

LAND USE POLICY
AND THE AGRI-FOOD
INDUSTRY IN ALBERTA



*Prepared by the Ag Summit and Agrivantage
Strategic Initiatives Committee*

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Agriculture & Food Council
The Catalyst

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Strategic Initiatives Committee*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ag Summit and Agrivantage processes identified competing uses for land, and the resulting loss and fragmentation of agricultural land, as important issues affecting the sustainability and profitability of Alberta's agri-food industry. Over the last year, the Agriculture and Food Council's *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Committee* has been engaged in discussions, research, and analysis relating to this issue. This document is a summary of the Committee's work. It is intended to add value to the work already completed by Ag Summit's Land Use Core Action Team.

INTRODUCTION

Land use policy is a pressing issue in Alberta. The cumulative impacts of varying types and increasing intensities of land use have the potential to permanently alter and erode the ecological, social, and economic benefits – the "natural capital"¹ – provided by the province's land base. This decreases future strategic land use policy options.

Currently, land use decisions often appear to be uncoordinated and made on a case-by-case basis, rather than guided by shared, core elements and principles of a modern and comprehensive land use policy. Loss of the land's capacity to provide natural capital value, including decreased productive use for agricultural production,

1. Natural capital is defined in the Canada West Foundation's *Western Canada's Natural Capital* report as "including resources such as minerals, timber, and oil and gas which provide the raw materials used in the production of manufactured goods. It also includes the land and water resources that anchor our quality of life and support economic activity such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, and recreation. Natural capital also includes living ecosystems – grasslands, oceans, and forests – that cleanse fouled air and water, reinvigorate soil, and contribute to a predictable, stable climate".

are particular issues in parts of the province, principally urban or near urban areas.

It is in these areas where major amounts of agricultural land are being acquired for residential, commercial and industrial development. Agricultural land is also often subject to simultaneous intensive use by other industries such as energy and forestry. Some of these activities are compatible with agricultural use and some are not.

Mounting pressures on the land base and the sustainability of the natural environment have elevated the profile of the land use issue, particularly over the last decade. These pressures have increased the need for new land use planning and policy architecture.

The views and issues of the agri-food industry need to be acknowledged and reflected in strategic policy and planning discussions among governments, other stakeholders, and the public. The purpose of this report is to set out agri-food industry perspectives and issues on land use, agricultural land use, and land use policy and planning frameworks. It seeks to serve as a reference and discussion document.

LAND AS A KEY COMPONENT OF NATURAL CAPITAL

Land is an asset, to be maintained and protected for future generations. It enables a sustained flow of activities that have ecological, social and economic value. Ecosystems support all forms of life by performing valuable ecological processes and these systems and processes are dependant on the health and maintenance of certain types of land and land attributes. Quality of life is

significantly enriched and enhanced by the many cultural, historic, aesthetic and environmental characteristics and qualities for which land is the anchor. The land also provides raw materials that drive economic growth, prosperity and profitability. The province's forestry, energy, and agri-food industries all depend on the land for renewable and non-renewable resources to fuel their operations.

The ecological, social and economic value and associated benefits provided by land can be characterized as natural capital. Land, therefore, represents a significant and key component of natural capital. The use of land and the reconciliation and balancing of uses and interests among industries and stakeholders is directly related to the sustainability of the natural capital value of land. Increasing competition to acquire land for permanent single development uses (in near urban and corridor areas) and among multiple renewable and non-renewable resource extraction uses (in all areas) can jeopardize its natural capital value.

Working agricultural lands are a major component of Alberta's land base and its natural capital value. Because these lands are in heavy competition with "higher value" permanent uses in near urban and corridor areas, the loss and fragmentation of these lands is a particular concern for the agri-food industry.

If the value of land as natural capital is to be sustained, enhanced and preserved for generations to come, land use policy architecture must address these issues and recognize and incorporate principles and approaches to maintain desired natural capital attributes.

TRENDS AND ISSUES AFFECTING LAND USE

Increased competition to acquire land for a growing number of uses and the intensification of those uses are two significant trends affecting land use policy in the province. Land use policy in Alberta is also impacted by and needs to take into consideration and address several other key trends and issues. These include: industry growth; expanding urban populations; preference for acreage living; demand for tourism and recreation activities; heightened concern for the natural environment; the need for current and comprehensive data and information; and changing expectations about the role of governments.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN LAND USE POLICY

Government plays a central role in the development and implementation of land use policy. Provincial and municipal governments significantly influence the protection and sustainability of the land base and the natural capital value of public and private lands through policy, regulations and legislation.

The provincial government is directly responsible for land use policy affecting public and crown land. Municipal governments, via the *Municipal Government Act*, are responsible for developing and implementing land use policy relating to private lands within a provincial regulatory and policy framework. This means that the provincial government also has some influence over private land use decisions.

The provincial policy framework relating to land use is complex and consists of legislation, regulations and policies that are administered by several ministries. An individual department may also develop issue-specific policies, according to

its mandate and operations. Land use decision processes may involve more than one ministry.

With some exceptions, the provincial government delegates responsibility for private land use decisions to municipal governments. The Provincial Land Use Policies provide a framework for municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, and planning decisions. Statutory land use plans and land use bylaws are two of the main tools used by rural and urban municipalities in land use planning and decision-making.

Current government policy and planning frameworks relating to land use have many effective components. However, policies at both the provincial and municipal levels require updating to address the complex land use issues that exist in today's intensive, multi-use environment.

THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY AND THE SPECULATIVE VALUE OF LAND

Agricultural producers are stewards of the land. By virtue of what they do they own most of the privately-held working land in Alberta. These stewardship responsibilities place primary agricultural production and producers in a unique position relative to other industries.

The speculative value of land, and how it factors into the economics of primary production, is impacting the choices primary producers make about how they use their land and whether it will be kept in agricultural use. Because land use changes generally occur at the point where one use becomes more profitable than another, monetary value is a critical factor in the preservation and stewardship of agricultural land and its natural capital value. The value of land and land use are inextricably linked.

Chronic profitability issues, related largely to conditions and circumstances far beyond the

control of producers, mean that long-term profitability frequently resides not in income from commodity production, but in speculative increases in the value of the land. As their land becomes more valuable for non-agricultural purposes, many producers, while it may not be their first choice, are pressured to sell all or parts of it for conversion to other higher value uses. Further, poor profitability out of production often dictates that to retire debt and retire comfortably, primary producers wishing to pass their operation on to a child must factor the increased speculative value of their land into price.

These issues are woven deeply into agri-food industry issues, perspectives and positions on land use policy and explains the often wide variance of view on land use issues within the agri-food industry.

TRENDS AFFECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

The trends driving land use issues generally also affect the use of agricultural land. However, there are several agri-food industry trends and issues that specifically affect the use and sustainability of Alberta's agricultural land base. These include: changes in industry characteristics; intensity and environmental impact of production operations; increasing awareness of industry's stewardship role; a focus on growth; other resource industry, stakeholder and development pressures; profitability issues; divergence of views within industry; government support of traditional production; and understanding of the industry in provincial land use policy.

SUPPORTING THE PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND NATURAL CAPITAL

The protection of agricultural land and its natural capital value needs to be a priority in a comprehensive land use policy and planning framework. The following initiatives and

approaches should be considered in modernizing, consolidating and integrating land use policy frameworks.

New policy approaches include: re-evaluating zoning definitions and descriptions; economically recognizing the stewardship role of agricultural producers; implementing “smart growth” strategies; and removing disincentives relating to the protection of agricultural land.

Voluntary initiatives with potential for implementation in Alberta already exist in other jurisdictions and they have been effective in working to address loss and fragmentation issues. These include two types of agricultural land preservation programs that differentiate between the right to develop land and the right to own and use it: *purchase of development rights* (or easements) and *transfer of development rights* programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION

It falls principally to governments to take the lead in developing policy frameworks for land use planning and decision-making that balance economic, ecological, and social objectives and that preserve natural capital value. Industry sectors that use the land base for their activities also have a major role in ensuring its protection and sustainability.

The need to address the land use policy issue is pressing. The *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Committee* offers the following observations for consideration by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and the agri-food industry in developing new land use policy frameworks in Alberta.

Develop a shared vision and goals – The many stakeholders involved in and affected by land

use policy have divergent agendas and priorities. Acknowledgement and acceptance of land as a critical and fundamental component of natural capital is vital and offers a common platform and understanding from which to move forward.

Commit to new strategic policy priorities – Strategic and business plans for governments and industry should include performance measures and outcomes relating to the protection and sustainability of natural capital value.

Develop and implement a data measurement and monitoring system – Policy makers and planners at all levels in government and industry need timely and relevant information to make appropriate, balanced land use decisions. A province-wide system should provide monitoring and analysis of key environmental, economic, and social indicators of natural capital value to help ensure that land is used most efficiently and sustainably in both the short and long terms.

Increase communication and collaboration among stakeholders – Industry and government should work together to increase understanding and awareness of the growing pressures on the land base, and build consensus on land use policy issues. An ongoing effort to communicate and consult with the public is also required.

Mandate co-ordinated and integrated planning – Government departments and agencies should consult, communicate and collaborate with each other on land use policy development, planning and decision-making. An integrated approach by policy makers should consider multiple interests and the implications of land use decisions in the context of natural capital principles and understandings.

Review provincial policies – Provincial policies should provide clear, consistent direction and balance economic, social, and ecological elements.

Rigorous performance measures and compliance provisions should be incorporated.

Increase the capacity of municipalities to plan and manage within the provincial policy framework – Municipalities need and deserve detailed and appropriate policy architecture from the provincial government to make effective, enforceable and appropriate land use decisions.

Support the preservation of agricultural land – The protection of agricultural land and its natural capital value should be one of the priorities of a balanced land use planning and policy framework. New policy approaches and tools could be considered for implementation in Alberta.

These observations are suggested to increase the effectiveness of the land use policy and planning framework in Alberta, mindful that their implementation will necessitate compromise, trade-offs and sacrifices. All interests and expectations cannot be satisfied all of the time if land use policies and decisions balance environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.

AN AGENDA FOR THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

The range of perspectives, expectations and agendas in the agri-food industry make industry-wide consensus on land use policy unlikely. What is possible, and much needed, is increased discussion, understanding and awareness of the issue. The *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Committee* offers the following suggestions:

Agree on shared principles – Recognition that the protection of natural capital is a priority can be a point of consensus and common platform upon which to begin developing shared perspectives on land use policy issues.

Engage and stay engaged – There should be clear and defined responsibility within industry enabling the distillation and interpretation of land use policy issues and to spearhead efforts ensuring that industry is informed and aware of opportunities for discussion and debate.

Ensure the agri-food industry is an active participant – For land use policy initiatives that are underway it is important that the agri-food industry be at the table with other resource industries, governments, and the public.

Promote understanding among other industry stakeholders – Increased communication and collaboration with other industries will encourage dialogue on and development of new policy and programming options that will balance economic, ecological, and social objectives.

Partner with governments – As stewards of private land and its natural capital, the agri-food perspective on land use policy issues is important and needs to be communicated to policy and decision-makers in the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The challenge of modernizing and consolidating Alberta's land use policy and planning framework must be addressed if the ecological, economic, and social benefits – the natural capital value – provided by the province's land base is to be sustained. Consideration of the agri-food industry's needs, perspectives, and issues is critical in developing the shared vision and goals that will guide land use policy and land use decisions in the next century.

BACKGROUND

The Ag Summit and Agrivantage processes identified competing uses for land, and the resulting loss and fragmentation of agricultural land, as important issues affecting the sustainability and profitability of Alberta's agri-food industry. Appendix I outlines the Ag Summit and Agrivantage initiatives in more detail.

In following-up on the outcomes of Ag Summit and Agrivantage, the Agriculture and Food Council identified land use as one of three strategic priority areas where it could contribute to policy development affecting the industry. In June of 2003, Council created an ad-hoc Committee to manage the *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Project*. Over the last year, the Committee has been engaged in discussions, research, and analysis relating to Council's identified strategic priorities arising from Ag Summit and Agrivantage.

In the fall of 2004, the Committee commissioned the project team of Stantec Consulting and Toma and Bouma Management Consultants to complete a situational analysis, policy review, and working paper on land use policy issues. This study proved to be of great value to the Committee. The Executive Summary of the Consultant's report is appended to this document.

This report is a summary of the Committee's work on land use policy. It is intended to add value to the work already completed by Ag Summit's Land Use Core Action Team and to offer observations on key land use policy issues and on modernizing, consolidating and building land use policy architecture for Alberta's next century.

INTRODUCTION

Land use policy is a pressing issue in Alberta. The cumulative impacts of varying types and increasing intensities of land use have the potential to permanently alter and erode the ecological, social, and economic benefits – the “natural capital”² – provided by the province’s land base. This decreases future strategic land use policy options.

Currently, land use decisions often appear to be uncoordinated and made on a case-by-case basis, rather than guided by shared, core elements and principles of a modern and comprehensive land use policy. Loss of the land’s capacity to provide natural capital value, including decreased productive use for agricultural production, are particular issues in parts of the province, principally urban or near urban areas. It is in these areas where major amounts of agricultural land³ are being acquired for residential, commercial and industrial development.

As Alberta’s economy grows, increases in and competition among land uses will continue to grow correspondingly. When several industries and stakeholders desire to use the same piece of land for their various activities, cumulative impacts can be significant and irreversible. This is occurring throughout the province, to varying degrees and

in various forms, depending upon location.

For example, land in the Highway 2 corridor between Edmonton and Calgary accommodates many uses, including agriculture, oil and gas development, and residential and industrial development. Areas farther away from urban centres and related growth areas are less likely to experience such multiple, numerous and often competing development pressures.

The views and issues of the agri-food industry need to be acknowledged and reflected in strategic policy, and planning discussions among government and other stakeholders. Agri-food industry perspectives and issues relating to land use are important for several reasons:

- As owners of the majority of private land in the province, agricultural producers are stewards of this land and its associated value as natural capital.
- The speculative value of land, and how it factors into the economics of primary agricultural production, is an important land use and agri-food policy issue.
- Agricultural land is often subject to simultaneous intensive use by other industries such as forestry, energy, and urban development. Some of these activities, at some level of intensity, are compatible with agricultural use and some are not.
- Continuing loss and fragmentation of agricultural land to “higher value uses”, particularly in near urban and corridor areas, can and does erode agri-food industry profitability and sustainability by reducing

2. Natural capital is defined in the Canada West Foundation’s *Western Canada’s Natural Capital* report as “including resources such as minerals, timber, and oil and gas which provide the raw materials used in the production of manufactured goods. It also includes the land and water resources that anchor our quality of life and support economic activity such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, and recreation. Natural capital also includes living ecosystems – grasslands, oceans, and forests – that cleanse fouled air and water, reinvigorate soil, and contribute to a predictable, stable climate”.

3. For the purposes of this discussion, agricultural land is defined as cultivated land, native grassland or bush, rivers, creeks, riparian areas, and wetlands owned and managed by private landholders.

the quality, quantity and contiguity of land available for primary production.

Land use policy is not a new issue or priority. However, the need to address it is reflected directly in the rapid and continuing pace of economic and population growth and associated land use issues and pressures in Alberta.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ARE AFFECTING
ECOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC
BENEFITS PROVIDED BY THE LAND BASE

Modernizing, consolidating and clarifying land use policy architecture will result in more strategic, co-ordinated, cohesive, effective and efficient decision-making and management of Alberta's land base. This will entail balancing the interests and requirements of multiple industries and stakeholders, including the agri-food industry, against a public interest in the ecological integrity of land and maintaining its natural capital value. To achieve this, all industries and stakeholders must work together to reconcile varying perspectives and priorities and set short and long-term environmental, social, and economic objectives for land use policy.

Mounting pressures on the land base and the sustainability of the natural environment have elevated the profile of the issue, particularly over the last decade. These pressures have increased the need for new policy architecture, among governments, industry and other stakeholders, and the public. Three recent developments, by governments and others, are noteworthy and demonstrate interest in and desire to address the land use policy issue:

- The Alberta Government's 20 year strategic plan: *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, released in 2005, sets priorities

relating to the environment, including the protection of natural resources and air, soil and water quality. The plan commits the Government to ensuring that the province's land base is used as effectively as possible, recognizing multiple users, for the benefit of all Albertans. It indicates that land use policies will be reviewed and a comprehensive land use policy for the province will be developed. This will complement the implementation of the Alberta Government's *Water for Life Strategy* completed in November 2003.

- The Canada West Foundation, an Alberta based, independent, non-partisan, non-profit public policy research institute, launched its Natural Capital Project in 2003. This project is predicated on the assumption that a vibrant and healthy environment is not at odds with economic growth. It aims to increase understanding of the value of natural capital and its important role in public policy frameworks, particularly those relating to land and water.
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada recently launched its two-year National Agricultural Land Strategy, which will address priority agricultural land use, land capacity and land management issues to ensure the future sustainability of the agricultural land resource base in Canada.

The purpose of this report is to set out agri-food industry perspectives and issues on land use, agricultural land use, and land use policy and planning frameworks. It speaks to the urgency of addressing the land use policy issue and seeks to serve as a reference and discussion document for the agri-food industry, other industries, stakeholders and governments.

LAND AS A KEY COMPONENT OF NATURAL CAPITAL

Land is an asset, to be maintained and protected for future generations. It enables a sustained flow of activities that have ecological, social and economic value.

Ecosystems support all forms of life by performing valuable ecological processes and these systems and processes are dependant on the health and maintenance of certain types of land and land attributes. For example, riparian areas and wetlands support the maintenance of productive soil and fresh water quality and availability (nearly all of a watershed is land). Native grassland, which is difficult to restore once disturbed and cannot be replaced if destroyed, provides diverse habitat and contributes to biodiversity. Environmental sustainability and human health are directly related to the preservation and protection of these lands.

Quality of life is significantly enriched and enhanced by the many cultural, historic, aesthetic and environmental characteristics and qualities for which land is the anchor. Forests, parks, rivers, mountains, prairie, and other beautiful and unique natural areas and landscapes are important products of the land in Alberta. These natural areas also enable many opportunities for sustainable recreation and tourism activities.

The land also provides raw materials that drive economic growth, prosperity and profitability. The province's forestry, energy, and agri-food industries all depend on the land for renewable and non-renewable resources to fuel their operations. Privately owned agricultural land is the foundation for the production of food and non-food agricultural products and services. It

is also a major platform for energy and forestry industry operations.

The ecological, social and economic value and associated benefits provided by land can be characterized as natural capital. Land, therefore, represents a significant and key component of natural capital. Natural capital enables the development and growth of industry; strengthens the economy; and, simultaneously, improves the health and quality of life of citizens. The maintenance and enhancement of natural capital needs to be of paramount importance to society, industry, and government. It is crucial to Alberta's wealth, prosperity and quality of life.

LAND REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT COMPONENT OF NATURAL CAPITAL AND SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AND PROTECTED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The use of land and the reconciliation and balancing of uses and interests among industries and stakeholders is directly related to the sustainability of the natural capital value of land. Increasing competition to acquire land for permanent single development uses (in near urban and corridor areas) and among multiple renewable and non-renewable resource extraction uses (in all areas) can jeopardize its natural capital value.

Working agricultural lands are a major component of Alberta's land base and its natural capital value. Because these lands are in heavy competition with higher value permanent uses in near urban and corridor areas, the loss and

fragmentation of these lands is a particular concern for the agri-food industry.

All of these uses, often simultaneous and at maximum intensities, cannot be accommodated for extended periods of time without jeopardizing or permanently reducing the natural capital value of the land on or below which they take place. Such activities, on both public and private lands, need to be managed for the benefit of society and industry. This will sustain or enhance natural capital value, and ensure that

land continues to remain productive and available for a variety of uses.

The need for integrated, comprehensive and co-ordinated land use policy architecture that addresses these issues and recognizes and incorporates principles and approaches to maintain desired natural capital attributes is pressing. This is critical if the value of land as natural capital is to be sustained, enhanced and preserved for generations to come.

TRENDS AND ISSUES AFFECTING LAND USE

Increased competition to acquire land for a growing number of uses and the intensification of those uses are two significant trends affecting land use policy in the province. These trends are further described in a discussion about cumulative effects of overlapping land uses, set out in the proceedings of the Ag Summit *Land Supports Us All* Conference held in January of 2002. Three “phases” of land use were identified, although they are not necessarily incremental and can occur concurrently.

- *Expansion* of land uses onto unaltered land – including pasturing livestock on native prairie.
- *Competition* for land among uses – including movement from agriculture to forestry uses, forestry or grazing to energy uses, agricultural use to human settlement, or protected areas to recreational use.
- *Intensification* of land uses – including increased numbers of confined feeding operations and use of irrigation as examples in the agri-food industry or increased exploration, roads and infrastructure in the energy industry.

A largely reactive decision-making framework has caused the negative impacts and cumulative effects of competition among and intensification of land uses to continually increase. This alters and jeopardizes the natural capital value of much of the province’s land base.

Land use policy in Alberta is impacted by and needs to take into consideration and address several other key trends and issues. These include:

Industry growth – Many resource industries in Alberta are pursuing aggressive growth

and development plans. The result is that the forestry, oil and gas, and agri-food industries are competing for use of, and access to, the same finite land base. Cumulative impacts of these varying and often intensive land uses are considerable and increasing, on both public and private lands.

Expanding urban populations – Immigration and rural-to-urban migration has for several years produced extraordinary demand in the province’s urban centres for housing and infrastructure. This is expected to continue in the near and medium terms. Grande Prairie, Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, and Lethbridge are all experiencing significant growth and land adjacent to these cities is being developed at unprecedented rates.

Preference for acreage living – Subdivision of land into acreages located within short commuting distance of major cities is becoming more common. These acreage parcels (1-20 acres) accommodate relatively few people yet have high servicing and infrastructure costs and often take agricultural land out of production.

Demand for tourism and recreation activities – There is increased demand for, and participation in, recreational activities that impact the land. Hiking, camping, skiing, fishing, hunting and golf, for example, are popular activities that require and affect land.

Heightened concern for the natural environment – Society, industry, and governments understand that a healthy environment and quality of life is directly linked to land and its use. Life-supporting ecosystems that provide clean air, water, and soil as well as biodiversity are dependent on the land base. This awareness has made land use a critical

public policy issue in relation to environmental sustainability, and in particular, water quality and quantity.

The need for current and comprehensive data and information – A recognition and inventory of natural capital value is required. Cumulative impacts of various land uses are not being measured or monitored on a comprehensive or consistent basis across the province, partly because specific values associated with natural capital are not defined. Industries and

governments are often making management and operating decisions without current and comprehensive information, particularly that related to key ecosystem and environmental indicators.

Changing expectations about the role of governments – There is increasing pressure on governments to incorporate a greater focus on environmental sustainability and natural capital value into land and water policy frameworks.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN LAND USE POLICY

Government plays a central role in the development and implementation of land use policy. Directly and indirectly, governments facilitate the effective and efficient use of land to achieve economic and ecological goals deemed to be in the public interest. Provincial and municipal governments significantly influence the protection and sustainability of the land base and the natural capital value of public and private lands through policy, regulations and legislation.

The provincial government is directly responsible for land use policy affecting public and crown land. Municipal governments, via the *Municipal Government Act*, are responsible for developing and implementing land use policy relating to private lands within a provincial regulatory and policy framework. This means that the provincial government also has some influence over private land use decisions. For example, all land use activities must comply with provincial policies and regulations pertaining to air and water quality, and energy or natural resource development.

The provincial policy framework relating to land use is complex and consists of legislation, regulations and policies that are administered by several ministries. An individual department may also develop issue-specific policies, according to its mandate and operations. Land use decision processes may involve more than one ministry and extensive communication between departments is imperative.

For example, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development has a mandate including wildlife management and habitat protection. Alberta Environment is responsible for the stewardship of air, land and water resources and Alberta Energy

and Resources regulates development of oil, natural gas, electrical, coal, and hydro resources. All of these departments make land use decisions that affect the natural capital value of public and private lands. Collaboration in policy development and in the decision-making process is essential.

GOVERNMENT PLAYS A CENTRAL ROLE
IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF LAND USE POLICY

Inadequate communication between departments may result in policies and decisions that can be sector-specific or narrow in focus, rather than decisions that consider the principles of science-based land management and long-term effects on the land base. This may create situations where industries and stakeholders are treated differently in land use policy and regulation decisions. For example, the Energy and Utilities Board (which regulates energy resource development in Alberta) and the Natural Resources Conservation Board (which reviews and approves permits for confined agricultural feeding operations) each have their own guidelines for assessing environmental impacts of development on the same piece of land.

The provincial government is working to increase communication and co-ordination in decision making relating to resource and environmental management. The creation of the Sustainable Development Coordinating Council provides one example of this. The Council is an inter-departmental group that ensures integration of provincial initiatives to maximize environmental

sustainability. Other examples are apparent at the individual ministry level. Alberta Environment is committed to working with other ministries, and industry, to address issues and achieve environmental outcomes in the context of a common vision. Alberta Municipal Affairs is committed to working with other provincial ministries and municipalities to review and update land use policies in the next three years.

Efforts to introduce new land use planning and monitoring tools into the decision-making process are also evident. Alberta Environment is championing the implementation of Integrated Resource Management on public lands, which involves “balancing environmental, social, and economic objectives while finding ways for all uses to exist together with less conflict”. The department is also introducing and using new tools to assist decision-makers in assessing how land use practices interact with natural processes to change the landscape.

Further, Alberta Environment and Alberta Sustainable Development represent the provincial government in the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Program. The Program monitors changes in biodiversity through comprehensive, impartial, and science-based data collection. Information can then be used by government, industry and others for environmental performance trend analysis and to assist in management decisions relating to land use. The Program is in the pilot stage and is a partnership between the federal and provincial governments, research institutions, industry, the academic community and non-governmental organizations.

With some exceptions, the provincial government

4. The province maintains responsibility for highways and roads; wells and batteries; pipelines and related installations; confined feeding operations; and manure storage facilities.

delegates responsibility for private land use decisions to municipal governments.⁴ Policy relating to private land use is the responsibility of municipalities within a regulatory framework set by Alberta Municipal Affairs. This department administers the *Municipal Government Act* which includes the authority to develop statutory plans and land use bylaws – two of the main tools used by rural and urban municipalities in land use planning and decision-making. The department of Municipal Affairs is also responsible for the Provincial Land Use Policies.

The Provincial Land Use Policies provide a framework for municipal statutory plans, land use bylaws, and planning decisions. They encourage an appropriate mix of land uses including agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, public, and recreational. The Policies have some guidelines relating to ensuring the sustainability of agriculture, the environment, and non-renewable resources although a criticism is that their primary focus is economic growth. The Policies are very broad, and as a consequence, interpretation and application varies significantly among the province’s many local governments.

PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL POLICIES NEED UPDATING
TO ADDRESS LAND USE ISSUES THAT EXIST IN
TODAY’S INTENSIVE, MULTI-USE ENVIRONMENT

Statutory land use plans are developed by municipalities as the basis for land use decision making in specific cases. These plans are required to address issues such as future use and development; transportation systems; provision of services; protection of agricultural operations; and environmental concerns. The Provincial Land Use Policies are to be used by municipalities in the development of statutory land use plans, although the provincial government does not monitor or enforce this.

Municipalities also develop land use bylaws which control and regulate the use and development of land and buildings. These bylaws specify which land can be used for certain purposes (zoning), as well as parcel size. Statutory land use plans and land use bylaws taken and used together are to achieve municipal land use goals.

Effective and appropriate public policy and resulting legislation and regulations, along with appropriate tools for measuring and monitoring land use impacts are critical to the protection and sustainability of the natural capital value of land. Current government policy and planning frameworks relating to land use have many effective components. However, policies at

both the provincial and municipal levels require updating to address the complex land use issues that exist in today's intensive, multi-use environment.

Successfully managing and mitigating cumulative impacts and sustaining natural capital value requires better co-ordination and collaboration between the many jurisdictions that presently carry responsibility for land use planning and decisions. Integrating economic growth, natural capital and environmental stewardship objectives in land use policy and the decision making process will ensure that the protection and enhancement of the natural capital value of Alberta's landbase is a priority.

FACTORS IMPACTING AGRICULTURAL LAND

THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY AND THE SPECULATIVE VALUE OF LAND

Agricultural producers are stewards of the land. By virtue of what they do they own most of the privately-held working land in Alberta. These stewardship responsibilities place primary agricultural production and producers in a unique position relative to other industries. The preservation of natural capital value and related benefits such as clean air, soil, and water are directly affected by agricultural activities and farming practices.

The speculative value of land, and how it factors into the economics of primary production, is impacting the choices primary producers make about how they use their land and whether it will be kept in agricultural use. Because land use changes generally occur when one use becomes more profitable than another, monetary value is a critical factor in the preservation and stewardship of agricultural land and its natural capital value. The value of land and land use are inextricably linked.

The value of land and frequently, the intensity of uses, tend to increase and intensify in direct proportion to its potential to generate income. For example, land that is close to urban centres is more valuable because of its development potential than land used for commodity production in "remote" areas. However, land closest to the urban centre may be prime agricultural land or ecologically important land that should not be developed because of its natural capital value. The highest value, therefore, is not necessarily reflective of the best or most appropriate use of a particular piece of land.

Despite this, near urban land traditionally used for agricultural commodity production will generally be sold for the highest value it will bring for other uses, which are usually some type of permanent development. Chronic profitability issues, related largely to conditions and circumstances far beyond the control of producers, mean that long-term profitability frequently resides not in income from commodity production, but in speculative increases in the value of the land. This is particularly so in near urban and corridor areas but figures into the economics of primary production across Western Canada. Thus, as their land becomes more valuable for non-agricultural purposes, many producers, while it may not be their first choice, are pressured to sell all or parts of it for conversion to other higher value uses.

THE VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND
LAND USE ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED

Further, poor profitability out of production often dictates that to pay down debt and retire comfortably, primary producers wishing to pass their operation on to a child must factor the increased speculative value of their land into price. This shackles the succeeding generation into increased debt, continued poor profitability and even greater dependence on speculative increases in land value to backstop operating losses and provide for retirement. This is not a healthy or sustainable cycle. Understandably, it is woven deeply into agri-food industry issues, perspectives and positions on land use policy and explains the often wide variance of view on land use issues within the agri-food industry.

Although the speculative value of agricultural land is a primary factor in individual land use decisions made by producers, there are also other issues impacting agricultural land use in Alberta.

TRENDS AFFECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND USE

The trends driving land use issues generally also affect the use of agricultural land. These include economic and population growth; heightened public concern for maintenance of the natural environment; the need for current and comprehensive data and information; and changing expectations about the role of governments in environmental sustainability.

There are also several agri-food industry trends and issues that specifically affect the use and sustainability of Alberta's agricultural land base.

Changes in industry characteristics – Fewer farms that are larger in size directly affect agricultural land use and availability. As well, many producers are reaching retirement age, and many of them will not be transferring their operations to a succeeding generation. More producers are looking to sell their land.

A focus on growth – The agri-food industry and the provincial government remain focused on a growth agenda expressed in the "20/10 Goal". Reaching \$20 billion in value-added processing and \$10 billion in primary production by the year 2010 will mean intensified primary production and, likely, putting more land into production. This may be at the expense of land that is better used for non-agricultural, or less-intensive agricultural activities.

Intensity and environmental impact of production operations – Growing diversity in the types of agri-food businesses and operations

and increasing intensity of those operations are in turn increasing impacts on the land base and potential erosion of natural capital value.

Other resource industry, stakeholder and development pressures – Growth of the forestry, energy, recreation, and urban development industries all increase the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land. Each of these uses irreplaceable agricultural land for their activities and competition will continue to increase and use will continue to intensify.

Increasing awareness of industry's stewardship role – Agricultural producers own the vast majority of private land in the province. They are increasingly the focus of attention in society because of their inherent responsibility for the natural capital value of this land, even if the land is subject to other simultaneous uses. Increasingly, agricultural land is viewed as a treasured asset, for economic, ecological and aesthetic reasons – and its protection is a priority.

Profitability issues – Profitability issues, particularly in the production of traditional commodities, are driving many producers to other land uses or to exiting the industry completely.

Divergence of views within industry – Land use can be a particularly contentious and volatile issue within the agri-food industry. Some view land use decisions as being directly related to the preservation of natural capital for the public good. Others see the issue as only relating to individual property rights and land ownership. Viewpoints are affected by many factors including location or proximity to urban centres; regional characteristics; local economic development plans; and individual producer priorities.

Government support of traditional production – Government subsidy programs continue to be focused on commodity production which sometimes encourages producers to expand their operations. Expansion for agricultural activities may not always be the best or most appropriate option. Payments for cultivated acres, with sometimes marginal productive value, for example, can encourage destruction of wetlands, native grasslands and other elements contributing to natural capital value. Payments supporting stewardship and improving natural capital value may be more appropriate.

Understanding of the industry in provincial land use policy – The provincial policy framework guiding land use decisions at the municipal level does not differentiate between urban and rural areas or acknowledge the importance of working agricultural lands in preserving and maintaining Alberta's natural capital. Nor does it take into consideration the many types of operations and intensities of use by various agri-food industry sectors which are all currently perceived and classified as "agricultural".

SUPPORTING THE PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND NATURAL CAPITAL

Agricultural land is a critical component of Alberta's natural capital. Its protection needs to be a priority in a new, comprehensive land use policy and planning framework. The challenge is to find the right balance between growth of other uses and the preservation of agricultural land, while respecting landowners' desires to make decisions about their property. The following activities, initiatives and approaches should be considered in modernizing, consolidating and integrating land use policy frameworks.

New Policy Approaches

Re-evaluate zoning definitions and descriptions – Provincial and municipal policies defining which activities can take place on which land need to be updated with respect to the agri-food industry. Primary production operations are not uniform. Among them, significant variances exist in intensity and amount of land required. This needs to be reflected in local land use bylaws, allowing certain types of agricultural uses to co-exist with urban development. For example, could a condominium development and a restaurant not be constructed adjacent to a tree nursery or a berry farm?

Recognize the stewardship role of agricultural producers – As stewards of the majority of private land, producers play an integral role in protecting, maintaining, and enhancing the province's natural capital, at their own expense. Land use policies should encourage economic recognition for these responsibilities. Options for recognition include publicly-funded or supported programs and payments and market-based instruments and incentives.

NEW POLICY APPROACHES WILL BE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN AND PROTECT AGRICULTURAL LAND AND ITS NATURAL CAPITAL VALUE

Implement "smart growth" strategies – "Smart growth" is a collection of urban development strategies that are fiscally, environmentally and socially responsible and aimed at reducing sprawl. Smart growth approaches designate urban "growth areas" and advocate the use of incentives and disincentives directing development to these areas without prohibiting development outside the boundary or infringing on property rights.

A key benefit of smart growth policies is that they enable an increased ability to plan development on certain lands but not on others such as ecologically valuable land or prime agricultural land. Thus, the ability to balance multiple uses such as residential, aesthetic, industrial, agricultural, and recreational is enhanced.

A tendency to reduction, or, at least, reduced increases in agricultural land values outside of designated development areas is another major benefit of smart growth strategies. This should keep more near urban land in production and reduce fragmentation.

Remove disincentives relating to the protection of agricultural land – Government policies and subsidy programs that directly or indirectly promote the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land should be reviewed and revised. Subsidy or insurance program objectives,

for example, should factor in land use and environmental considerations.

Regulatory and Voluntary Tools

One option to protect agricultural land and its natural capital value is by regulation. For example, British Columbia created the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) over 30 years ago. The ALR is a designated zone, including public and private land, where agriculture is recognized as the priority use. While controversial, the ALR approach has been very successful at reducing the loss and fragmentation of agricultural land to urban development and other uses. Ontario introduced the Greenbelt Act in 2005, which protects environmentally valuable land and some agricultural land from development in near urban areas.

Voluntary approaches, complemented by regulatory and legislative frameworks, will likely be the most acceptable and sustainable in protecting and preserving agricultural land in Alberta. Such initiatives already exist in other jurisdictions and they have been effective in working to address loss and fragmentation issues.

Two types of agricultural land preservation programs that differentiate between the right to develop land and the right to own and use it are worthy of further discussion. These are ***purchase of development rights*** (or easements) and ***transfer of development rights*** programs. These approaches have often been implemented in conjunction with smart growth land use policies.

A purchase of development rights initiative enables landowners to sell their development rights to the government or a non-profit organization. This is commonly confirmed through the subsequent placement of conservation easements or restrictions on the land.

Two such initiatives are offered in the United States and sponsored by the United States Government. The *Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program* keeps agricultural land in agricultural uses by providing matching funds to help purchase development rights or conservation easements. The *Grasslands Reserve Program* offers long-term easements to restore and protect native grassland.

Similar programs are offered in Alberta through privately-funded conservation organizations like Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society.

Transfer of development rights initiatives enable landowners to sell their development rights to developers, who can then use them to build in designated growth areas.

Payment under both programs is based on the difference between the agricultural value and the developed value. In both cases, the land for which development rights have been sold will never be developed. It is usually kept in agricultural use, allowing producers to continue to generate income from it. Through the participation in transfer or purchase of development rights programs, producers are able to benefit financially from the speculative value of their land without having to sell it. The land can continue to be used for primary production by the producer or his or her children.

New policy approaches, together with a balance of regulatory and voluntary tools, will be necessary to maintain and protect agricultural land and its natural capital value. The development and implementation of these components will be fundamental to an effective land use policy framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE ACTION

It falls principally to governments to take the lead in developing policy frameworks for land use planning and decision-making that balance economic, ecological, and social objectives and that preserve natural capital value. Industry sectors that use the land base for their activities also have a major role in ensuring its protection and sustainability. Central components of this role are participation, collaboration, compromise and a maximum, sustained effort to reconcile differences and find common ground on land use issues.

There is no single, profound decision or initiative that will resolve the bundle of issues associated with land use policy. Rather, progress and, ultimately, success, will probably be realized by key players doing what they do more diligently considering new approaches and principles, and working with more current and comprehensive information. Collaboration, compromise and the seeking of common ground are profoundly important. The need to address the land use policy issue is pressing and the price of failure is too high to pay.

The *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Committee* offers the following observations for consideration by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and the agri-food industry in developing new land use policy frameworks in Alberta.

Develop a shared vision and goals – The many stakeholders involved in and affected by land use policy have divergent agendas and priorities. Acknowledgement and acceptance of land as a critical and fundamental component of natural capital is vital. Discussion of land and land use

policy in the context of natural capital offers a common platform and understanding from which to develop a vision and goals. These can then guide the development of policy frameworks and land use planning and decisions.

ALL INTERESTS AND EXPECTATIONS CANNOT BE SATISFIED ALL OF THE TIME IF ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES ARE TO BE BALANCED

Commit to new strategic policy priorities –

Historically, economic goals have been incorporated into government strategic planning frameworks. It is now time to incorporate goals relating to natural capital value. Strategic and business plans for government departments and agencies, as well as for industry should include performance measures and outcomes relating to the protection and sustainability of natural capital value.

Develop and implement a data measurement and monitoring system –

Policy makers and planners at all levels in government and industry need timely and relevant information. Information on competing land uses; loss of land to development; existing land use activities; impacts on the landscape; and trends affecting land use is required to make appropriate, balanced land use decisions. A province-wide system of measurement that is co-ordinated, cost-shared, universally accessible and science-based is needed. This system should provide monitoring and analysis of key environmental, economic, and social indicators of natural capital value to help ensure that land is used most efficiently and sustainably in both the short and long terms.

Such a system will also support policy framework evaluation and adaptation.

Increase communication and collaboration among stakeholders – Industry and government should work together to increase understanding and awareness of the growing pressures on the land base, and build consensus on land use policy issues. An ongoing effort to communicate and consult with the public is also required.

Mandate co-ordinated and integrated planning – Government departments and agencies should consult, communicate and collaborate with each other on land use policy development, planning and decision-making. This is necessary at both the strategic and operational levels to ensure co-ordination and consistency in results. An integrated approach by policy makers will be the most effective at maintaining the productivity, sustainability, and natural capital value of Alberta’s land base. Such an approach should consider multiple interests and the implications of land use decisions in the context of natural capital principles and understandings. Land use planning tools promoting balance between economic, ecological and social objectives should be encouraged, supported and implemented to protect and sustain natural capital value.

Review provincial policies – Current land use policies are not comprehensive enough to deal with the complex array of interests and issues that exist in Alberta. Provincial policies should provide clear, consistent direction and balance economic, social, and ecological elements. Rigorous performance measures and compliance provisions should be incorporated in the development of new policies.

Increase the capacity of municipalities to plan and manage within the provincial policy framework – Municipalities need and deserve

detailed and appropriate policy architecture from the provincial government to make effective, enforceable and appropriate land use decisions. Policies should reflect broader provincial priorities and should also be flexible enough to adapt to local conditions and circumstances. Municipalities should be accountable for land use decisions within the context of a provincial land use policy and planning framework.

COLLABORATION, COMPROMISE AND THE SEEKING OF COMMON GROUND ARE PROFOUNDLY IMPORTANT

Support the preservation of agricultural land – The protection of agricultural land and its natural capital value should be one of the priorities of a balanced land use planning and policy framework. Through ownership of most of the private land in the province, agricultural producers are stewards of the land and its natural capital value. This land base should be protected as much as is reasonably possible. New policy approaches and tools could be considered for implementation in Alberta. These should be explored and evaluated.

These observations are suggested to increase the effectiveness of the land use policy and planning framework in Alberta, mindful that their implementation will necessitate compromise, trade-offs and sacrifices. Multiple land uses are sustainable if managed carefully and diligently. However, all interests and expectations cannot be satisfied all of the time if land use policies and decisions balance environmental sustainability and economic prosperity. A commitment to protecting, maintaining, and enhancing the land base and its natural capital value will be required by all industries and stakeholders. —

AN AGENDA FOR THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

The range of perspectives, expectations and agendas in the agri-food industry make industry-wide consensus on any policy issue unlikely. Land use is no exception. What is possible, and much needed, is increased understanding and awareness of the issue enabled by current, comprehensive information, collaboration and discussion. The *Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Committee* offers the following suggestions:

Agree on shared principles – There are varying opinions within the agri-food industry on land use. Recognition that the protection of natural capital is a priority can be a point of consensus and common platform upon which to begin developing shared perspectives on land use policy issues.

Engage and stay engaged – There should be clear and defined responsibility within industry enabling the distillation and interpretation of land use policy issues and to spearhead efforts ensuring that industry is informed and aware of opportunities for discussion and debate. This group should work collaboratively with the many industry stakeholders with an interest to encourage dialogue and understanding of issues and potential solutions. Such a group could also represent the industry's interests in discussions with other stakeholders.

Ensure the agri-food industry is an active participant – For land use policy initiatives that are underway it is important that the agri-food industry be at the table with other resource industries, governments, and the public.

Promote understanding among other industry stakeholders – The agri-food industry is well-positioned to take a lead role in identifying the shared benefits of a new land use policy framework. Increased communication and collaboration with other industries will encourage dialogue on and development of new policy and programming options that will balance economic, ecological, and social objectives. The agri-food industry should promote compromise in land use planning and decision-making, advocating that multiple uses are possible when managed appropriately.

INCREASED UNDERSTANDING, AWARENESS,
AND DISCUSSION OF THE LAND USE
POLICY ISSUE IS MUCH NEEDED

Partner with governments – As stewards of private land and its natural capital, the agri-food perspective on land use policy issues is important and needs to be communicated to policy and decision-makers in the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Senior industry representatives that are engaged and knowledgeable should be available to governments to offer clear suggestions and constructive feedback and to participate in policy development activities as appropriate.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Land use policy is a complex issue that affects many diverse interests and stakeholders. Modernizing and consolidating Alberta's land use policy and planning framework will be a challenge. However, this is a challenge that must be addressed if the ecological, economic, and social benefits – the natural capital value – provided by the province's land base is to be sustained.

Primary agricultural producers are the owners and stewards of a significant portion of Alberta's land and thus, its valuable natural capital. As such, the agri-food industry is an important player. Consideration of its needs, perspectives, and issues is critical in developing the shared vision and goals that will guide land use policy and land use decisions in the next century.

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APPENDIX I: AG SUMMIT AND AGRIVANTAGE BACKGROUND

In early 2000, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Agriculture and Food Council partnered to create a transparent, consultative and collaborative process by which industry and government participants could map out a shared agenda for the new millennium. The result was Ag Summit 2000. The process engaged over a thousand industry players to identify major issues, challenges and opportunities affecting the agriculture and agri-food industry and its continued profitability and sustainability. Ag Summit also provided a process by which recommendations to address these issues and opportunities could be developed and shared.

As part of the Ag Summit Phase II process, twelve industry-led volunteer Action Teams completed individual reports with recommendations that addressed specific issues arising from Ag Summit Phase I consultations. These recommendations were directed to industry and government. The Action Team reports were presented in a Collection to the Minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Chair of the Agriculture and Food Council in the spring of 2002.

The Land Use Core Action Team (LUCAT) report highlighted how the current land use policy and planning framework in Alberta impacts the agricultural industry. It outlined detailed and specific changes to provincial and municipal legislation; government roles and responsibilities; and provided many examples of sustainable land use tools.

The LUCAT also organized the Land Use Conference in 2002 that attracted over 600 participants. The Conference confirmed a cross-industry interest in land use, increased understanding of land use issues and created an atmosphere where collaborative work could begin. The team's efforts were instrumental in increasing awareness of the importance of agricultural land and bringing the agri-food industry into the land use discussion and debate.

Agrivantage was the industry-government team charged with overseeing the completion of the Ag Summit process. Part of its mandate was to address key, overarching issues affecting industry in a summary report. Representatives from the federal and provincial governments, as well as the Agriculture and Food Council and industry were part of the Agrivantage team.

The Agrivantage report, *Building Tomorrow Together*, was presented to the Minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Chair of the Agriculture and Food Council on November 27, 2002. It contained ten recommendations directed to industry and government. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and the Agriculture and Food Council agreed to provide a response to the Agrivantage recommendations.

In June of 2003, the Agriculture and Food Council created an ad-hoc Committee to manage the Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives Project. Phase I of the project was focused on

following-up with industry stakeholders on what actions or initiatives they are pursuing in relation to the Agrivantage report recommendations, identifying any gaps in implementation, and recommending options for further action. The Committee released its Phase I report: *Agri-Food Industry Response and Reaction to the Agrivantage Report* on June 24, 2004.

In the second year of the project, the same Committee managed Phase II which involved further research and analysis relating to two of Council's strategic priority areas arising from Ag Summit and Agrivantage. These were land use policy and environmental stewardship. As part of its Phase II mandate, the Committee completed two reports providing an industry perspective on both these topics, including observations on options and actions relating to industry's role and responsibilities.

APPENDIX II: CONSULTANT REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A New Agricultural Perspective: Land Use Policy in Alberta

Completed by Stantec Consulting and Toma and Bouma Management Consultants

December 2004

Executive Summary

As Alberta begins to formulate a new land use policy, it is opportune to examine the issues and develop a perspective on land use and land use planning.

Several broad economic and societal trends (a rapidly growing population, urbanization, 'rurbanization,' growing support for environmental sustainability) as well as Alberta's rapid growth in several resource sectors is intensifying the pressure on land and land use. Should agriculture be the only economic sector competing for land, that would be challenge enough. The Alberta reality, however, is that there are many industry players (energy, forestry, urban development, recreation, etc.) – all growing and, in many cases, competing for the same land. In other situations, growth is manifested through the intensification of use or the multiple use of land that also impacts adjacent uses.

Within agriculture, specific trends (such as industry consolidation, increasing diversity, demographic changes, economic fluctuations and cycles, increased measures to assure food safety and quality) compound the pressures on land. There is also a considerable degree of intra-sector competition for land and varying positions on land use within agriculture and its rural setting – a reflection of the inherent diversity characteristic of the industry.

The pressures facing agriculture are such that as an industry it can rarely outbid competing land uses purely on the basis of economics. Urban encroachment, interface conflicts, access to resources on or under the land as well as increased demand for the preservation of natural areas are growing issues. All indicators suggest that these will increase.

Agriculture is major contributor to the province's working and natural landscape. The sector at large is the province's largest landowner. In effect, farmers are the major stewards of Alberta's land. Yet, agriculture receives no credit or compensation for the benefits that it contributes to the province's natural capital.

Clearly the time has come to explore a more expansive approach to land use and land use planning – an approach that recognizes the importance of land as a critical foundation for the economic, social, cultural, environmental, and aesthetic well being of Albertans.

One such approach identifies the need to address 'natural capital' defined as the resources on or in the land as well as the landscapes (working and natural), wetlands, and water resources that anchor the quality of life for a society. Management and preservation of natural capital provides a possible 'lens'

through which the issues and challenges facing land use can be evaluated. Such an approach to public land use policy has the potential to address a broader array of economic, social and environmental objectives.

The existing overall planning and policy framework, served Alberta well over the years. However, given the dramatic increased pressures on land by a variety of sectors, the current framework is no longer adequate to meet the future needs of Albertans. Within this cauldron, the current policy framework is largely driven by short-term economics and varies from municipality to municipality depending upon local pressures, interests and interpretations. Furthermore, the policy framework lacks clear guidelines, has difficulty dealing with multiple uses as well as inter municipal impacts and is rarely, if ever, subject to enforcement.

Perhaps the most significant shift that may occur as a result of this report is a clear acknowledgement that agriculture cannot approach the broader issue of land use policy as an industry in isolation. To do so will likely lead to a perspective that is too limiting and viewed by the public as self-serving. The consequence, in light of the multiple growth pressures, is to compromise agriculture as an industry within the broader context of growth and demand use pressures.

Rather, agriculture should approach the land use challenge as one player in a multi-sector and stakeholder process. As well, agriculture must itself approach the process recognizing its own diversity and accordingly, the differing land use requirements within its own industry. This will be challenging. However, it begins a more comprehensive approach that has a much better opportunity to develop optimal solutions for Albertans and, in the long run, for the agricultural industry itself. Such a cross-sectoral approach should aim at achieving the overall public interest – a public interest increasingly focused on the value of natural capital.

A new perspective on land use and land use planning requires a clear vision and the application of new tools to actualize the vision. A number of key actions are required including calling for the comprehensive re-writing of Provincial Land Use Policies; undertaking an integrated approach to planning; establishing mechanisms to coordinate multiple interests; developing strong municipal policy; building a foundation of sound information and data from which improved decision making can flow; and developing new tools to manage balanced growth. These tools include 'Smart Growth' – namely an approach to reduce urban sprawl; establishing a system that quantifies the value of environmental goods & services which in turn will provide a basis to acquire and transfer easements and rights as well as a framework for effective mitigation and compensation.

The Agriculture & Food Council has the opportunity to provide leadership on the issue of land use and land use planning. To this end, this document can serve as a basis to generate feedback and direction from the agricultural community as well as Albertans at large. Further, the Council can play a vital role in shaping the agenda for a new approach to land use planning. Integral to this process will be the development of relationships and alliances with other sectors and interests. Collectively, this alliance of interests will be positioned to advocate a comprehensive approach to land use and land use planning with the provincial and municipal governments.

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Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

<http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca/app21/rtw/index.jsp>

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties

<http://www.aamdc.com/Policy/default.htm>

Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Program

www.abmp.arc.ab.ca

Alberta Chamber of Resources

<http://www.acr-alberta.com/>

Alberta Energy

<http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca/>

Alberta Energy and Utilities Board

www.eub.gov.ab.ca

Alberta Environment

<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/>

Alberta Municipal Affairs

<http://www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/>

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development

<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/>

American Farmland Trust

<http://www.farmland.org/>

Canada West Foundation

<http://www.cwf.ca/>

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Government of Alberta

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Natural Resources Conservation Board

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Smart Growth BC

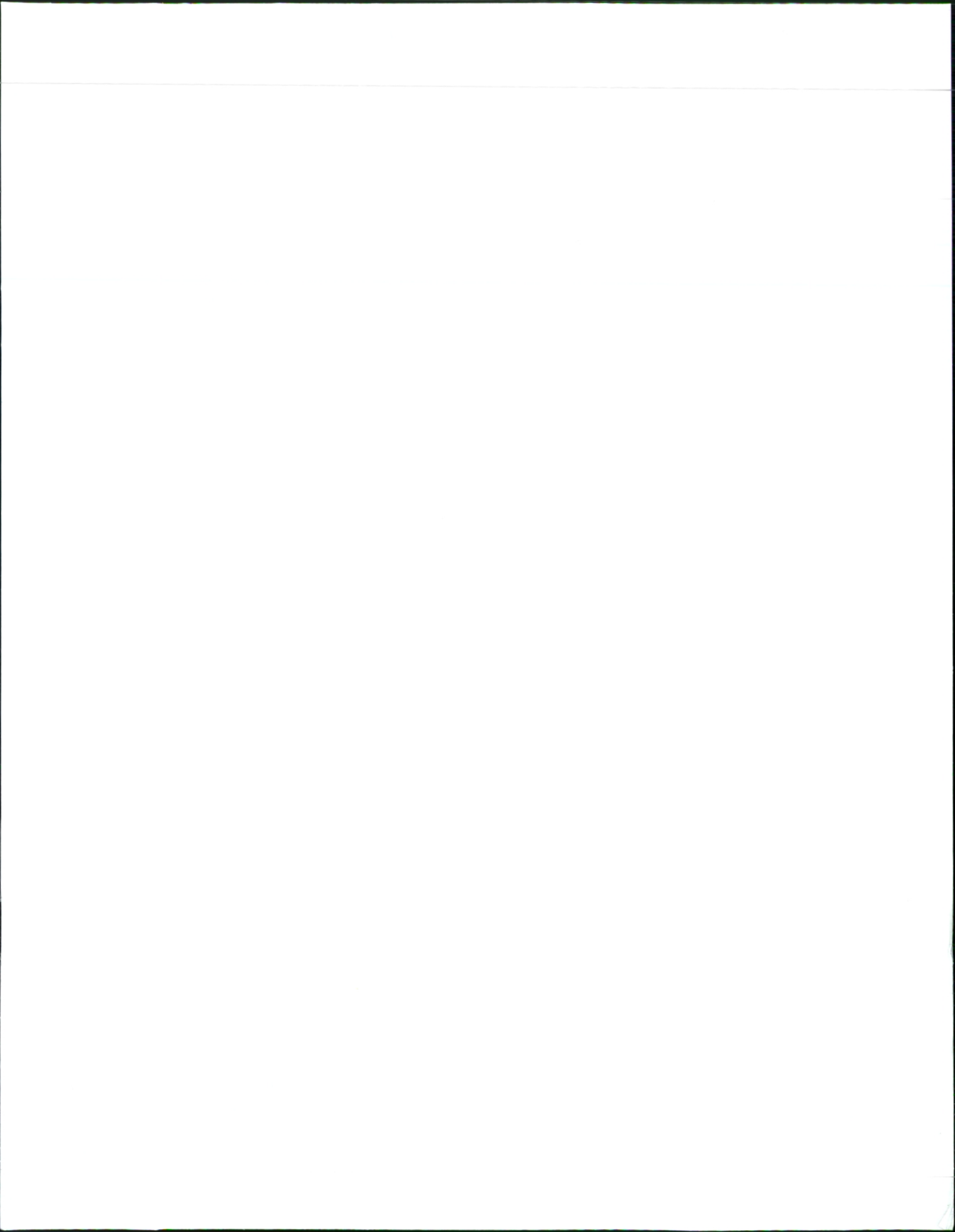
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Agriculture & Food Council
The Catalyst

The Agriculture and Food Council was formed in 1994 as an industry organization representing all links in Alberta's agri-food chain. Council seeks to support the industry in achieving its long-term goals of increasing Alberta's share of world food, agriculture and agribusiness markets; improving sustainable resource and environmental management; and engaging industry and society in building understanding, awareness and capacity to learn, adapt, lead and improve quality of life.

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