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Leduc County Agricultural Strategy

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As Approved by Council

Prepared By





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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Report Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the outcome of the comprehensive analysis and consultation process that was previously documented in the Phase 1 Report¹. This report describes:

- (a) the **vision** for the long term future of agriculture in Leduc County,
- (b) a **definition** of agriculture that is suitable for the context and circumstances of Leduc County,
- (c) the **principles** that provide the fundamental direction for how Leduc County must proceed if it is to achieve the vision, and
- (d) an **agricultural strategy** that outlines a multi-pronged set of implementation actions in the areas of governance, advocacy, communication, education, and infrastructure.

The draft definition, vision, principles and strategy has been tested with the residents, farmers, businesses, and other stakeholders in Leduc County in the consultation process. These consultations were held on March 17, 21 and 22 and had over 90 people attend and discuss the options.

A number of excellent points were raised and some additional context provided specifically regarding: the need for more clarity in terms of the components of an agricultural impact assessment; and the need to more clearly recognize the difference in the impacts of land fragmentation in various regions within the County.

This feedback has been considered and addressed in this Agricultural Strategy document. Once approved by County Council, the details of the agriculture strategy will be implemented over time. This will be accomplished through a variety of tools including: policies in the new Municipal Development Plan; updates to regulations in the Zoning Bylaw; and other Leduc County programs such as communication, education, budgeting and infrastructure.

1.2 The Ag Strategy In Context

The Leduc Agricultural Strategy is intended to provide a general strategy for agriculture and land use planning in the County. This strategy will ultimately be implemented, over time, through a suite of Leduc County decisions and actions from communication and education through infrastructure and regulations. As such, the Agricultural Strategy is intended as one of the key drivers in shaping the Municipal Development Plan that is now under preparation—that is the primary document where the important land use policy are enshrined. The next step in this process is that the Agriculture Strategy gets considered as part of the MDP consultation process in upcoming public meetings and its policies are considered along with all the other factors in the overall comprehensive development of the new MDP.

¹ As documented in the "Agriculture Strategy: Draft Situation Report" prepared by Serecon, Toma & Bouma and Stantec, December 7, 2015.



2.0 Vision

2.1 Background

Near the end of the 1800s, various factors coincided to drive the rapid agricultural settlement of Alberta: European settlers looking for opportunity, the expansion of the railroads, the granting of homestead lands to settlers, aggressive advertising by the Canadian government, the requirements of European markets for agricultural products, and limitations on the availability of land in the US. With its fertile soils, agriculture flourished in what is now Leduc County.

Although agriculture continued as a major economic driver in Leduc County, the economy diversified, most notably with the discovery of oil at Leduc #1 in 1947, the opening of the Edmonton International Airport in 1960, the development of the Nisku Industrial Park in 1972 and significant coal extraction for power generation in the western portion of the County. At the same time, the metropolitan area within the County and in the adjacent areas continued to grow at a quick pace, with development pressures especially strong in the Queen Elizabeth Highway corridor. Consequently, agriculture now operates in a much more competitive environment in the midst of an array of industrial, commercial and residential pressures and competing uses for what have historically been agricultural lands.

2.2 Vision

It is from within this context that the following vision for agriculture in Leduc County is proposed—a vision that reflects the opportunities, conditions, realities and desires of Leduc County and recognizes both the historical role of agriculture in the community as well as the future opportunities for agriculture in a local and global economy.

Leduc County: A vibrant and resilient agri-food future built on a proud agriculture history.

This vision describes a 'picture of the future' that builds upon a solid agricultural past that has brought us to where we are today. Agriculture is a significant part of the current County fabric. The 2011 Census of Agriculture reported a total of 1,850 farm operators and 1,225 farms in Leduc County, with a combined capital value of over \$2.5 Billion. Farming occupies about 72% of the area of Leduc County.

In the past, the typical farm used to be a family earning a living from mixed farming from a quarter section. This type of system has changed dramatically. For example: there is more specialization; there are fewer but larger farms; technology has dramatically altered the operational environment; and sophisticated business management practices are required to ensure financial success.

Therefore, this vision for agriculture must also look to the future—ensuring that agriculture will continue to evolve and thrive. The outlook for agriculture—particularly the demand for grains, oilseeds, pulses and meat proteins will be strong. The opportunity is to supply a range of agricultural and food products and/or services to an accessible metropolitan and global market.

Addressing this opportunity requires a formal and firm commitment by Leduc County to ensure the conditions for agriculture, and agricultural land, play an



important role within the context of land use in Leduc County.

One of the main challenges comes from the proximity factor and the resulting competition for land for non-agricultural purposes - whether it is for residential, commercial or industrial growth. Given this inherent conflict, the vision must not only provide direction for realistic and economically sustainable opportunities but also commit to a regular review process to assess and adapt the continuing viability of agriculture in the light of continuous change.



3.0 Definition

3.1 Need for Common Terminology

Common terminology is critical in the process of strategy development. In this case, one of the key elements is to ensure that there is an agreement on what 'agriculture' means within the context of Leduc County. A common dictionary definition of agriculture might traditionally have read something like this: *Agriculture is the science, art, or practice of farming including cultivating soil for growing crops and the rearing animals to provide food, fibre and other products.*

The Canadian Census of Agriculture defines a "farm" as an agricultural operation that produces at least one of the following products intended for sale: crops (hay, field crops, tree fruits or nuts, berries or grapes, vegetables, seed); livestock (cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, game animals, other livestock); poultry (hens, chickens, turkeys, chicks, game birds, other poultry); animal products (milk or cream, eggs, wool, furs, meat); or other agricultural products (Christmas trees, greenhouse or nursery products, mushrooms, sod, honey, maple syrup products).

The reality, however, is that given the changes in the industry and the diversity of stakeholders, agriculture means different things to different people. It varies tremendously—ranging from large operations covering thousands of acres to small specialized operations within a controlled environmental facility. This is a critical issue since it creates confusion and uncertainty since the various components comprising 'agriculture' will vary given their relative importance in different parts of a community.

3.2 Components

Based on the information that has been reviewed, it would appear that there are various components to 'agriculture' that contribute to a complete definition, as follows:

- **activity:** it includes business, practice, production, managing, raising, cultivation...
- **knowledge:** it's based on skills, expertise, the science, the art of...
- **products:** it includes a variety of food, fibre, crops, livestock, wool, horticultural products, and experiences with these products...
- **supplementary services:** activities such as marketing, value added production, tourism, recreation, education...
- **motivations:** mostly driven by profit-seeking, but also lifestyle...
- **dynamic:** it is constantly changing and evolving...

If Leduc County defines agriculture as broadly as possible it would be more inclusive and potentially maximize opportunities as agriculture continues to evolve in the future. While the objectives of farmers historically have been to produce food for human consumption and to do so profitably over the long term, Council should not limit agriculture to these activities alone as agriculture continues to change. The definition should also be broad enough to include activities that are motivated by personal interests (hobby) or recreational purposes.



3.3 Definition

A broad definition has the added advantage that it enables, agriculture to occur in both and urban and rural settings.

However, by defining agriculture too widely you leave significant room to define what an agricultural enterprise really is making decisions more complex: is a welding shop that focuses on agriculture but also does work for the oilfield the same as a farrier in terms of the goals of the County when making decisions?

Finally, as you broaden the definition of agriculture you potentially increase the extent of discretion that has to be applied in making decisions. This flexibility creates complexity in ensuring transparency in decision making—one of the key demands from stakeholders is a reasonable level of certainty.

After considering all of these elements, the following definition of agriculture is proposed:

The growing, raising, managing and/or sale of livestock, crops, foods, horticulture and agrifood related value added enterprises including education, motivated either by profit or lifestyle.²

This provides a good balance between the various interests. It also contributes to consistency on a regional basis.

² Livestock is defined to include poultry in this case.



4.0 Principles

4.1 The Basis

As outlined in the Phase 1 Report, analysis and stakeholder input from across Leduc County was used as a basis for the development of principles. These consultations clearly indicated that participants to the input process felt strongly that:

- There was a need to **enshrine the right to farm** – the feeling from respondents was that if agriculture is important to the county then it should be clearly stated. In addition there was a desire for actions and regulations that are consistent with this goal.
- Respondents also felt strongly that there was a need to **prioritize soils as a part of any land use decision making process**. Leduc County has fertile soils that need to be preserved, but that the intrinsic value of high quality agricultural land does not offset the speculative value tied to development. This imbalance has caused issues and a structured way to deal with these needs to be developed.
- Leduc County is **well situated** to develop more intensive food producing operations (market gardens, produce production, greenhouses) as well as downstream agricultural enterprises comprising primary processing, further processing or related value added and agri-business opportunities.
- Valuable agricultural land is being lost and this **is of significant concern**.
- In addition to the absolute loss of land, there is a need to **limit the impact of subdivision that fragments farmland** and creates conflict and difficulties for agriculture. Input from the public meetings has provided additional context on how this can be addressed and why the approach need not be consistent across the County.
- Decisions need to be consistent and transparent **and rules need to be enforceable and then enforced** - a reasonable level of certainty is important.
- There is a **lack of a champion(s)** for agriculture and that agriculture appears to be a low priority for Leduc County.
- The reality of the physical location of the county, and hence the competing pressures for land, is not lost on the interviewees. Stakeholders generally accept that there is a need for a **balanced approach** with agricultural considerations but one element, although an important one, in the decision framework.
- An important reality is **an element of education that is thought to be necessary**. This may be in the form of a more specific expression of the importance of agriculture and how it contributes to the economic, social and environmental fabric of Leduc County—hence the need for a strong statement of support for agriculture.

After considering the situation and input from the stakeholders, four principles were



identified. Each was defined with specific supporting elements. These principles were used to identify the relevant elements to be included in the future strategy for agriculture in Leduc County. They are as follows:

- 1. Leduc County formally recognizes and champions the importance of agriculture for its economic, environmental, and community contributions and is committed to ensuring its long-term viability in the County.**
- 2. Leduc County should protect long term priority agriculture areas. The designation of these areas shall be done on a comprehensive and systematic basis considering land suitability, contextual factors, and the protection of large contiguous areas through reducing and managing conflicting land uses.**
- 3. Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion to non-agricultural uses, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.**
- 4. Agricultural should have a variety of targeted support and education programs to promote understanding and provide more certainty for the agricultural industry and ensure both traditional and value-added agriculture achieves their potential in Leduc County.**

4.2 Principle 1

Formally recognize and champion agriculture's important role in Leduc County

Agriculture is the major user of land and is a major contributor to the economy in Leduc County. It creates jobs and economic wealth for farmers and businesses. It also offers a degree of local food security; it provides an alternative lifestyle for those who desire it; it helps establish the aesthetic and community character of the County; and it contributes a set of environmental goods and services such as cleaner air, water, as well as fostering a diversity of wildlife habitat.

As a result, agricultural land has intrinsic value that is not necessarily quantified in the market values typically attributed at any point in time. Accepting this principle reflects that land is the foundation for agriculture and needs to be seriously considered in a broader context.

Leduc County is a complex municipality with a diversity of major uses, including industrial, commercial, country residential as well as agriculture. Agriculture faces both opportunities and challenges from being in a growing metropolitan setting. If agriculture is to grow and prosper in a climate of certainty, it needs to be supported by a strong commitment to its future. Hence, the following principle:

Leduc County formally recognizes and champions the importance of agriculture for its economic, environmental, and community contributions and is committed to ensuring its long-term viability in the County.

This statement must actually mean something in terms of policy. Agriculture should not be considered a temporary use and agricultural lands should not be considered a land bank for future non-agricultural development opportunities. Leduc County



must demonstrate that it is not just paying lip service to the protection of agricultural lands until lands are proposed for subdivision and conversion to non-agricultural uses.

First, formal recognition provides certainty through a commitment that agriculture is important in the long run to Leduc County. **Second**, decisions regarding land use pass a highest and best use analysis filter that measures the impacts of policy decisions on agriculture. **Third**, while the municipality is a lead player, other stakeholders and citizens should participate. This process would govern how land use practices and other programs are implemented in the future.

This is a critical step for Leduc County, especially considering the extent of the development pressure currently being faced by the agriculture sector. A key issue raised in the interviews was the extent to which the County Council thinks that agriculture is relevant, formal recognition with related steps, actions and deliverables would send a very strong positive signal to the sector.

In fact, the lack of the agricultural voice is a major deficiency in Leduc County and much of Alberta. By comparison, Quebec has a very strong farm advocacy group (Union Producteur Agricole); Ontario has a Federation of Agriculture organized at the county level; Manitoba has the Keystone Agricultural Producers which is a strong voice for agriculture.

These factors mean that the administration of County programs should be based on the inherent need to support agriculture on a day-to-day basis and in the long term. Targets for programs need to be set, monitored and revised as required.



4.3 Principle 2

Recognize and protect the priority agricultural land

The land base in Leduc County varies greatly by soil quality and suitability for agriculture of different kinds. As a result, agricultural regions within Leduc County are not the same, given their soils and the growth pressures arising from their location and context. The impact of this is that all land is not equal in terms of the utility it provides as farmland and how it fits within the context of the County. However, there are areas that are worthy of long term protection for agricultural use.

Leduc County should protect long term priority agriculture areas. The designation of these areas shall be done on a comprehensive and systematic basis considering land suitability, contextual factors, and the protection of large contiguous areas by reducing and managing conflicting land uses.

In other words, acceptance of this principle means that any land use planning process must establish a robust set of policies and approaches that facilitate, or at the very least support, those types of agriculture that have the best fit and future in the County and reflect this in the decision making process. On the other hand, while agriculture is to have a high priority, it must fit within the multiple objectives the County seeks to integrate like economic development and environmental protection.

This principle, when combined with the previous principle, should lead to determining priority areas where agricultural lands are to be protected in the long term. It will also determine areas where conversion and subdivision will be permitted that will have the least conflict with agricultural uses.

There is a continuum of tools to address the protection of agricultural land—they range from doing nothing—which would violate the findings from the stakeholder consultations—to a strong regulatory approach. Leduc County is not alone in dealing with these issues. For example, the Provinces of British Columbia and Ontario have made very clear commitments with their respective Agricultural Land Reserve and Greenbelt zones. Other counties such as Lancaster County in Pennsylvania have clearly delineated permanent agriculture areas and urban growth boundaries. Whatcom County in Washington State has set the objective of maintaining a minimum area of 100,000 acres and is actively protecting current agricultural land as well as re-converting lands in urban areas back to agriculture. Consideration could also be given to identifying and preserving what could be termed as 'Special Agriculture Area' defined as an area characterized by unique soils, climatic factors, infrastructure and/or management capabilities that enables it to produce a range of agricultural/food products that cannot be replicated elsewhere.³

While Leduc County is limited to the tools available to it under the Municipal Government Act, which is primarily strong local policy, this could be reinforced with stronger tools at the regional and provincial level. In any event, the County's overall land use pattern must be cognizant of the multiple economic, environmental

³ Three examples include (a) the Holland Marsh in Ontario—an area of deep black/peat soils that grow large acreages of vegetables; (b) the Niagara Peninsula between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario—known as the tender fruit growing region including peaches and grapes; and (c) the Okanagan Region—BC's wine growing region.



4.4 Principle 3

(natural capital), and community values that come from agriculture. There is significant non-market value associated with it and that this needs to be formally recognized in any land use decision process. For example, several US states are using an effective tool called the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) program. This process systematically evaluates farmland based both on technical merit (land quality) as well as suitability for development (proximity to services, other development, infrastructure, etc.).

Regardless of the tools used, it is critical that the application of this principle be done in a transparent and objective fashion. The County must be seen as consistently applying the rules and/or process that are used to identify and then protect priority agricultural land. Similarly, there will be areas where some aspects of agriculture, such as intensive livestock operations, will not be suitable because of conflicts with other priority uses in that area.

Limit land fragmentation in priority agricultural areas

During the stakeholder consultation it became very apparent that fragmentation of agricultural land was felt to be as big of an issue as the absolute loss of the agricultural land base through conversion. There was a slight divergence between the requirements for large scale agriculture and those for smaller more intensive production. These two requirements have been accommodated in the strategy.

As a result, significantly reducing the level of subdivision in priority agricultural areas is established as an independent principle for the development of the Agricultural Strategy.

Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.

This means that the land use policy process must provide a mechanism for the qualification and potential quantification of the extent of fragmentation when considering any land use decision in priority agricultural areas. Decisions must be based on an objective technical process that provides strict guidance for the exercise of discretion, eliminating the potential for the perception of political interference. The perception of a political based decision making process will undermine the credibility of the decision making process—regardless of the accuracy of that perception.

Strict enforcement of this type of criteria would obviously create significant reservation from those who feel it is affecting the value of their surface rights. This protest is a reality to be accepted if the negative impacts of fragmentation on agriculture are to be avoided.

Ultimately, there is a need to recognize the diversity of agriculture, including the need to maintain large parcels as well as parcels appropriate for intensive agricultural production in order to avoid conflicts with incompatible uses, etc. This is consistent with municipal land preservation schemes that have been used in both Canada and the United States. Any adjustment to priority areas (defined in Principle 2) must be clearly stated and the rationale must follow an accepted and transparent



4.5 Principle 4

process.

Leduc County needs to send a clear and consistent message to all parties that the policy decisions about priority agriculture areas are firm and not subject to change. While discretionary uses may still be allowed in agricultural areas of the County its use would be limited to situations where significant, structured, and transparent impact analysis has been completed. A clear signal of how the County is going to deal with land use zoning decisions provides certainty and will ensure that stakeholder expectations are set appropriately. Ultimately, there is a need to communicate that agriculture is of high on-going importance in Leduc County (i.e., it's not just a land bank for future commercial and industrial development).

Implement multi-pronged support for long term success

While agriculture is primarily land based and will benefit from establishing priority agriculture areas, it's not just about the land. Leduc County, to support and foster a healthy agricultural sector, needs to assert its commitment to agriculture with a clear political strategy supported by land use plans and policies. But these are only part of the solution—Leduc County needs to supplement the focus on land with a broad menu of other activities, such as governance structures, communications and education, economic development initiatives, and infrastructure efforts.

Agriculture should have a variety of targeted support programs to ensure agriculture achieves its potential in Leduc County.

As with the oil and gas sector and other industrial sectors, infrastructure specific to agriculture may be required. This could potentially be in the form of economic/market development strategies, communication/public relations, and physical infrastructure.

Ultimately, the agricultural sector will have to stand on its own. However, a focus on specific infrastructure will increase the extent to which the sector can grow and speed at which it can provide a significant contribution back to the County.



5.0 The Proposed Agricultural Strategy

5.1 The Basis

Agriculture is, by far, the major land use in Leduc County. As noted earlier, agriculture creates jobs and economic wealth for farmers and businesses; it offers a degree of local food security; it provides an alternative lifestyle for those who desire it; it helps establish the aesthetic and community character of the County; and it contributes a set of environmental goods and services such as cleaner air, water, as well as fostering a diversity of wildlife habitat.

As planning is goal directed, it is important to link the proposed policies and actions back to the principles. This makes it clear the rationale why certain actions should be undertaken. This section outlines the proposed agricultural strategy (policies and actions) that flow from the principles—so it is structured based on those four key principles.

All of the policies and actions are discussed below principle by principle.

5.2 Principle 1

Leduc County formally recognizes and champions the importance of agriculture for its economic, environmental, and community contributions and is committed to ensuring its long-term viability in the County.

For agriculture to grow and prosper, it needs to be supported by a strong commitment to its future. Agricultural land should not be considered simply as a land bank or a holding reserve for development opportunities that arise in the metropolitan setting. The intent of this principle is to provide certainty through a long term commitment to agriculture in Leduc County. Flowing from this, decisions regarding land uses should fully consider the impacts of policy decisions on agriculture. Formal recognition with related steps, actions and deliverables would send a very strong positive signal to the sector.

Actions

County Council should adopt this Agricultural Strategy with the purpose of clearly demonstrating its strong long term commitment to support a diverse agricultural sector in the County and incorporate its key aspects into all related municipal planning and policy documents and processes including:

1. Fostering agriculture as a stated key policy area in the County's Strategic Plan—with key indicators and targets defined, and monitoring and corrective action processes outlined.
2. The development of specific agriculture-supportive policies (urban growth boundaries, priority agriculture areas, special agriculture areas, limits on conversion and fragmentation, etc.). These policies need to be identified, qualified and included in the new County Municipal Development Plan.
3. Leduc County should update its evaluation and reporting processes to ensure that planning, land use, subdivision and other County decisions are



5.3 Principle 2

Actions

reviewed from the perspective of impacts on agriculture. This should include agricultural impact assessments⁴—similar to those required for environmental impact assessments—where there may be significant impacts on priority agriculture areas.

4. Leduc County should facilitate establishing a comprehensive advocacy group to promote agriculture on a county-wide basis. One of the main functions of this group would be to ensure that the principles of the Agricultural Strategy are followed and enforced.
5. Leduc County should set a specific and stated goal to work with municipal partners and the Capital Region Board to establish a consistent and agriculture-supportive approach to food and agriculture throughout the Capital Region.
6. Leduc County should implement a targeted education and communication strategy focused on indicating the support for and positive impact of agriculture in the County.

Leduc County should protect long term priority agriculture areas. The designation of these areas shall be done on a comprehensive and systematic basis considering land suitability, contextual factors, and the protection of large contiguous areas by reducing and managing conflicting land uses.

While agriculture must have a high priority, it still must be integrated into Leduc County's multiple objectives like economic development and environmental protection. While Leduc County is limited to the tools available to it under the Municipal Government Act, this could be reinforced with stronger tools at the regional and provincial level.

It is critical land use decisions be made in a consistent, transparent and objective fashion based on the priority of agriculture in the area.

Some of the key actions would include:

1. Leduc County should establish firm long term boundaries for priority agriculture areas - this will provide certainty for agriculture - as shown on Figure 1 in the Appendix. These boundaries should be enshrined in the new Municipal Development Plan and future area structure plans where appropriate. Outside these areas, higher density of use should be required and encouraged to reduce future development pressure on lands in the priority agriculture areas. The small holdings/country residential area east of Beaumont can be developed for small holdings agriculture and country residential. Additional prioritization within this area would be accomplished, where necessary, via a formal impact assessment process which is described

⁴ An agricultural impact assessment is intended to determine if a development proposal will adversely affect existing and future agricultural activities on-site and in the surrounding area. The assessment describes the proposed development, the on-site and surrounding land uses, and the physical and socio-economic components of the agricultural resource base; identifies the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed development on existing agricultural operations and on the flexibility of the area to support different types of agriculture; considers methods of reducing any adverse impacts; considers compensation such as the provision of agricultural protection easements; and makes recommendations in that regard. It has consideration for the cumulative effects of other potential development. A more detailed outline of requirements can be observed in Appendix 2.



in Appendix 2.

2. The priority agriculture areas are divided into seven sub-areas. Specific consideration and/or rationale needs to include: the quality of the land; the fact that there will continue to be pressure and the extent of fragmentation already occurring in a given region; the existence of intensive livestock operations and what they require in order to ensure they can continue to operate; any special environmental considerations that are already in place; and the fact that just because farmers may need to grow does not mean they necessarily want to be landlords.

After taking this into consideration, the proposed priority agriculture sub-areas include:

- A. Those areas for **Environmentally Sensitive Agriculture** (along the North Saskatchewan River, the Pigeon Lake watershed, and the moraine lands in the northeast of the County).
Intent/Vision – these areas represent larger existing policy areas in the County. Agriculture is a priority use for the majority of these areas, but must operate with sensitivity to the environmental context. It is understood that there are a number of additional ESA's that have been identified in a recent study and the applicable policies must be followed.
- B. The **Genesee Power area Project**, which in the long term, should be rehabilitated and returned, primarily, to agriculture use.
Intent/Vision – to formally and officially recognize that these lands are to be returned to agricultural use over time.
- C. **West Agriculture** including areas around and west of Thorsby. These lands typically have a mix of CLI 2-5 and a lower FAR. There is not a significant number of intensive livestock operations in this area.
Intent/Vision – to recognize that the needs for the west part of the County are as unique and diverse as are the relative quality of the soils. The intent would be to maintain an area in the county where affordable larger scale agriculture is possible while balancing the need to allow for minimal subdivision in order to maintain communities.
- D. **North Central Agriculture** including those lands both east and west of Leduc, Nisku and the Environmental Impact Assessment. These lands are some of the best lands in the County. They differ from the lands further south in that there is not a significant amount of intensive livestock production in those regions.
Intent/Vision – this area currently has a number of larger scale cropping operations on high quality soil and there is a need to ensure their viability into the future. The point is to that development in this area should be discouraged.
- E. **South Central/East Agriculture** which includes those lands south of Calmar and Leduc including the lands south of Twp Road 500 and east of the lakes. The lands in the south central area are higher quality than average and have a number of intensive livestock (mostly dairy) operations. Those lands to the south east typically have a lower FAR however they do have a significant number of dairy operations and their requirements have to be considered.



- Intent/Vision** – intensive livestock needs to be considered if it is to have a future in the County. This area would be identified as one in which the needs of those farmers are considered and protected. Therefore, development should be limited to protect this potential.
- F. **Agriculture Small Holdings/Country Residential** areas which are east of Beaumont to Highway 21. This area is one of the most fragmented parts of the County already and typically has a mid to lower FAR.
Intent/Vision – to reflect the reality that population pressure will continue in the County. As a result, this area is identified as the most desirable location to accommodate that reality. It is understood that Country Residential needs to have a minimum density and this needs to be addressed as part of the MDP process.
- G. **Agriculture Small Holdings areas** in the northeast corner of the County where there are already a number of small agricultural holdings. Increased country residential should be discouraged. In addition, there is a need to consider the Beaver Hills Moraine biosphere.
Intent/Vision – not all agriculture is large scale and this area can provide a place for anyone wishing to produce food and/or agricultural products on a smaller scale on smaller parcels. This would include nurseries; greenhouses; market gardens; U-Pick; organic etc. It would also include non-product based agriculture like agri-tourism, equine, etc.
3. Current policies and zoning should provide for a broad variety of agriculture wherever possible and being consistent with the elements outlined in point 2. Agri-tourism could be added in as a viable discretionary use.
4. The conversion of land to non-agricultural uses (such as recreation, processing, recreational vehicle storage, etc.) in areas C- E as defined in Table 1 should only be considered after a formal and extensive agricultural impact assessment – the specific components of which are outlined in Appendix 2. The stated intent is to maintain contiguous areas of agricultural land without conflict from other non-agricultural uses. Leduc County should direct conversion to areas outside priority agriculture areas that are less desirable for agriculture or with less impact on agriculture.
5. In order to be consistent with this principle, Leduc County should that the maximum number of dwellings allowed per parcel is limited and strictly enforced. There must be a process to ensure that the onus is on the applicant – through the application of an agricultural impact assessment – to demonstrate that an exception has to be made and there are simply no other reasonable alternatives available to them.
6. As part of its broad education and communication programs, Leduc County should give the community a better appreciation of the requirements and the benefits of them. A clear signal of how the County makes decisions will ensure that stakeholder expectations are set appropriately. Ultimately, there is a need to communicate that agriculture is of high on-going importance in Leduc County (i.e., it's not just a land bank for future commercial and industrial development).



7. Leduc County should work with the Capital Region Board to have priority agriculture areas designated in the Regional Growth Plan. Similarly, Leduc County could encourage the Provincial Government to do more to protect priority agricultural areas.
8. Leduc County should formally monitor and annually report on the amount and location of land conversion.
9. When Leduc County updates its Land Use Bylaw, requirements should be included to (1) make sure the size of residential areas in agricultural settings be no larger than required to include buildings and natural areas for existing farmsteads, etc., (2) buildings shall be located closer to roads so as to maintain the maximum viability for agricultural lands, (3) residential parcels and their access shall be located to minimize any negative impact on agricultural operations, and (4) have boundary conditions to buffer and minimize the impacts between uses across boundary lines.

5.4 Principle 3

Fragmentation of agricultural land is just as much a problem as is the absolute loss of agricultural land through conversion, so fragmentation should be limited in priority agricultural areas.

The consultation process revealed that fragmentation of agricultural land was as big of an issue as the absolute loss of the agricultural land base through conversion. As a result, reducing the level of subdivision in priority agricultural areas is an important component of the future agricultural strategy as farms grow larger and conflict with non-agricultural users is to be minimized.

Strict enforcement of this type of criteria would obviously create reservation from those who feel it is affecting the value of their surface rights. This protest is a reality to be accepted if the negative impacts of fragmentation on agriculture are to be avoided. The following actions would be required:



Actions

1. In the agricultural priority areas, the Land Use Bylaw should be amended to limit subdivision and dwellings to that which is proposed in Table 1 below.
2. A formal agricultural impact assessment would be required for subdivision identified in Table 1. As part of this assessment it would be expected that the applicant be able to quantify that the impact of the obstruction would be minimal in terms of its effect on the typical farming operation.



Table 1 Matrix of Priority Agricultural Land – County of Leduc

	Agriculture Priority Areas	Location	Permitted Subdivisions	Dwellings	Agriculture Impact Assessment
A	Environmentally Sensitive Agriculture	Along the North Saskatchewan River and some of the major lakes and the Ministik Lake Sanctuary	1 parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or a CR) subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment	1 principal permitted; 1 secondary dwelling is discretionary	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.
B	Genesse Reclamation for Agriculture	The coal mining area in the northwest portion of the County	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP
C	West Agriculture	The areas around and west of Thorsby	1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac, homestead, or a CR)	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 80 ac parcels	For new CR parcels but not homestead parcels. Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.
D	North Central Agriculture	Lands in the north central portion of the County both east and west of the development core of Leduc, Nisku, Edmonton International Airport, etc.	1 new 80 ac parcel; no additional homestead or CR parcels	1 principal dwelling on each parcel	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.
E	South Central /East Agriculture	Lands south of Calmar, Leduc and Twp Road 500	1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or existing homestead, but not a new CR)	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 80 ac parcels	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.
F	Small Holdings and Country Residential	Generally between Range Rd 234 and Hwy 21 north of Twp Rd 500	As per area structure plan, may include small holdings and CR	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 40 ac parcels	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.
G	Small Holdings Agriculture	In the northeast corner of the County north of Twp Road 500 east of Hwy 21	40 ac minimum, no CR	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.



5.5 Principle 4

Agricultural should have a variety of targeted support programs to ensure agriculture achieves its potential in Leduc County.

While agriculture is primarily land based, it's not just about the land. Leduc County needs to supplement the focus on land with a broad menu of other activities, such as governance structures, communications and education, economic development initiatives, and infrastructure efforts. The target for these activities MUST reach beyond the residents of the County and address the reality that there is a need to engage the wider urban population in the Capital region.

Compliance with this principle includes the following:

Actions

1. Leduc County needs to actively send a clear and consistent message to all parties that agriculture is of high on-going importance in the County (i.e., it's not just about commercial, residential and industrial development). This means that every decision must have formal consideration of its impact on agriculture.
2. Broad education programs could be introduced to give the community a better appreciation of agriculture and to promote best practices for the agricultural sector (such as ALUS). Targets for the outcomes would be part of the annual reporting as part of the strategy assessment process.
3. Leduc County needs to follow up on its message by working with other stakeholders to support agriculture in the County and the Capital Region: the farmers, food processors and other agri-food related value added enterprises, agri-food input and service suppliers, its residents, other municipalities, the Capital Region Board, and the Provincial Government.
4. Leduc County should formally coordinate and implement its agricultural strategy as part of its relationship with other agencies like Leduc Nisku Economic Development Association. As Aerotropolis moves ahead, Leduc County should encourage that its initiatives help advance the overall agriculture sector in Leduc County.
5. Leduc County should work to maximize benefit for agriculture from synergy with the other economic drivers (like the airport, Nisku industrial).
6. Leduc County should facilitate the formation of a comprehensive advocacy group to provide leadership and promote agriculture on a county-wide basis.
7. Leduc County could facilitate an annual agricultural forum aimed at assisting and promoting the agriculture sector in the county. This forum would build on Leduc's strength as an agri-food jurisdiction and could provide an opportunity to review progress and suggest changes to the agricultural strategy as required. Perhaps the initial goal for the Leduc 'Agri-Food' Forum is to identify, assess and prioritize the top tactical priorities for the County based on the new agricultural strategy giving direction for supporting policies including the organizational requirements, infrastructure, marketing and communications.
8. Leduc County must include specific agricultural priorities in long term



budget planning and annual budgets – further to the detailing of these priorities. These priorities have to be equal to those of other areas of budget planning and addressed as such.

9. Leduc County should dedicate resources to economic development initiatives for food and agriculture whether it's for events, promotion of local food, developing value added clusters, farmers markets, community gardens, agri-tourism, etc. This will require the development of a focused economic development strategy for the agri-food sector.
10. Leduc County should establish a mechanism for the purchase of agricultural protection easements through different sources. There are options for funding, such as a special levy, a land conversion fee, or donations, etc.
11. Leduc County should pursue funding opportunities for agricultural community development projects. Such funds are typically available from either provincial or federal programs.
12. Leduc County should develop a set of indicators and report annually on the success of the implementation of the agriculture strategy. This would include addressing a range of planning measures (land conversions, fragmentation etc.), and business measures (market development achievements, etc.).



6.0 Next Steps

Implementation

This report reflects discussion with the Agriculture Services Board, the Council, and the stakeholders in Leduc County about the vision, definition, and principles. Each of the recommendations can be linked directly back to one or more of the principles and is seen as a building block necessary in order to achieve the vision for agriculture in Leduc County.

As stated in the introduction, the Leduc Agricultural Strategy is intended to provide a general strategy for agriculture and land use planning in the County and is intended to be one of the key drivers in shaping the Municipal Development Plan that is now under preparation—that is the primary document where the important land use policy are enshrined. In addition, over time the Land Use Bylaw should be amended to implement the MDP policies with respect to agriculture.

The next step in this process is that the Agriculture Strategy gets considered as part of the MDP consultation process in upcoming public meetings and its policies are considered along with all the other factors in the overall comprehensive development of the new MDP. For example, policies about population growth and distribution might be developed consistent with the Agricultural Strategy.

7.0 Appendix 1: Identification of Priority Areas

Figure 1: Geographic Coverage of the Seven Priority Agriculture Areas

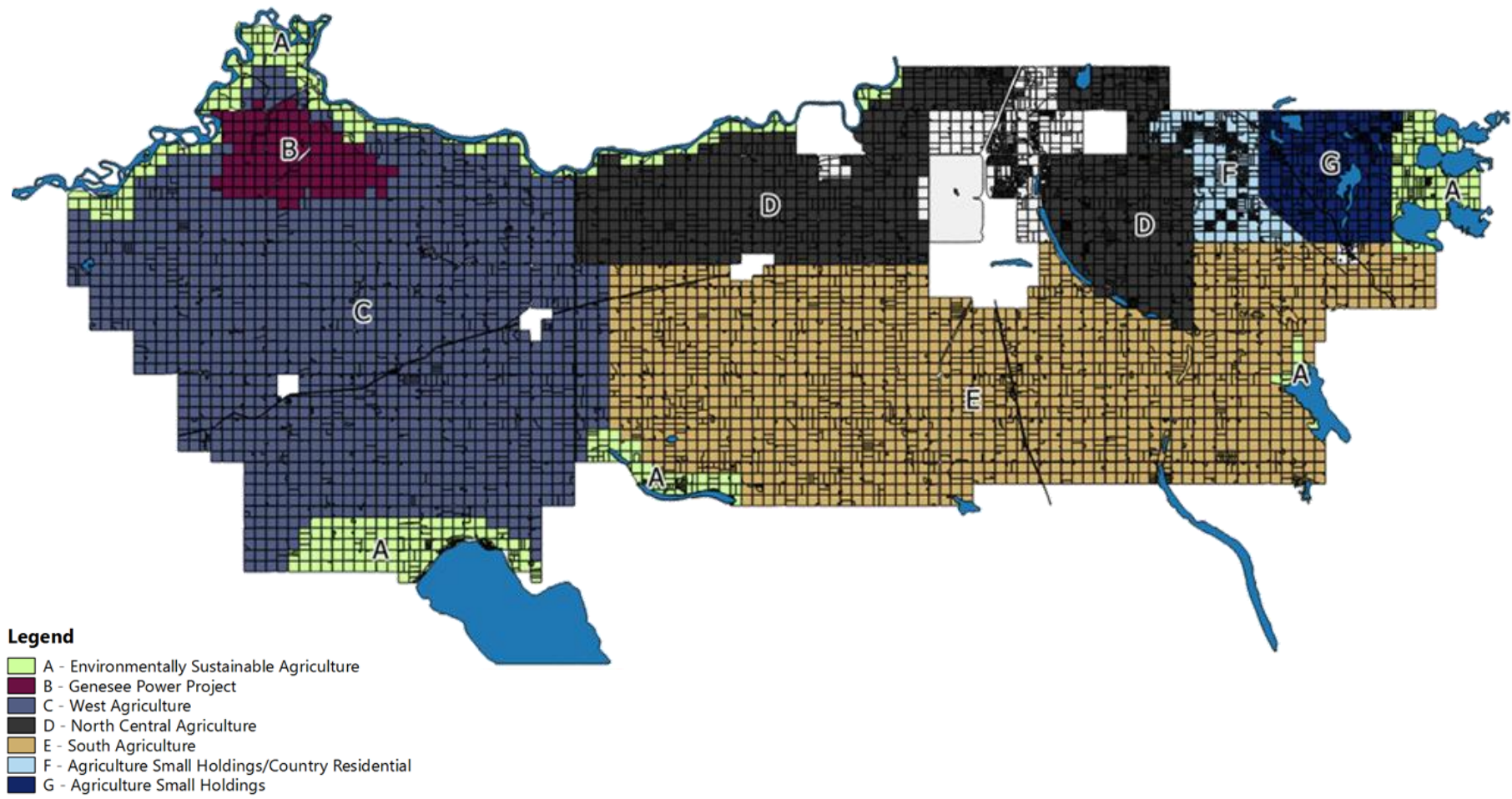




Table 2 Description of the Seven Agriculture Priority Regions

	Agriculture Priority Areas	Location	Rationale	Purpose	Permitted Subdivisions	Dwellings	Agriculture Impact Assessment	Conversion to other Non-Ag uses
A	Environmentally Sensitive Agriculture	Along the North Saskatchewan River and some of the major lakes and the Ministik Lake Sanctuary	Agriculture areas adjacent to major environmentally sensitive areas require special responses	To allow agriculture that is responsive to its environmentally sensitive context	1 parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or a CR) subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment	1 principal permitted; 1 secondary dwelling is discretionary	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	Should be more limited than current LUB—for example, not outdoor storage, etc.
B	Genesee Reclamation for Agriculture	The coal mining area in the northwest portion of the County	As coal mining is completed, lands should be returned to a variety of agricultural uses	To provide for reclamation for future agriculture	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP	To be established with reclamation plan/ASP	
C	West Agriculture	The areas around and west of Thorsby	Areas are a mix of CLI 2-5, but have lower FAR	To provide for a variety of agriculture and permitted subdivisions	1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac, homestead, or a CR)	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 80 ac parcels	For new CR parcels but not homestead parcels. Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	Should be more limited than current LUB—for example, not outdoor storage, etc.
D	North Central Agriculture	Lands in the north central portion of the County both east and west of the development core of Leduc, Nisku, Edmonton International Airport, etc.	The best lands in the County by CLI and FAR	To provide a large contiguous area primarily for large field crops on larger parcels with limited subdivision without creating new residential parcels	1 new 80 ac parcel; no additional homestead or CR parcels	1 principal dwelling on each parcel	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	Should be more limited than current LUB—for example, not outdoor storage, etc.
E	South Central /East Agriculture	Lands south of Calmar, Leduc and Twp Road 500	A mix of CLI classes with fairly good FAR and the presence of numerous dairy operations	To provide a large contiguous area for a broad range of agriculture, including dairy operations, that will not be adversely impacted by significant increases in population	1 new parcel per quarter (either 80 ac or existing farmstead, but not a new CR)	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 80 ac parcels	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	Should be more limited than current LUB—for example, not outdoor storage, etc.
F	Small Holdings and Country Residential	Generally between Range Rd 234 and Hwy 21 north of Twp Rd 500	The most fragmented part of the County, already containing country residential. Generally CLI 3-4, with mid range FAR	To provide some opportunity in a restricted area for a mix of country residential and small holdings	As per area structure plan, may include small holdings and CR	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling for 40 ac parcels	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	
G	Small Holdings Agriculture	In the northeast corner of the County north of Twp Road 500 east of Hwy 21	Somewhat fragmented area, generally CLI 3 and mid to lower range FAR	To provide an opportunity for small agricultural holdings while not allowing expansion of country residential	40 ac minimum, no CR	1 principal dwelling on each parcel; plus 1 discretionary secondary dwelling	Should have an AIA for conversion to other uses like golf courses, etc.	

AIA: Agriculture Impact Assessment
CLI: Canada Land Inventory Classification
CR: Country Residential Parcel < 5 ac
EIA: Environmental Impact Assessment
FAR: Farmland Assessment Rating



8.0 Appendix 2: Basic Elements of the Agriculture Impact Assessment (AIA)

	<p>The goal of the AIA is to provide a lens through which development options can consider agriculture in the decision making process. As outlined and defined in Appendix 1, not every region and/or decision would require an assessment however, a consistent approach is necessary for those that do.</p> <p>It is important to recognize that an AIA involves a varying level of due diligence based on the extent to which the specific request varies from the land use practice and how significant the potential impact on agriculture might be. In many cases the AIA could be completed by the applicant themselves and would not require the use of specialists. A good example of this is the situation where the application is for a physical severance that is larger than the general allowable size. While it is still important to have the report, the extent of due diligence required would be minimal and this type of submission could easily be completed by the applicant.</p>
Context	<p>An AIA is consistent with Principle 1 in the Strategy where there is a stated objective to recognize the importance of agriculture. As a starting point the goal is to ensure that any development occurs in a way which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recognizes the specific nature and existence of the soil resource;▪ Is compatible with, or at a minimum is not disruptive to existing farm operations;▪ Can provide quantitative evidence of the extent of the impact on agricultural production; and▪ Ensures that the proponent can demonstrate why alternative options are not feasible under the specific circumstance.
Contents	<p>The reality is that each proposal will be somewhat different and each priority ag area will have a specific set of criteria. On the other hand, it is expected that at a minimum they will follow the following format. The extent to which third party expert opinions are required will also vary based on the proposal. However, the more controversial the request, the more likely it is that independent opinion would be required.</p>
1) General Project Description	<p>The applicant needs to provide a site plan as well as providing a discussion of the proposed location. The information required would include an outline of the soils and topography along with any other landscape feature. A complete summary of the parcel size, shape and accessibility would also be required.</p>



2) Land Use Specifics

Photos and contour maps would enhance the discussion and provide the decision makers with the necessary tools for the assessment process.

This would include items like:

- Past and current farming practices – outlining the type and intensity of agricultural production at the present time and over time. The intent here is to ensure that the context for the request is provided by the applicant and would include things like cultivation patterns, livestock operations, any areas currently idle and if there are improved or native pasture areas;
- Any non-agricultural land uses already on the site – this would provide the opportunity to identify activities that may not have been related to agriculture in the past that would serve to mitigate the impacts on agriculture;
- Farm site management specifics – tenure of ownership and farm management. The existence of rental units and/or farm worker or family accommodation. It may also be useful to have a description of the extent of part or full time farming that occurs on the site by the individual making the request;
- Adjacent land use and farming types – this is a critical feature of the proposal since the change not only affects the current and future owner, but it will also affect the neighbors. The proponent must clearly identify that they have full knowledge of the surrounding area as well as the potential difficulties that their request may create for others. These difficulties would include but not necessarily be limited to: situations where there is potential for an increase in nuisance complaints; changes to the manner in which field or livestock operations have to be conducted; and any potential corrective actions that would add cost and/or time to farming activities;
- Estimate of the direct loss relating to agriculture – a quantitative assessment of what is being lost by changing the zoning as per the request;
- Mitigative measures to be taken – since the change may have an impact on a number of fronts, the applicant must provide significant due diligence to demonstrate how these issues have been identified and provide an outline on the corrective actions they are committing to do in order to mitigate the effects. The monitoring process that will be put in place should also be identified. For any corrective actions not taken the applicant must clearly outline the options considered and reasons for not taking them.

The proponent needs to describe the proposed development, the on-site and surrounding land uses, and the physical and socio-economic components of the agricultural resource base. They also need to identify the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed development on existing agricultural operations and on the flexibility of the area to support different types of agriculture.



Procedure

Leduc County needs to determine what decisions related to the AIA can be made by staff and which ones need to be moved to the ASB. This is an important distinction as those decisions made by staff can likely be more quickly communicated to the applicant than those that have to go to the ASB for review.

On the other hand, the objectivity of the process needs to be maintained and this balance must be determined prior to proceeding with the AIA process. Further, a draft document with specific examples should be made available at the County. The draft could even take the form of a fillable pdf as a starting point. This would significantly improve the overall quality of applications.