

Provincial Perspective on Agricultural Land Conversion

Jason Cathcart, Ph.D., P.Ag.

Manager, Land-use Policy

Agriculture and Forestry

Edmonton



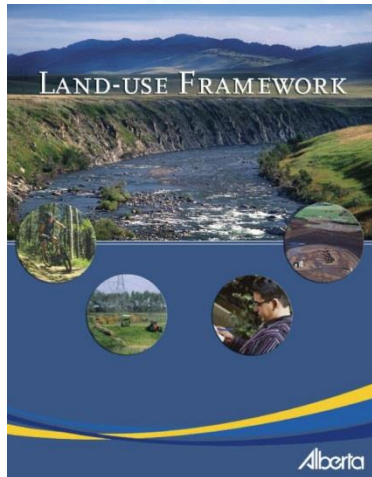
Relevant pieces of the Land-use Framework - 2008

Addressing provincial policy gaps and areas of provincial interest:

- Reducing the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land.

From the LUF Perspective:

- Public concern around **food security**.
 - Although Alberta is currently a net exporter of agricultural products, issues of water scarcity and climate change present some uncertainties around the future of some agricultural sectors.
- GoA is not doing enough to **stop urban and rural residential sprawl**.
 - Existing policy is insufficient - agricultural producers may need some incentive to keep their land in agricultural production.





Perception on the issue differs...

Rural: Often see fragmentation as the main issue, as it leads to inefficiencies in production.

Urban: Often see conversion as the main issue, concerns about food security.

Older producers: Don't want government intervening in the ability to sell land; impacts retirement savings.

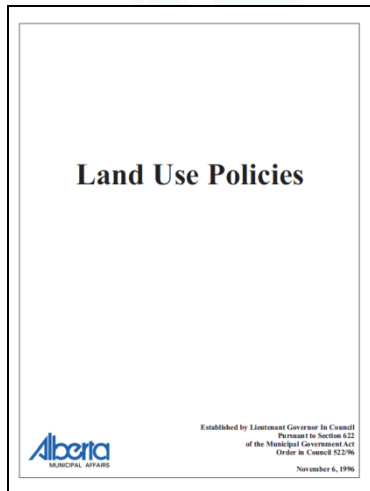
Younger producers: Concerned about the speculative overvaluing, looking for protection and devaluation.

Corridor residents: Concerned with growth and development, high land values.

Eastern regions: Maintaining a population in the area to support rural community and local services.

Agricultural Land in Alberta

- Since 1996, fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land has been managed through the *Provincial Land Use Policies* (PLUPs) and local statutory land-use bylaws.



- Municipalities are “encouraged” to limit the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land.
- The effectiveness of the PLUPs/local bylaws have not been monitored or assessed.
- Effectiveness has been found to be variable among municipalities.
- Alberta maintains a strong agricultural sector.



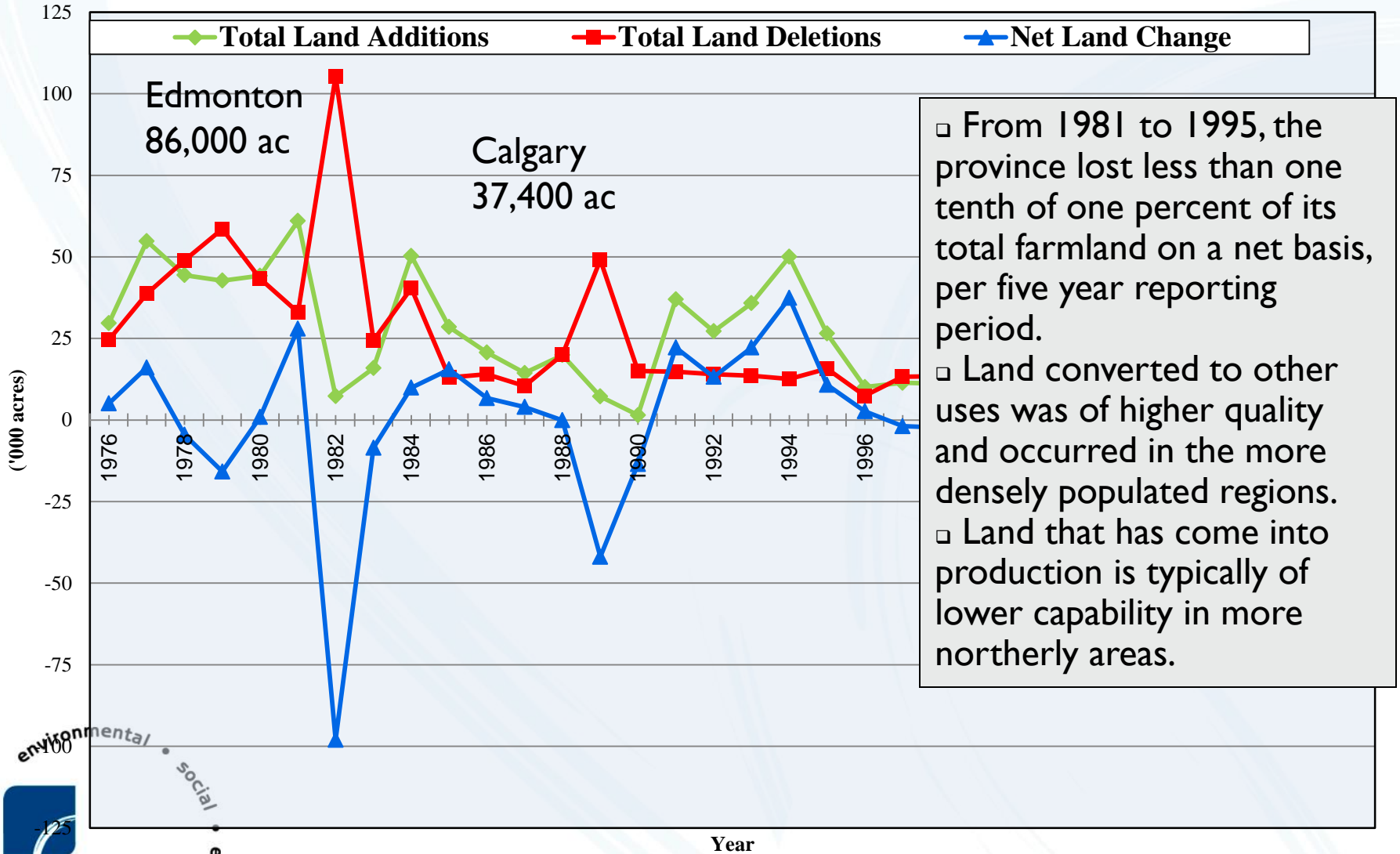
Agricultural Land in Alberta

- Alberta is strongly export-focused and successful relative to agriculture and agri-food products.

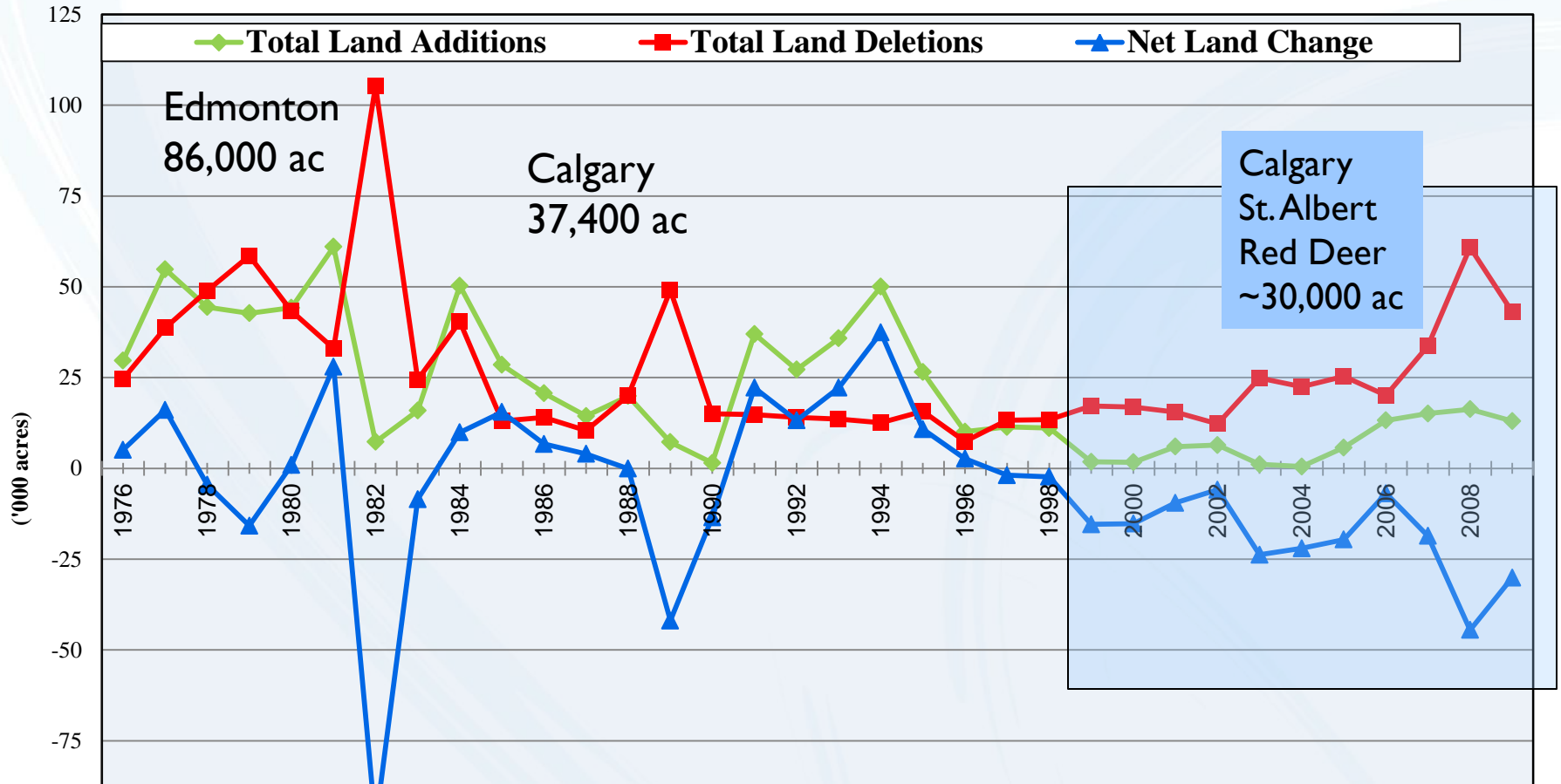
Despite losses to the land base:

- In 2014, international exports of primary and processed agricultural and agri-food products set a record at \$9.7 billion.
- Approximately 46 percent of Alberta's primary agricultural commodities and approximately 31 percent of Alberta's value added agri-food products were exported to foreign markets.
- This said, the province does recognize that agricultural land is being lost to non-agricultural uses, however, there is limited evidence that the current rate of fragmentation and conversion has had negative economic, environmental, and/or social consequences in Alberta.

AF – Past and Present



AF – Past and Present



- From 1996 to 2009; there was a net loss (permanent) of approximately 200,000 acres.
 - 0.4% of the total agricultural land base
- Roughly 85% of that loss occurred along the Edmonton to Calgary corridor (~183,000 ac)
- Approximately 95% of the loss was of LSRS 2 and 3
 - 0.8% of the total Alberta 2/3 land base

Agricultural Land in Alberta

- Factors influencing changes

Stakeholders identified a wide range of factors....

- ❑ Health of the agricultural and energy economy
- ❑ Shifting demographics; population growth
- ❑ Technology; the ability to work from home
- ❑ Lack of understanding; disconnect from agriculture
- ❑ Increasing land values; speculative holding
- ❑ Municipal laws and policies; provincial direction
- ❑ Unknown quantity and quality of northern agric. Land
- ❑ Unknown effects of climate variability; north/south
- ❑ Cost of development; construction costs
- ❑ Stage of life; retirement plans and succession
- ❑ Increased agricultural input costs
- ❑ Impacts on economies of scale
- ❑ Impacts to **private property interests**

Agricultural Land in Alberta - moving forward

Current Policy Direction (April, 2011)

Direction to Municipalities:

Continuation of the intent of the current provincial land-use policy through regional planning with the addition of regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of agricultural land fragmentation and conversion by AF.



- In areas **without** a regional plan, the 1995 PLUPs continue to provide direction until a plan is implemented.
- In areas **with** a regional plan, the direction provided by the regional plan prevails:
 - Continuation of the intent of the 1995 PLUPs, however municipalities are now “expected” to limit the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land.
 - Tools are available and encouraged: ALSA tools and the Efficient Use of Land
 - Recognition that both large and small agricultural parcels support a diversified agricultural economy and rural communities.
 - AF is legally required to monitor and report on changes to the agricultural land base.
 - Annually, but not less than once every five years

Reporting Methodology

- Multiple methodologies were explored.
- Need for a methodology which could be applied easily and consistently across the province.
 - Province / LUF Region / Municipality / LSRS
- The AF methodology relies on land ownership (i.e., title) parcel size as a proxy for land use.
 - Agricultural, rural residential, urban, and other



Permanent Land-use Change

Alberta					
Land Use Class (ha)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Agricultural	21,013,670	21,024,000	21,037,100	21,045,480	21,024,610
Rural Residential	210,440	215,890	217,910	218,840	224,180
Urban	428,850	437,370	437,240	437,890	438,520
Other	38,130,450	38,137,810	38,076,320	38,057,400	38,038,140
Exclusions	5,839,378	5,839,378	5,839,378	5,839,378	5,839,378
(c.v. 66.4 million)	65,622,788	65,654,448	65,607,948	65,598,988	65,564,828

Land Use Class (ha)	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Total Net Change
Agricultural	10,330	13,100	8,380	-20,870	10,940
Rural Residential	5,450	2,020	930	5,340	13,740
Urban	8,520	-130	650	630	9,670
Other	7,360	-61,490	-18,920	-19,260	-92,310

GAIN

Permanent Land-use Change - localized impacts?

Agricultural land (ha)					
Land Use Class (ha)	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Total Net Change
Province	10,330	13,100	8,380	-20,870	10,940
Capital Region	-2,800	880	-1,230	-686	-3,836
Hwy 2 Corridor	-11,155	345	-1,710	-4,025	-16,545
Special Areas	8,069	1,831	2,200	3,887	15,987
Lower Peace	26,913	657	1,020	-10,797	17,793

} LOSS
} GAIN

SUMMARY

- Issue is complicated – balancing producer interests, the public, and the role of governments.
- Many valid reasons to protect agricultural land, but few are universally applicable across the province.
- Tools are available for both municipalities and/or individuals to voluntarily protect agricultural land.

Thank-you

Contact Information:

Jason Cathcart; Ph.D., P.Ag
Manager, Land-use Policy
Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Edmonton
780-427-3432

AF Agricultural Land Monitoring and Reporting:

www.agric.ab.ca/landuse

Land-use Framework:

www.landuse.alberta.ca

