



2022-2027

Agricultural Services Business Plan



2022-2027

1.0 Executive Summary

Situation statement

Yellowhead County is located approximately 94 km west of Edmonton, Alberta. Our western boundary is located just a few short kilometers east of Jasper National Park's boundary. Yellowhead County is considered to be a part of the North West Region of the province.

Surrounding the Towns of Edson and Hinton, Yellowhead County is an economically strong region with immense opportunities in petroleum, mining, forestry, agriculture and tourism industries. The county has a land area of over 22,000 km² (7,012,349 Acres or 2,837,797 hectares).

There are approximately 10,990 residents who call this area home; those living in the hamlets of Evansburg, Wildwood, Robb, Marlboro, Cadomin, Peers, Brule, and Niton Junction and those who live in the rural areas of the County.

Typical farming practices in Yellowhead County include cultivation of cereal, oilseed, and hay as well as production of beef, horses, and sheep. Yellowhead County is also home to a number of tree nurseries and greenhouses.

The County has 2284.1 km of roads, and Highway 16 runs across the middle of its geography from Evansburg at the Pembina River, to the Jasper Park east boundary. Canadian National's main rail line parallels this east to west, with spurs south to Cadomin and north to Grande Cache.

ASB Program History & Continuity

Yellowhead County's Agricultural Service Board (ASB) was established in November of 1959 when the area was Improvement District 14. I.D # 14 became M.D. #94 in 1994, and finally Yellowhead County in 1998.

As with all ASBs, the County's ASB operates under authorizations from the *Agricultural Service Board Act* and as such, has powers and duties delegated to it by the provincial government for enforcement of statute: the *Weed Control Act*, *Soil Conservation Act*, *Agricultural Pests Act* and the *Animal Health Act*. The ASB is established by bylaw and its representation includes two elected officials and three "members at large," ideally active County producers. Council appoints all members and staggers terms to ensure continuity.

Yellowhead County's services includes many long standing, successful programs and partnerships that continue today, such as:

- Weed Inspection Program
- Roadside Vegetation Management Program
- Pest Control Program
- ASB Bursary Program
- Farmers Appreciation Breakfast
- Various extension programs with approximately 20 annual events

More recently (since 2010) Yellowhead County has added the following programs;

- Fence Line Program
- Agricultural Plastics Recycling Program
- Pond Days – for school age children on the importance of riparian areas, aquatic life, etc.
- Farm Safety- targets junior high students on the importance of farm safety and how to stay safe
- Mountain Pine Beetle Program
- CHAP (Custom Herbicide Application Program)

The ASB also partners, on behalf of the County, with monetary grants to external agencies to promote agriculture, agricultural sustainability and rural living in the County and in the province, such as:

- West Central Forage Association
- Stewardship Alliance for Conservation Agriculture (formerly the West Central Conservation Group formed in 2002)
- 4-H Clubs throughout the County
- Rural Woman’s Conference
- Alberta Farm Safety Centre
- Alberta Invasive Species Council Lobstick Garden Club
- County Agricultural Societies

2.0 Mission & Vision

The ASB’s vision is intended to complement the County’s overall vision, with the ASB aiming to refine and target Council’s statement to relate it specifically to agriculture.

ASB: “*Yellowhead County shall have a progressive, sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural industry.*”

Yellowhead County Vision: “*A responsible and diverse community of choice where quality of life matters.*”

The ASB mission statement is intended to turn vision into action for both today and tomorrow:

ASB: *“Encourage good stewardship of the environment while promoting agriculture and a safe, healthy rural lifestyle.”*

Yellowhead County Mission: *“Building a better community for present and future generations.”*

3.0 Values

In addition to the County’s values as captured in Council’s *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025* (accountability, collaboration, fairness, ingenuity, and respect), the ASB prioritizes the following six benchmarks for itself and for Agricultural Services in plans and action:

Honesty: *We are sincere and truthful with our staff and residents.*

Openness: *We are visible and accessible to our residents; we are approachable and listen to the concerns and ideas of staff and the agricultural community.*

Responsive: *We act on suggestions and/or concerns of staff and residents and reply to communications in a timely and respectful manner.*

Knowledge: *We maintain a high level of awareness of current information, facts and ideas on agricultural issues; we improve our knowledge through experience and education.*

Accuracy: *We avoid errors and are precise in our work.*

Compassion: *We understand the feelings and perceptions of others in our dealings with them.*

4.0 2022 SWOT Analysis

In the spring of 2022, the Board undertook a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the County as an organization, the agricultural community, and Agricultural Services to explore the external and internal environment that Agricultural Services Department will serve in over the span of this plan. This exercise informed the content of this plan.

A SWOT analysis depends on a thorough exploration of each influencer and its pressures within the County. Solutions are left to the next stage of strategic planning. Weaknesses and threats help identify activities needed but not taking place, or those that have outlived their effectiveness for any reason. In general, weaknesses and challenges result from change—externally through demographics, technology, and the economy; or internally through the election cycle, human resource dynamics, etc.

Potential responses--the next stage—can be imagined through our strengths and opportunities, considering the history of services, organizational aims for the next span of years, and aspects of the future that are most evident and out of the County’s ability to avoid. Strengths are often internal and existing, while opportunities are the potential. A review of these finds what underpins success. Is it staff, equipment, and facilities? Is it Council support, strong financial means, or legislation?

Strengths –The ASB found that the County enjoys:

- Well trained and experienced administration using updated policies and procedures
- Strong Council support for agricultural services and the ASB
- Generous financial support through Council
- Well maintained equipment
- Well established, successful, recognized programs and extension
- Formal Integrated Vegetation Management Plan
- Clear and comprehensive enabling legislation
- Trusting relationships between Agricultural staff, residents and producers through communications
- School programming that meets the needs of the next generation
- Cooperation between Ag Services and other County departments such as Infrastructure, Planning, Protective Services and the rest of Community Services
- Reciprocal, facilitative partnerships with outside organizations
- Demonstrated flexibility and agility
- Valuing rural lifestyles and communities
- Generous grant programs

Weaknesses - The ASB identified these current weaknesses:

- Difficulty covering the huge land area of the County in the inspection program, roadside program, extension delivery, and in-person farm calls
- Ratepayer understanding of the complexity and importance of vegetation management
- Recruiting adequate numbers of qualified seasonal staff – current worker shortage following the 2019-2022 COVID pandemic
- Having to catch-up in response to growing environmental instability
- The related gap in farmer resiliency from an unstable environment as well as a need to diversify, be prepared for emergencies, survive economic fluctuations
- Producer emergency preparedness not yet in progress
- Increased horticultural practices and information needs and requests from ratepayers.

Opportunities- opportunities to strengthen services and programs:

- Increase producer resiliency – get ahead of environmental instability, further farm diversification, get prepared continuing or worsening economic fluctuations
- Develop producer emergency response preparedness
- Leverage the concerns of non-agricultural ratepayers about invasive plants and habitat loss
- Rely on our willing, able, and dedicated staff to provide in-service and extension support
- Public promotion of weed management to develop support between neighbours
- Echo the strong rural ethic in our communities
- Alberta Transportation and highway maintenance contractors working well with County to control weed problems
- Pursue use of the new herbicide/pesticide technology
- Acreage owners are eager to learn & support, are early adopters of new ideas
- Small operators producing niche/ specialty products and an increasing market availability
- Farm Gate sales
- Benefits of an area-wide gravel pit inspection program- partner with neighbors, decreasing invasive species spread (i.e., neighbour Counties, ESRD, and private pits in conjunction with Transportation)
- Support the Yellowhead Local Food Initiative- a collaboration between the County and Community Futures West Yellowhead.
- Find ways to bring participation into programs to assist in farmers mental and physical health
- Rental Equipment – consider making more types of equipment available
- Producer resiliency coupled with emergency preparedness equals sustainability

Threats- Threats to the County ratepayer wellbeing, sustainability, or resiliency:

- Misinformation- increased internet and social media usage while quality of information degrades
- Increased concern about pesticides – a growing negative view or lack of understanding about the AG industry
- Extension- hard to find topics that interest everyone- learning styles are rapidly changing
- Small farms having difficulty surviving
- Increased OHV and horse traffic, industry leading to increased weed issues in Green Zone - recreation users in the County west end causing environmental damages and introducing weed species or spreading infestations
- Transient residents in communities not getting involved
- Mountain Pine Beetle growing problem- residents requiring assistance, County is grant dependent to help address; dead trees increase fire threat and environmental degradation
- Legislation- enforcement is dependent entirely on County ag services

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- The off-grid homesteader movement – lack of knowledge/education and unwillingness to learn; resistance to government, law, and policy
- CN continuing un-cooperative
- Absentee landowners and non-producing renters
- Aging landowner population
- Impacts of the major transportation corridors Highway 16 and CN
- Extensive riparian areas present unique challenges
- ESRD not supporting weed eradication on Crown lands, general inability to enforce with Crown; lack of Crown action on random camping, OHV off trail use, weed infestations/ introductions
- Increasing incidents of severe weather; growing weather instability
- Lack of agriculture support services – butchering, abattoirs, licensed facilities – lack of succession in these industries
- Veterinarian shortages
- Abandoned disturbed leases/ sites – oil & gas industry neglect

Within the myriad interplay and mutual influences of the elements found in the SWOT, the ASB forged goals, strategies, and activities to guide effective and efficient services going forward.

5.0 Looking Ahead: Goals and Strategies

The ASB formulated four primary goals for Yellowhead County’s Agricultural Services Department. These goals are:

1. To provide effective and sustainable weed control on public and private lands.
2. To promote effective pest control to reduce agricultural losses.
3. To promote soil, water conservation and Best Management Practices in our rural and agricultural communities for a sustainable and more stable future.
4. To increase awareness of agricultural issues and enhance the wellbeing of the agricultural community by promoting healthy rural living and ensuring services support a wide variety of producer sizes and types across the County.

Goal One: To provide for effective and sustainable weed control on County and privately-owned lands.

Strategy #1	Activities	Timeline
Provide weed control on County owned lands and road allowances.	i. Invite former staff to return in the next season.	January
	ii. Advertise seasonal opportunities in local media and with external connections for hiring as early as possible in the spring of every year.	January
		~March

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Purchase required chemical for municipal weed control iv. Purchase biological control for sensitive areas- if available v. Apply herbicide to areas mechanically brushed by Infrastructure vi. Conduct training for all staff in safety and safe and effective pesticide application; send staff to appropriate product training as required. vii. Provide species identification training and reference material to other County departments viii. Communicate municipal weed control plans through media, advertisements, news releases, workshops, website, posters and pamphlets ix. Provide a “No Spray Agreement” program and coach residents on invasive species and control practices x. Development necessary policy and procedures and keep current p & p’s updated xi. Install new upgrades to spray program when available xii. Develop an equipment replacement schedule xiii. Develop the Weed-free Hay Program xiv. Develop the Weed-free Straw Program xv. Develop programs and procedures to promote weed-free gravel pits and stockpile sites xvi. Leverage the Sasquatch Program- communications targeted at responsible back county recreation preventing invasive species spread 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>May</p> <p>May</p> <p>May</p> <p>April</p> <p>2022</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>2026</p> <p>2022-2023</p> <p>2023-2024</p> <p>2024-2026</p> <p>2023-2023</p>
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
-2 spray trucks equipped with GPS and operated by qualified personnel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. All referrals and complaints of weeds on municipal lands are actioned ii. Infrastructure Department reports improved control of mechanically brushed sites 	Ongoing

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<p>-3 UTV spray units equipped with MRF GPS technology -7 AgMobile (Munisight) inspection tablets -3 FTE applicators -1 FTE laborer -2 PTE applicator -5 PTE laborers -Safety equipment & clothing -Memberships to: Professional Vegetation Management Association, Alberta Invasive Species Council, and Association of Alberta Agriculture Fieldmen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Increased Fence Line Program participants iv. Achieving the once-every-three-years inspection/treatment rotation v. Increased internal staff awareness of invasive species vi. Log a decrease in complaints vii. Inspected roadside ditches are “cleaner” of invasive species. viii. YHC operates a true a spot spray program verses a blanket spray program. ix. All County-owned properties are included in herbicide/ mowing rotation. 	
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Strategy #2	Activities	
<p>Promote effective weed control on private land</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide information on weed identification and control through workshops, weed pamphlets, news releases and/or newsletter to residents and County staff; host and attend public events ii. Fence Line Program iii. CHAP Program iv. Utilize tablets and weed management software to manage & record invasive plants v. Conduct training program for all inspectors vi. Re-inspect all problem areas identified in the previous year vii. Complete weed inspection reports on weed inspection software and provide reports to the landowners viii. Develop a replacement plan and schedule for herbicide application equipment ix. Diversify/increase rental equipment 	<p>Annually</p> <p>2025</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vi. Fusarium and blackleg inspections as per <i>Agricultural Pest Act</i> upon AAFRED requests. vii. Complete inspections by referral of insect damage on private and public lands to assist with identification and recommend control measures (Both Ag and horticulture) viii. Maintain and monitor insect traps as requested ix. Provide information on agricultural insect pests through workshops, website, news releases and/or newsletter as indicated by pest populations in previous year. x. Participate in the Ab AG Crop Reporting xi. Policy development and review. 	
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -well trained FT staff -advertising -information packages and mailings -website updates -social media -facility rentals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Increase in number of producers/residents requesting information re: agricultural pests ii. Number of residents attending our information sessions and/or requesting information from the Ag Services dept. increases iii. Number of programs/news releases on pest control provided for the public increases iv. Decreased number of tree health concerns. (MPB, drought, herbicide, disease, Spruce Beetle pest issues on trees) v. Decreased number of horticultural issues. vi. Producers giving positive feedback regarding our Clubroot mail out 	

Strategy #2	Activities	
To provide coyote control services to producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ensure Agricultural Fieldman & one assistant holds a valid Form 7 Permit under the <i>Agricultural Pests Act</i> 	Annually

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experiencing predation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Review and maintain toxicant security iii. Provide education on predator prevention, control techniques, and management strategies to all applicants iv. Offer coyote control solutions to residents v. Update and maintain the beaver or predator control contractor list vii. Actively monitor Wild Boar populations and research-based control methods including education campaigns regarding the invasiveness of Wild Boar. viii. Ongoing policy and procedure development and review. 	
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
-staff holding Form 7 permits -Toxicant secure storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reduced reports of predator related losses ii. Decreased number of toxicant requests iii. Monitor Wild Boar sightings and increase awareness of control options 	

Goal Three: To promote soil and water conservation, and Best Management Practices in our rural and agricultural communities for a sustainable and more stable future.

Strategy #1	Activities	
To provide extension programming to producers and stakeholders promoting soil and water conservation through SACA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Coordinate with SACA one workshop/demonstration on riparian protection/development, weed control, manure management, alternative watering, etc. ii. Increase grant funding opportunities to SACA for conservation programming similar to WCFA grant funding expectations. iii. Deliver Water Well Management workshops. 	Annually

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv. Submit news releases and/or newsletter articles to promote conservation activities v. Provide referrals for testing options to assist landowners with soil sampling vi. Emphasize soil management and fertility in our workshops vii. Facilitate shelterbelt planning and maintenance workshop for residence viii. Continue and develop the Agricultural Plastics Recycling Program 	
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -well trained FT staff -advertising -facility rentals -agriculture specialists -Alberta Environment specialists -Propose hiring of a part time or full-time horticulturist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Number of producers attending information sessions increases ii. Feedback on and adoption of Best Management Practices is robust iii. Residents adopt water well management plans iv. Number of people requesting information sessions on applicable topics increases. 	

Strategy #2	Activities	
<p>Link with local, regional, provincial and federal partners to provide conservation programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide support to the Environmental Farm Plan through grant funding to SACA, advertising and technical assistance ii. Work with and support WCFA and SACA through grant funding to deliver forage or conservation extension and forage demonstration plots iii. Utilize provincial and federal resource agencies to deliver programs iv. Work with Agricultural Plastics Recycling Program, Clean Farms, Recycling Council of Alberta, Edson District Recycling Society 	

Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
-well trained FT staff -partnering agencies -advertising -facility rentals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Numerous extension programs delivered with support from partners ii. Partners report a good working relationship with staff and success with residents iii. Residents attend Shelterbelt and Pruning Workshops iv. Increased number of producers participating in Ag Plastics recycling Program 	

Goal Four: To increase awareness of agricultural issues and enhance the wellbeing of the agricultural community by promoting healthy rural living and ensuring services support a wide variety of producer sizes and types across the County.

Strategy #1	Activities	
Provide staff and board members access to learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Board members and the Agricultural Fieldman (AF) will attend the Provincial ASB Conference ii. Board members and at least one staff will attend the Regional ASB meetings iii. The AF and the two Agricultural Services Coordinators will be active members of the AAAF iv. Staff will participate in regional/provincial information sharing and training programs 	Ongoing
Resources	Measurable Outcome(s)	
-Council -Alberta Agriculture & Forestry -Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen -Alberta Environment -Lakeland College -University of Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Staff and board members report that they have increased knowledge of agricultural issues. ii. Permanent and seasonal staff are fully trained and effective in their work requirements iii. Residents are using social media to stay informed about programs, services and events. 	

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-Olds College		
Strategy #2	Activities	
Provide landowner learning opportunities Disseminate information on agricultural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Work with WCFA on long term plots located at the Wildwood County offices property to increase their knowledge of forage crops and species variety ii. Extension events iii. Policy development and review iv. Update and maintain resource library of agricultural publications and materials v. Update and flesh out agricultural information on website vi. Deliver informational programs on new/revised resources directed at agricultural producers, e.g., landowner rights workshops, farm safety, weed and agricultural pest information sessions, horse health workshops, water well workshops, manure management, MPB, drought, waste water system workshops, gardening etc. vii. Deliver the Classroom Agriculture Program (CAP) as requested together with SACA viii. Deliver Farm Safety Program to Jr. High students in the County 	
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
-Resource information -Staff -Budget -Facility rentals -Local schools -Contracted speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Communication plan in place ii. County residents indicate they are aware of agriculture and environmental practices. iii. Residents are aware of programs, services and events offered by the County 	

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Strategy #3	Activities	
Provide resources to assist producers enhance their economic viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Deliver workshops focused on agricultural innovation and/or diversification e.g. landowner’s rights workshops, farm safety, weed and agricultural pest information sessions, horse health workshops, water well workshops, manure management, MPB information sessions, drought, waste water system workshops, gardening, crop diversification on traditional no-crop areas. ii. Coordinate and initiate Agri-Tourism initiatives iii. Provide funding to groups that increase awareness iv. Assess equipment and plan lifecycle replacements v. Rental Policy development and review in-house pilot program 	
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Well trained FT staff -Rental equipment -Rental Agents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. County equipment meets needs of the community ii. County equipment is operational and safe 	

Strategy #4	Activities	
Encourage population retention and pride in safe rural living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Host Annual Farmer’s Appreciation Breakfast ii. Conduct the Annual County Pride Contest, including categories for farms, acreages and hamlets iii. Continue to provide gardening workshops, tree health and pruning workshops iv. Promote the white spruce as the County tree and the bunchberry as the County flower publications v. Provide grant support to groups promoting agriculture and rural 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vi. living (Rural Woman’s Conference, WCFA, SACA, Lobstick Gardening Club and 4-H Clubs, Agricultural Societies) vii. Centennial Farm Family Award viii. Continue Bursary program for students pursuing an education in Agricultural or Environmental Sciences. ix. Policy review – Agricultural Bursaries Policy review – Farm Family Centennial 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Resources	Measurables / Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Staff -Internal partnerships -Facility rentals -Contracted speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Interest in Annual County Pride Contest & tour ii. Attendance at the Farmers Appreciation Breakfast iii. Grant recipients report grants have assisted in promotional activities 	

6.0 In Closing

Agricultural Services Department is an integral part of the municipality’s service inventory. Staff, the Board, and Council aim to serve the cultivation needs of residents, businesses, and visitors in the County, and the preserve the environmentally vibrant setting of the County.

The ASB hopes that this strategic business plan will resonate with residents and Council, and focus the energies of staff and the support of Council toward providing and promoting effective, sustainable practices in agricultural. The ASB trusts that pursuit of this plan’s goals and activities will enhance our characteristically rural communities and the healthy, happy lifestyle they offer.