*, Policy 8.14 and *Land Use Bylaw*, Section 46.1). A number of the County's policies relating to agricultural land preservation also overlap with and support large-scale cropping and ranching activities. For example, growth management strategies concentrating business and residential growth to specific growth nodes promote the retention of large contiguous tracts of land. Boundary design guidelines, agricultural priority roads, and a local right-to-farm policy are other tools the *County Plan* explores to minimize land use conflicts and support the continuation of conventional agriculture. Global competitiveness is further reflected in the County's overall shift toward a viewpoint that supports agricultural growth and reduced regulation (Rocky View County, 2011). In general, therefore, the County's approach does not explicitly support competitiveness, but rather allows it to occur. This is reflected in one County representative's comment that:

We have little impact on global competitiveness other than acknowledging what is happening there and, again, stepping out of the regulatory regime as much as possible. [...] We don't want to negatively impact global competitiveness, [...] but we want to provide flexibility too (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

A member of the County's Agriculture Service Board favoured reduced regulation to support global competitiveness. Commenting on development restrictions, she stated,

When you are dealing with farmland that surrounds the city of Calgary, you make it harder and harder for those who are close in to farm because of the cost. Well if they own

their land outright then there isn't a cost, but if they care not to farm anymore, nobody will buy it. So you run the risk of actually decreasing productivity of the reasonably good farmland that's close in, because farmers will walk away or sell it in smaller chunks and it's not properly farmed or it's not farmed at all anymore (Rocky View County Stakeholder 5).

The County's Agriculture First Parcel Out policy was recently simplified in the *County Plan* to address this issue, allowing landowners to subdivide a minimum 50-acre parcel for agricultural use, without re-designation. The policy can be seen as detrimental in terms of fragmenting the large parcels required for competitive conventional agriculture. However, one key informant also pointed out that it also helps landowners with succession planning; further, the sale of a small parcel of land can contribute to the economic viability of larger farms, thereby keeping them in operation (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

Food sovereignty is an emerging issue in Rocky View County, though it currently has minimal influence on land use planning. The SSRP deals only briefly with local food issues, recognizing that consumer demand for locally grown food provides opportunities to diversify the agricultural economy (Government of Alberta, 2014). Within Rocky View County policies, local and regional food systems are extensively discussed in the *Agriculture Master Plan*. The AMP notes the context of global food price volatility and the likelihood of future food security concerns affecting the viability of agricultural production in the County. The plan also recognizes the increasing demands for local food in the Rocky View area, and outlines a production model based on tiered regional food systems that is currently challenging more conventional food growing, distribution and sales patterns. This regional model is designed to minimize the steps in the production cycle, and keep both benefits and food in the local region (Rocky View County, 2011). The AMP notes that Rocky View is well placed to participate in and contribute to such a system, and establishes a related goal to facilitate opportunities for the diversification of agriculture (Goal 3). Some of the specific opportunities the AMP identifies include culinary tourism incorporating locally grown food; specialty crops, herbs, medicinal plants and organic foods; and local food (Opportunities 3.1.3.11-13). The AMP further outlines numerous mechanisms that can support the development of a local food sector in Rocky View, including provisions for more farmers markets, farm-gate direct sales, and competitive property tax rates for local food producers, among other initiatives (Rocky View County, 2011).

Several of the recommendations relating to local and regional food systems are incorporated into the *County Plan*, which includes policies to develop a regional approach to food production, marketing and distribution; to build linkages between producers and consumers to increase local food consumption; and to support and encourage operators involved in regional and local food production, marketing, distribution, diversification, and food security (Policies 8.1 and 8.2). In addition to these direct references, the *County Plan* further enables local or regional food production systems through policies and regulations that accommodate smaller-scale production. The *County Plan*'s first goal for agriculture is to foster a diverse, sustainable and viable agricultural sector, while another goal is to "encourage and support new forms of agriculture innovation and diversification through land use policy" (see Policy 8.0 Agriculture).

Both the *County Plan* and the *Land Use Bylaw* include specific measures to enable small producers to enter the industry by permitting agriculture first parcels out and smaller agricultural subdivisions, and by supporting small-scale, value-added agriculture and agricultural services.

These measures are not specifically designed to achieve food sovereignty; as with global competitiveness, the focus of regional food production is on increasing the flexibility and profitability of agricultural producers. However, they do provide a context that supports and enables a greater level of food sovereignty at the local and regional level.

While food sovereignty has begun to have a presence in land-use plans and policies, key informants suggest that it has not been as influential as the other two policy regimes. Several significant points were made during interviews: The push for local food is driven by urban interests; a diet comprising only locally-grown food is unrealistic in Alberta because of the limitations on what can be grown; and despite being incorporated into policies, food sovereignty has almost no bearing on day-to-day land-use decisions. These themes are reflected in the following comments:

Personally I believe that this whole demand for local food is driven by people who can afford that, and people who have higher net worth. The vast majority of the public do not have that demand or interest. This is being driven by a very, very small market segment (Rocky View County Stakeholder 5).

Food sovereignty hasn't been a large factor to this point. We just haven't gotten there yet. And it's sort of beginning but I don't think it's going to go far in this county, because it's not recognized. [...] We need to be threatened by something before it's going to click for us. I mean all we need is a power outage for ten days [or] something that restricts movement of trucks. And it would be spurred by the City of Calgary residents, and it would spill over to us. But until that happens I think it's going to be pretty small (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

Because of our location and our climate it is limited to the types of crops that can be grown. [...] Where we're sitting we're 3500 feet above sea level. I mean we don't have long growing seasons out here. Now for the greenhouses that would be a little bit different; for greenhouses you have to be able to secure that land but that greenhouse business is what I would call a deep-pocketed business to get started. And so it's limited (Rocky View County Stakeholder 4).

Table 7: Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: global competitiveness documents

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Agriculture Master Plan Agriculture Right to Farm Policy South Saskatchewan Regional Plan	<i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>	<i>Land Use Bylaw</i>	
	Medium Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper Agriculture Right to Farm Policy South Saskatchewan Regional Plan	Agriculture Master Plan South Saskatchewan Regional Plan		<i>County Plan</i>
	Low Influence	Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper	Agriculture Master Plan South Saskatchewan Regional Plan		

Table 8. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: farmland preservation documents

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper South Saskatchewan Regional Plan	<i>County Plan</i> Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper South Saskatchewan Regional Plan		<i>County Plan</i>
	Medium Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper South Saskatchewan Regional Plan	Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper	<i>Land Use Bylaw</i>	County Plan South Saskatchewan Regional Plan
	Low Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper South Saskatchewan Regional Plan			

Table 9. Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: food sovereignty documents

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	Agriculture Master Plan		<i>Land Use Bylaw</i>	
	Medium Influence	<i>County Plan</i> Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper Agriculture Right to Farm Policy <i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>	Agriculture Master Plan <i>South Saskatchewan Regional Plan</i>	<i>Land Use Bylaw</i>	
	Low Influence	Agriculture Master Plan Growth Management Strategy/Discussion Paper	Agriculture Master Plan		Agriculture Master Plan

Table 10: Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: global competitiveness themes

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	Develop local, national, international markets Overcome trade barriers to expand market access Local economic & employment benefits Diversification, innovation, sustainability of sector Buffers to minimize conflict & protect agricultural land uses Maximize value-added production Growth, diversity & reduced regulation Flexible policies	Importance of agricultural policy, irrigation and fertile grassland for economic success	Large parcels of land for traditional farming	
	Medium Influence	Increased food commodity prices Global emphasis on food production Agriculture as business Right to Farm policy Use of innovative technology and advanced management practice Reputation for safe and dependable	Global market turbulence Commodity price volatility High farmer input costs Focus of agriculture, agri-food and agri-product sectors on export markets		Buffers to minimize conflict & protect agricultural land uses

		food Enhance productivity and new product development Extension/education programs for operators			
	Low Influence	Importance of cropping and cattle ranching Processing facilities to add value Agriculture as economic driver Regional collaboration for economic development	Oil and gas development affecting efficiency Shifting demand for biofuels Need for reliable supply of quality water through irrigation		

Table 11: Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: farmland preservation themes

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	Protect agricultural operations First Parcel Out subdivisions Land as natural capital; land & societal goods Agricultural land stewardship Smart Growth development Land stewardship Growth nodes for residential development Limit agricultural land fragmentation and conversion Efficient use of land Contiguous blocks of land for primary production Voluntary landowner actions to preserve agricultural land	High land values Difficulty reaching consensus on agricultural land conversion Provisions for conservation easements expanded to include agricultural lands (ALSA)		Transfer Development Credits
	Medium Influence	Competition for agricultural land Minimize oil and gas development Compensation to landowners; market-based incentives Preserve prime agriculture and grazing farms Agricultural land conservation Value of agricultural land for sustainable growth of industry	Annexation Limiting residential development restricts property rights Country residential impacts agricultural operation	Topography and soil characteristics Separation distances	Compensation to landowners; market-based incentives Growth nodes for residential development First Parcel Out Subdivisions New voluntary partnerships with private landowners Adoption of beneficial management practices to support environmental stewardship

Low Influence	Use of agricultural land for small scale energy production Agricultural community identity Land conservation		
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Table 12: Analytical framework for policy regime at local level: food sovereignty themes

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	Diversification of agriculture		Smaller parcels to accommodate emerging trends in agriculture	
	Medium Influence	Small-scale, value-added agriculture Regional approach to food production, marketing & distribution Producer-consumer linkages Clustering of food producers Shared lands & community gardens Local food production Right of farmers and ranchers to engage in agricultural practices Smaller land parcels to provide mixed land uses including local food production Supportive business climate and marketing approaches	Vulnerability of world food security Need for increased investments in agriculture Domestic food scarcity concerns Increased consumer demand for locally grown food Demand met in part by greenhouse industry		
	Low Influence	Specialized livestock production Local food sector Regional food system Farmers markets Off-site marketing opportunities	Ethical question of crops for biofuels 100-mile diet Tiered food system Local food		Mechanisms to support local food sector

Table 13: Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of global competitiveness

		GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	7	1	1	0
	Medium Influence	10	4	0	2

	Low Influence	9	4	0	0
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Table 14: Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of farmland preservation

		FARMLAND PRESERVATION			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	7	3	0	1
	Medium Influence	13	2	1	4
	Low Influence	4	0	0	0

Table 15: Analytical framework for policy regimes at local level: frequency of food sovereignty

		FOOD SOVEREIGNTY			
		Vision, Goals, Objectives, Recommendations	Driving Issues, Concerns	Regulations	Action Items
Level of Influence	High Influence	1	0	1	0
	Medium Influence	11	4	1	0
	Low Influence	6	2	0	1

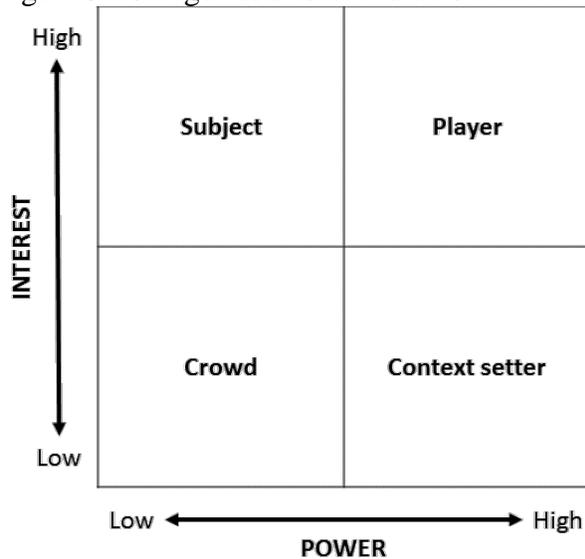
Stakeholder analysis

In addition to understanding the policies and legislation, it is important to acknowledge that these documents are influenced by various political forces. The aim of the stakeholder analysis is to document different organisations and institutions that participate in and thereby influence agricultural land use planning processes and decisions. Our stakeholder analysis involved three aspects: identify relevant stakeholders; complete a profile for each stakeholder; assess each stakeholder's level of influence within agricultural land use planning. For each stakeholder we aimed to complete a comprehensive profile based on secondary sources, including promotional materials on websites; reports, positions papers and other publications; statements in the media; committee meeting minutes, etc. The same level of information was not available for each stakeholder.

Based on the information collected for the profiles we then assessed their level of influence using a power-influence grid. This analysis leads to four categories of stakeholders (Figure 3):

- **Players:** have both an interest and significant power
- **Subjects:** have an interest but little power
- **Context setters:** have power but little direct interest
- **Crowd:** have little interest or power

Figure 3. Categories of stakeholders



Results of Stakeholder Profile

The Stakeholder Profile reveals that there are a number of province-wide industry organizations that represent the collective interests of commodity producers and have a primary objective of growing the competitiveness of their respective industries. They serve as advocates, and sometimes as advisors who are actively consulted on provincial policy issues. Their scope of influence, however, is often limited to providing input on aspirational policies. The breadth of producer organizations' involvement in the land use planning process specifically seems to

depend to some extent on the nature of their industry. Beef and wheat producers, for example, have a more specific mandate for global competitiveness and are actively involved in policy development. Younger and smaller organizations such as the Greenhouse Growers Association of Alberta, on the other hand, aim largely to support their members with information and recognition.

Farmland preservation organizations range from small landowner coalitions, such as Action for Agriculture, to land trusts working to establish conservation easements. The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* (2009) empowers land trusts to protect, conserve and enhance agricultural land; however, since this change was only recently introduced, land trusts have had a limited influence on the agricultural land-use planning process to date – other than the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which key informants note has been influential. Organizations affiliated with food sovereignty, for example CalgaryEATS!, exert a limited degree of influence in a range of roles from advocacy to policy development. They often have a broader mandate to promote sustainability, and thus incorporate support for preserving land generally and agricultural land specifically on occasion. In general, however, local food groups are more interested in promoting sustainable locally grown food and are not directly involved in land-use planning.

Key informants confirmed that within Rocky View, the Agricultural Service Board is an important stakeholder that, in part, represents the interests of farmers and producers. Composed of both Councilors and farm members, the Board provides grassroots input on policy documents, and makes recommendations to Council (Rocky View County Stakeholders 2 & 3). Informants also noted the importance of the Western Irrigation District and local watershed stewardship groups, whose watershed management plans help direct land-use decisions, as well as supporting agriculture and environmental issues. More indirectly, agricultural societies have a role in supporting farmers markets. Rocky View County is bordered by two major First Nations, though, as one informant commented, “we have seen very little input – although we’ve solicited – and we do try to acknowledge it” (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

Results of Stakeholder Power-Influence Grid

The Stakeholder Power-Influence Grid illustrates that, predictably, stakeholders with the most power and influence are those directly involved in land-use decisions. Province-wide bodies that are consulted regarding policies in the area of global competitiveness also typically have a high level of both influence and power over land use planning decisions. Food sovereignty groups at the local or regional level, as mentioned above, tend to have a high level of interest but little actual power. Stakeholders with a primary mandate to protect agricultural land likewise have a high level of influence but only modest power within the land-use planning framework; they may be consulted during aspirational policy development but they have no authority to make land use decisions. Because they operate outside of the land use planning process, land trusts have lower levels of power despite having significant influence over landowners’ voluntary initiatives to preserve land. One trend to note in regards to the Power-Influence Grid is that several stakeholders at the highest power and interest level cross over between multiple policy regimes, most commonly farmland preservation and global competitiveness.

Table 16. Stakeholder analysis: power-interest grid

ININTERESTUENCE	High	<p>Alberta Land Institute</p> <p>Southern Alberta Land Trust Society</p> <p>Action for Agriculture</p> <p>Western Irrigation District</p>	<p><i>Alberta Federation of Agriculture</i></p> <p>Nature Conservancy of Canada</p> <p>Ducks Unlimited</p> <p>Miistakis Institute</p> <p>Jumpingpound Creek Watershed Partnership; Nose Creek Watershed Partnership</p>	<p><i>Natural Resources Conservation Board</i></p> <p>Agricultural Service Board</p>
	Medium	<p>Alberta Farm Fresh Producers Association</p> <p>Organic Alberta</p> <p>Western Sky Land Trust</p>	<p>Calgary Regional Partnership</p> <p><i>Alberta Wheat Commission</i></p> <p><i>Alberta Barley Commission</i></p> <p><i>Alberta Pulse Growers</i></p> <p>Tsuu T'ina Nation Stoney/Nakoda Nation</p> <p>Agriculture and Food Council of Alberta</p>	<p><i>Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency</i></p> <p>Alberta Rural Sustainable Alternatives Network</p> <p>Bow River Basin Council</p> <p><i>Alberta Beef Producers</i></p> <p><i>Western Stock Growers Association</i></p> <p>Alberta Assoc. of Agricultural Societies</p>
	Low	<p><i>Alberta Greenhouse Growers Association</i></p> <p>Slow Food Calgary</p>	<p><i>Alberta Oat Growers Commission</i></p>	<p>Alberta Food Matters & Growing Food Security in Alberta</p> <p>Calgary EATS!</p>
		Low	Medium	High
POWER				

Farmland protection

Food sovereignty [bold]

Global competitiveness [italics]

Discussion

Our overall aim for the project is to identify principles and beneficial practices that represent land use planning solutions that protect farmland. As a step toward this final aim we identified four principles that guided our analysis: maximise stability, minimise uncertainty, integrate across jurisdictions; and accommodate flexibility. In this section we discuss the strength of the legislative framework for Rocky View County in the context of these four principals.

Maximise stability

A stable legislative framework for protecting farmland is one that is not easily changed at the whim of shifting political interests; it is well-entrenched in acts of legislation, policy, and governance structures that are based on clear, concise language, and can hold up to court challenge. A key element of stability is a clear statement of purpose regarding farmland protection among the primary goals and objectives within each enforceable document. Thus, stability is a critical measure of the strength of an agricultural land-use planning framework.

The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* introduces specific indicators and monitoring and evaluation requirements for land fragmentation; thus it has the potential to have a stronger role in directing local land use decisions than did the Land Use Policies. Confined Feeding Operations, which are governed by the Natural Resources Conservation Board, represent one area of the land use policy framework that has a higher level of stability. Although municipal governments can make recommendations to the Board, approvals for Confined Feeding Operations are made at the provincial level.

From a policy perspective, the local legislative framework is quite stable, with agricultural land use policies that are integrated with each other and with broader County priorities and goals. The *County Plan* has clearly articulated policies designed to minimize land use conflicts and introduce a higher level of stability. The *County Plan* was recently revised with reference to recommendations made in the *Agriculture Master Plan*, which incorporated significant community consultations and stakeholder input. It articulates clear and specific policies for agricultural land use, which are supported by revised regulations in the *Land Use Bylaw*. The *County Plan* is quite specific about how it will direct residential and business growth, and how it will manage conflicts. For confined feeding operations, the plan specifies that incompatible land uses “shall” not be supported within minimum distance of separation of a confined feeding operation (see Policy 8.27). The term “shall” is defined in the *County Plan* (p.10) as a directive term indicating mandatory actions that must be complied with. “Shall” is used in conjunction with many residential development policies (e.g., Policy 10.2), requirements for area structure plan contents (e.g., Policies 9.6, 10.1 etc.), and other issues impacting agricultural operation. Agriculture First Parcels Out “should” be supported given specific criteria (Policy 8.18), indicating a strongly preferred action, while residential first parcel out re-designation and subdivision “may” be supported depending on particular circumstances of the site or application, although the *County Plan* does offer some guidance regarding these decisions (Policy 8.21). In general the policies that relate to agricultural land use have a high degree of specificity. However, as noted above, there is room for interpretation within the Land Use Bylaw’s discretionary uses, and further opportunity for political influence. As one land use stakeholder commented,

[The local policies] are stable but they’re weak. And they are very vulnerable to political

lobbying, particularly by the development industry [...]. And so this puts a big emphasis on the decision makers of the day, which happens to be the councilors that are elected (Rocky View County Stakeholder 4).

Minimise uncertainty

The presence of uncertainty, typically introduced via ambiguous language, exceptions or gaps, is a critical measure of the weakness of an agricultural land-use planning framework. Thus, in addition to maximising the stability of a legislative framework through enforceable policies, people want to know they can rely on these rules and regulations to be applied consistently under different circumstances.

From a provincial perspective, the agricultural land-use framework has introduced another level of uncertainty into the land-use planning process. The *Municipal Government Act* and the new *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* (pursuant to the *Land Use Framework*) delegate considerable authority to local decision-makers to direct land use patterns, in addition to encouraging some voluntary tools (such as conservation easements) for private landowners to protect agricultural land. The SSRP uses stronger language than the former Land Use Policies (1996) did, and “expects” municipalities to identify areas where agriculture should be a primary activity; to limit the fragmentation of land; to employ land use planning tools to direct non-agricultural development to areas where it will not constrain agriculture; and to use tools to minimize conflicts between uses. Since 1996 there has been no oversight to monitor whether the directives contained in the Land Use Policies were even taken into account in the development and implementation of local plans and bylaws. The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* introduces regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of agricultural land fragmentation and conversion by the Province. However, the policies are not binding and local area authorities are still responsible for incorporating the land use framework principles “where appropriate.” This leaves considerable room for different interpretations and variability in how agricultural land use decisions are made at the municipal level.

Most of the specific land use policies and regulations have been developed at the County level. As noted above, these are generally quite strong and stable. However, there is a fairly high degree of uncertainty with regard to the extensive discretionary land uses articulated in the *Land Use Bylaw* that are subject to the decisions of Rocky View County Council. Thus there is considerable potential for political processes to exert influence over policy recommendations in the decision-making process. It should be noted that one key informant felt this was a positive aspect of the legislative framework, allowing decision-makers “room for interpretation based on the local needs” (Rocky View County Stakeholder 5).

Integrate across jurisdictions

Integrating policies and priorities across jurisdictions is a foundation for building cohesion across provincial, regional, and local governments. One can also think of integration as a formal “linkage” that provides consistency among them. In order to successfully integrate policies across jurisdictions there must be sufficient details about the legislative context that guides and constrains local government plans and strategies.

By this measure of integration, we found that the Rocky View *County Plan* has a high degree of integration vertically into the provincial legislative framework. Both the *Agriculture Master Plan* and the *County Plan* make direct references to the *Municipal Government Act*, identifying the responsibilities delegated to municipalities and the enforceable regulations within which municipalities must work (for example, the *Municipal Government Act* Subdivision and Development Regulation). Both plans also reference provincial legislation including the *Land Use Framework* and the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* (not yet finalized at the time of the *County Plan*'s approval) that enable the County to make land use decisions, acknowledging that local policies must align with the provincial framework. Policies for confined feeding operations also refer to and align with the enforceable *Agriculture Operation Practices Act*, which regulates those operations with input from municipalities. Based on a recommendation in the *Agriculture Master Plan*, Rocky View County developed its own Right to Farm policy (2013) which supports the corresponding provincial policy. The AMP refers briefly to the Growing Forward grants available through the Province to support agriculture producers, but does not refer to other aspects of *Growing Forward 2* as an enabling policy that supports agriculture more broadly.

As for whether the legislation and policies were well integrated locally, one County representative commented that,

There's still a number of recommendations from the Ag Master Plan that haven't been fully integrated into the County Plan and then not into the Land Use Bylaw. [...] But on the whole I'd say that we're 90% there (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2).

Generally the informants agreed that the legislation and the overall vision were well documented and integrated, and that a considerable amount of consultation and effort had gone into both the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* and the County's *Agriculture Master Plan*. However, one informant felt there was room to build better linkages among municipalities adjacent to Rocky View County (Rocky View County Stakeholder 2), and another felt there were opportunities to involve more farmers and producers in the planning process (External Stakeholder 1).

Integration across jurisdictions laterally is quite a different matter. Even though both the *Agriculture Master Plan* and the *County Plan* make direct reference to regional approaches to "food production, marketing, and distribution" (Policy 8.1(b)) the experience of regional cooperation in the region has been somewhat less than positive. This is evidenced by the withdrawal of Rocky View County from the Calgary Regional Partnership, as well as a long-standing disagreement stemming from the annexation of land from the County to support growth in Calgary. Consequently, the extent to which the County's policies that are quite supportive of a regional food system will ever bear fruit, remains to be seen.

Accommodate flexibility

Creating an effective legislative framework is an act of balance, without being too stable so that it cannot be changed when needed or too strict so that it cannot be applied in a range of circumstances. Thus, flexibility is necessary in order to moderate the restrictive effects of maximising stability and minimising uncertainty. The means to accommodate flexibility is typically done through governance mechanisms.

Across Rocky View County's land use framework, flexibility is a significant principle for protecting agricultural land and operations. The *Agriculture Master Plan* repeatedly notes that because agriculture business operations are directly linked to the successful management of their land base, they need land management flexibility and the removal of prohibitive regulation (Rocky View County, 2011). Policies such as simplifying agricultural first parcel out subdivisions may not be in keeping with other jurisdictions' efforts to reduce land fragmentation; however, they are important to maintaining the viability of the agriculture sector more generally. The *County Plan's* vision for agriculture as a vital part of the County's social, economic and environmental integrity includes both the continuation of traditional farming and ranching, as well as innovation and diversification (Rocky View County, 2013). This vision requires support for the diversity and flexibility of agricultural operations, as well as flexibility in agricultural land management in particular.

In addition to the above four principles, we also discuss issues that have come up in our project that we believe deserve specific attention: the influence of policy regimes, small-lot agriculture/fragmentation of farmland, and natural resource developments.

Influence of policy regimes

The protection of agricultural land has significant influence on the land-use planning process in Rocky View County. The County's emphasis has shifted from a "preserve, protect and regulatory" viewpoint to one that facilitates agricultural growth, diversity and reduced regulation. As noted above, the *County Plan* does support agricultural first parcel out subdivision, as well as residential first parcel out, both of which carries the risk of further fragmenting the land base. However, the plan also formalizes "Smart Growth" development principles as a way to manage residential development and growth, promote efficient use of land, and direct new country residential land uses to areas where they will cause the least disturbance to agricultural operators. The County's *Agriculture Master Plan* further recognizes the intrinsic value of farmland as natural capital and supports market based incentives to compensate landowners for agricultural land protection and conservation.

The core of Alberta's agricultural economy is commodity based and export oriented. Thus economic competitiveness, often couched in terms such as "sustainability" and which includes global competitiveness, has long been a high priority for agricultural policy in Alberta. Our research found these matters are also significant within the County. Again, in its recent policy changes, Rocky View County has promoted a move away from a strong regulatory framework to facilitate agricultural growth, diversity and reduced regulation in support of an economically competitive agricultural industry, where productive resources are allocated in accordance with market signals and producers are afforded the flexibility to respond to those signals. The *County Plan*, as well as the *Agriculture Master Plan* also contain provisions designed to support innovation and foster entrepreneurialism. While building in ways to achieve more flexible and market-responsive land uses, the County continues to recognize and place a high value on conventional, large-scale farming.

Food sovereignty is more of an emerging priority in Rocky View County, and based on our field work, appears to be largely driven by urban demands. Nonetheless, a growing interest in food that is healthy and culturally appropriate, and which is grown locally using environmentally sound and sustainable methods, presents opportunities for diversification and innovation within the County's agriculture sector. While recognizing that traditional agriculture will continue to be the

dominant land use in Rocky View, the County recognizes the trend toward smaller scale, specialty focused, local based food sectors. The County aims to develop a more regional approach to food production, marketing and distribution and stronger connections between producers and consumers to increase local food consumption and crop diversification. While supportive of more regional food systems, the *County Plan* does not prioritize food sovereignty as highly as the other two policy regimes. And finally, while *County Plan* contains no mention of the growing ethnic diversity in the City of Calgary, or its surrounding region, or the manner in which these demographic changes will almost certainly impact the demand structure for locally-grown foods, the plan certainly contains provisions that could facilitate entrepreneurial responses to such changes at the production-unit level.

Small-lot agriculture/farmland fragmentation

The combined issue of small-lot agriculture and fragmentation of the land base centres on what appears to be a growing awareness of food sovereignty. Much of this interest in small-lot agriculture is associated with new farmers and their need for affordable land that is reasonably close to population centres. What makes the demand for small-lot agriculture particularly important is that there is often little room within farmland protection legislative frameworks to accommodate smaller lots. The main reason is that sub-dividing into smaller lots is in direct conflict with the over-riding goal to not fragment the land base. The primary land-use planning tool for preventing fragmentation is large minimum lot sizes. Thus, small lots and farmland protection are often in direct opposition.

The fragmentation of agricultural land is a concern within Rocky View County, primarily resulting from Country Residential and more recent industrial and commercial developments. Acreages are nevertheless considered to be an important part of rural communities, while industrial and commercial development is important to the County's future economic sustainability. Rather than restricting these developments altogether, the County has created strategies to concentrate future development within designated growth nodes or areas already impacted by fragmentation.

Smaller agricultural parcels are accommodated in Rocky View County for a number of reasons. They are perceived as a way to encourage more diversified and entrepreneurial forms of agriculture that can capitalize on changing market demands for local, low-input and organic, and specialty food products. Smaller lots also allow new operators to enter the industry when they would otherwise be restricted by high land values. The County's move to simplify regulations around agricultural first parcels out hopes to accomplish several objectives: again, to allow smaller producers entry into the industry; to facilitate succession planning; and to maintain the viability of agriculture, and thus prevent conversion of the majority of a land holding by permitting a landowner to generate revenue through the sale of a single smaller parcel.

Natural Resource Development

As with small-lot agriculture, natural resource development is a significant cause of farmland fragmentation in Rocky View County. As the County's *Agricultural Context Study* notes, resource extraction activities focus on oil and gas, sweet and sour gas, coal bed methane, and sand and gravel extraction. While resource development can generally co-exist with the agricultural industry, it does take land out of production for a period of time and can have various negative

impacts on the land base. Oil and gas activity, which is regulated by the Province, is the second largest factor in the loss of agricultural land in Rocky View, consuming 18,000 acres of land since 1980 (Rocky View Municipal District, 2009b).

Food sovereignty

As noted above, food sovereignty has to date had a limited impact on the land use planning process, though as discussed above also it is a growing priority in the County primarily because of the opportunities it presents to diversify the local economy. Demands for regional food systems relate to potential shocks to the international commodity markets and concerns about global food security. Consumers' growing preference for freshness, variety and sustainable production practices originates largely from the city of Calgary, which has recently produced a food action plan. While the city's strategies focus primarily on urban agriculture, the plan could begin to have a greater impact on land use in the County if fully implemented.

Stakeholder analysis

A number of stakeholders and stakeholder groups operate within Rocky View County, although not all are based in the County. Stakeholders range from individual landowners, to small-land protection advocates, such as Action for Agriculture, to groups like Nature Conservancy Canada and the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, both of which advocate for larger-scale land trusts. Several Local Watershed Stewardship Groups, which operate under the auspices of *Water for Life*, are also active in the County, and were identified by several key informants as playing an important role in land-use planning processes and decisions. With the exception of some and perhaps many individual landowners, these stakeholders generally have a broader interest in sustainability and in conserving the ecological values of landscapes, though agricultural lands are increasingly recognized within their objectives. Another important stakeholder is the Agriculture Service Board, which advises Rocky View County Council on matters relating to agriculture. Because this group includes a combination of Council members and farm members, it represents a broad range of perspectives that influence local land-use policy development. Organizations such as commodity and producer groups and local food advocates have a high level of interest in agricultural land use issues but generally low levels of influence over local planning decisions. For the most part, commodity and producer groups, in particular, prefer to undertake consultation at the provincial and national levels.

Rocky View County actively sought and took into consideration input from a variety of stakeholders during its recent policy development processes, in particular during the preparation of the *Agriculture Master Plan*. Thus the County's agricultural land-use planning framework represents a wide range of perspectives including residents, local organizations that include farmer representation, and environmental groups with a broad stewardship and sustainability agenda. There are several key provincial stakeholders that influence the local agricultural land use policy framework, including Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, and Alberta Environment; however, as the Provincial framework is outside of the scope of this study they have not been fully included in this analysis.

Conclusion

Most of Rocky View County's agricultural land use policies and legislation have been revised within the past two years, while the key regional land use policy, the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*, has recently come into force in September 2014. The *County Plan* and the SSRP include new policy directions for agricultural land use that incorporate a number of beneficial principles; however, it is too soon to assess whether the new approaches will be beneficial for protecting agricultural land in practice.

Despite this limitation, it is possible to identify principles and practices within the agricultural land use planning legislative framework in Rocky View County that represent significant potential for protecting farmland. The most beneficial of these principles and practices include:

- Agriculture Land Use Districts that provide for a range of parcel sizes enabling both large and smaller-scale agriculture.
- Smart Growth strategies that concentrate development into strategic nodes of residential and business activity (priority growth areas with existing Area Structure Plans), which helps to mitigate fragmentation of agricultural land and supports the efficient use of land. This practice further supports related goals of protecting open spaces and environmental assets, encouraging the preservation of rural character, minimizing servicing costs and establishing vibrant and thriving commercial centers.
- Regular monitoring of agricultural land conversion and fragmentation.
- Intermunicipal development plans (IDP), which as a statutory tool could potentially be used in the context of each of the three policy regimes, but especially farmland protection.
- Relaxation of "agriculture first parcel out" application requirements, which permits some flexibility to landowners in responding to high speculative land values while also keeping land in agricultural use.
- Grassroots input and recommendations (as provided in Rocky View County by the Agricultural Service Board).
- Policies that minimize conflict between agricultural and other land uses (agriculture boundary design guidelines, agriculture priority routes, local Right to Farm policies, etc.)
- A regional food system approach coordinated across jurisdictions and based on a shared vision for a sustainable food system.
- Policies that provide education and marketing support for producers, as well as policies allowing farm-gate sales.
- Provincial market-based voluntary tools and incentives to help compensate landowners for conservation and stewardship of agricultural land; in particular, the potential use of conservation easements and Transfer of Development Credit schemes.
- Provincial leadership in policy development.
- Flexibility for municipalities to meet local needs and priorities.

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Appendix: Glossary

Policy:

A formal statement of intent; principles, rules, or guidelines that are designed to determine or influence major decisions or actions and all activities that fall within the domain of the policy.

Enforceable policy:

Policy with clear statements of intent to enforce (often with penalty for failing to follow the policy)

Aspirational policy:

Policy without clear statements of intent to enforce (often with penalty for failing to follow the policy); a broad statement about desired outcomes, objectives, or activities

Enabling policy:

Policy with clear statements of intent to implement a policy (e.g., provide resources)

Policy regime:

A policy regime and its changes refer to the combination of issues, ideas, interests, actors and institutions that are involved.

Legislation:

A law (or Order in Council) enacted by a legislature or governing body; can have many purposes: to regulate, to authorize, to proscribe, to provide (funds), to sanction, to grant, to declare or to restrict.

By-law (bylaw):

Local laws established by municipalities as regulated by the provincial government. Note: for our purposes, a by-law is considered part of legislation.

Regulation (pursuant to Act):

Is a form of legislation (law) designed with the intent to regulate; a rule or law designed to control or govern conduct; creates, limits, constrains a right, creates or limits a duty, or allocates a responsibility.

Governance:

Methods, systems, or processes of governing; the act of implementing policy and legislation. For our purposes we are concerned with groups (e.g., commissions, advisory committees) that have the authority to apply, review, or enforce policy and legislation specific to agricultural land use planning.

Appendix: Criteria for Evaluating Content of Legislative Framework

Legislation documents

	Legislative Context (Provincial)	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Local policies	Maps
0	None	None	None	None	None
✓	Brief statements that include at least one reference to the main provincial legislation or policy related to agricultural land use planning. Little too context provided other than perhaps a statement that acknowledges the local governments duty to uphold these acts and policies.	Very brief description of agriculture background. This may include a minimal section or statistics on historical context, background and issues, and demographics on agriculture/farming.	Includes a vision, goal, or objective for agriculture but with minimal explanation or rationale.	One or two brief statements about agricultural land use policies, perhaps with little context.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) with agricultural land use shown.
✓✓	Expanded statements that reference more than one of the main provincial legislation and policies and provides added context to the above. Multiple statements that outline how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.	Includes multiple sections dedicated to information and statistics about agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a vision, goal, and objective for agriculture with a statement of explanation and some action items.	Several statements (three to five) about agricultural land use policy presented within local context. May also reference an agricultural plan.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) showing agricultural land uses and at least one (1) agriculture specific map showing designated agricultural land.
✓✓✓	Comprehensive that outlines how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.. May include diagrams to help establish thread of consistency among different levels of government.	Comprehensive account of agricultural background . May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a detailed section on vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture that outlines a rationale and action items. May also document relations with other land uses and local priorities.	Detailed section of agricultural land use policy statements (more than five) or agricultural sub-area plan adopted as by-law. May also reference an agricultural plan.	Provides two (2) or more agricultural land use maps including a map showing designated agricultural land. May also include Other maps to illustrate specific issues or policies (future areas of study, development permit areas, current land tenure).

Policy documents

	Legislative Context (Provincial)	Background	Vision, Goals, Objectives	Local Policies	Maps
	Same as above	Same as above	Same as above	Different	Same as above
0	None	None	None	None	None
✓	Brief statements that include at least one reference to the main provincial legislation or policy related to agricultural land use planning. Little to no context provided other than perhaps a statement that acknowledges the local governments duty to uphold these acts and policies.	Very brief description of agriculture background. This may include a minimal section or statistics on historical context, background and issues, and demographics on agriculture/farming.	Includes a vision, goal, or objective for agriculture but with minimal explanation or rationale.	Several statements (three to five) about agricultural land use policy presented within local context.	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) with agricultural land use shown.
✓✓	Expanded statements that references more than one of the main and policies and provides added context to the above. Multiple statements that outline how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.	Includes multiple sections dedicated to information and statistics about agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a goof presentation of vision, goal, and objective for agriculture with a statement of explanation, a few recommendation items, and some action items.	Comprehensive section of agricultural land use policy statements (more than five).	Provides at least one (1) general land use map(s) showing agricultural land uses and at least one (1) agriculture specific map showing designated agricultural land.
✓✓✓	Comprehensive that outlines how provincial legislation and policies “fit” in the local context.. May include diagrams to help establish thread of consistency among different levels of government.	Comprehensive account of agricultural background. May also reference an agricultural plan or report.	Includes a detailed section on vision, goals, and objectives for agriculture with an extensive and detailed list of recommendations and/or action items.	Comprehensive agricultural plan. May also refer to background report.	Provides two (2) or more agricultural land use maps including a map showing designated agricultural land. May also include Other maps to illustrate specific issues or policies (future areas of study, development permit areas, current land tenure).

Appendix: Criteria for determining level of influence of policy regimes

		Placement (significance) within Document			
		Aims, Goals, Objectives	Mission, Vision, Mandate, Purpose	Driving issues, concerns	Action items
Level of influence	High influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in an enforceable policy or regulation	A clear, explicit statement at the highest level of an enforceable policy or regulation		
	Medium influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement at the highest level of an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) items in a policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a short list (three to five) of items in a policy
	Low influence	A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in an aspirational policy		A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in an aspirational policy	A clear, explicit statement as part of a long list of items in a policy