

Agricultural System Study

PLAN 595: ADVANCED
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Prepared for the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB), the Agricultural System Study was a cutting-edge research project part of an ongoing paradigm shift in regional land use planning in Alberta. Alberta planning professionals have historically viewed agricultural land as a resource for future development. Unlike other jurisdictions like British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, Alberta urban municipalities have few natural constraints impeding outward expansion. As a result, between 2002 and 2012, the Edmonton Metropolitan Region converted 38,250 hectares of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. However, as the global population increases, climate change exacerbates food uncertainty, and the loss of productive agricultural lands to urban sprawl, the need to conserve agricultural land becomes increasingly urgent. These factors have catalyzed a paradigm shift in understanding the agricultural system.

At the forefront of this paradigm shift is the EMRB, championing the stewardship and wise management of the Region's agricultural assets through the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan in 2017. The Growth Plan led to the creation of the Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) in 2021. In 2022, while awaiting provincial approval for RAMP, the EMRB partnered with the University of Alberta's School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) to create the Region's Agricultural System Study. The Study's purpose was two-fold. First, define the Region's agricultural system and its relationship to other components. Second, identify approaches to support the agricultural system through land use planning and strategic investment.

The Project Team undertook a multi-pronged, iterative, and research-based approach to develop an agricultural system definition and visualized conceptual framework to address the first study objective. We conducted research on the various components of the system by speaking to subject matter experts, consulting policy and legislative analyses, and modified the definition based on feedback received.

Upon defining the regional agricultural system, the Project Team conducted a policy analysis paired with a study of best practices from other



Figure 1: Edmonton Metropolitan Region Agricultural System Visualization

jurisdictions. Policy analysis included federal, provincial, regional, and municipal legislation, regulations, plans, and policies relevant to the Region's agricultural system. This analysis identified the Region's agricultural opportunities and challenges. Coupled with the policy analysis, we conducted a scan of potential casestudies, both domestic and international, to provide insight on agriculture-related initiatives relevant to the EMRB. We selected four case studies in Canada and two in the United States. Best practices were extracted from these jurisdictions based on applicability to the Region and categorized as (1) applicable,

(2) applicable with slight modifications, and (3) applicable with major modifications, based on the analysis of the existing legislative framework.

The Study concluded by passing the torch back to the EMRB with 51 recommendations for consideration. Based on current events and feasibility, these recommendations are categorized as short, medium, and long-term. The 51 recommendations provide a toolkit for the EMRB to pick and choose from. The study is an ongoing process, and the work completed can be continued by the EMRB.