



Edmonton Metropolitan
Region Board



Regional Agriculture Master Plan

DISCUSSION GUIDE and Questions

November 2020



I believe this is a once in a lifetime opportunity that should not be ignored. Our timing couldn't be better, we need to seize this opportunity through RAMP to elevate and recognize the full potential of the agriculture and agri-foods sector to contribute to economic diversification, create jobs and attract investment and talent to the Region. We need to think big and bold and use the RAMP to demonstrate we understand the future opportunity for agriculture and agri-foods and are prepared to take the necessary steps to get there.

Mayor Rod Shaigec, Parkland County and RAMP Task Force Chair, EMRB



Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) Discussion Guide and Questions

Part One – Background and Context

What is the Purpose of this document?

Part one of this document provides an overview of work underway by the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board (EMRB or Board) to develop the first ever Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP) for the Region. It serves as a starting point to engage in discussion with stakeholders working in and supporting the agriculture sector, and guide stakeholder input to inform the development of land-use policies for the future of agriculture in this Region.

Part two provides the questions that will be asked of stakeholders in the engagement sessions.

Who is the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board?

The EMRB consists of an elected official from each of the thirteen largest municipalities in the Edmonton Region¹. As a regional Board, the EMRB is mandated by provincial Regulation² to oversee the development and implementation of a 30-year regional Growth Management Plan (Growth Plan), titled *Re-imagine. Plan. Build*³.

The EMRB's main function is to plan for and manage the growth of the Region in a strategic, coordinated, and integrated way. At the same time, the EMRB is committed to ensuring that the unique characteristics of each town, city and county are preserved, while building the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the Region as a whole.

How is RAMP being developed?

As part of the implementation of the regional Growth Plan, EMRB members collectively agreed to develop a plan for agriculture that would ensure the agriculture and agri-foods sector in the Region can continue to grow and thrive. This work was initiated in the Spring of 2018. To date, the Board has completed research on the state of agriculture in the Region, and opportunities for growth, as well as explored potential policy tools to manage land in the Region that will enhance agricultural activities and communities.

¹ Town of Devon, Town of Morinville, Town of Stony Plain, City of Spruce Grove, City of Leduc, City of Beaumont, City of Fort Saskatchewan, City of St. Albert, City of Edmonton, Parkland County, Sturgeon County, Leduc County, and Strathcona County .

² Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board Regulation 189/2017

³ Re-imagine. Plan. Build. – EMRB Growth Plan <http://emrb.ca/growth-plan/>

The EMRB appointed a 7-member Task Force to oversee the development of the Regional Agriculture Master Plan. The Task Force includes an elected official from each of the four member counties, as well as two cities and one town. The Board approved a vision and guiding principles to guide its work in developing policy with agriculture as its focus (see Appendix 1). The Board and Task Force are now gathering input on how to address the RAMP objectives and develop land-use policies to support the growth of the agriculture and agri-foods sector through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process.

Feedback received from the stakeholder engagement sessions and written submissions will be compiled into a 'What We Heard' report. This report will be presented back to regional stakeholders for validation. The stakeholder input from the 'What We Heard' report will be considered in the development of a draft RAMP by the Task Force and, once complete, will be recommended to the Board for approval. Once approved by the Board, the final Regional Agriculture Master Plan will be presented to the Government of Alberta for approval as part of the regional Growth Plan.

Importance of Agriculture in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region (or Region) enjoys the following key attributes, characteristics and advantages that strongly position it to meet future demand:

- **Productive soils:** The Edmonton Metropolitan Region is, in fact, the most productive agricultural region in Alberta.
 - It is home to high quality black soils – 35% of the top producing soils in Alberta are found in the Region.
 - 69% of the Region is comprised of 'prime' agricultural soils (LSRS 2, 3, 4)⁴.
 - The Region boasts a favourable climate – some areas in the Region have never experienced a crop failure in 100 years⁵.
- **Strong agricultural sector:** The Region is home to 4,655 farm operations. These farms:
 - generate 40% more revenue per acre than their Alberta counterparts (\$499 vs. \$352 per acre),
 - are smaller in size compared to the provincial average (523 acres vs. 1,237 acres),
 - have rates of invested capital per acre that is almost twice the Alberta average (\$5,581 vs. \$2,863 per acre).
- **Experienced, innovative and skilled workforce:** The Region is has a great number of farmers who are rapidly expanding their operations; food processors who have developed successful businesses supplying customers both nationally and internationally; and an emerging class of entrepreneurs who are developing new food businesses and events.
- **Vibrant food processing sector:** An estimated 25% of the province's food and beverage processing industry is situated in the Region. The sector includes two major poultry processors, several dairy processing plants, a large oil seed crusher, a feed milling sector as well as numerous speciality food and beverage processing businesses which have grown to become major national and international

⁴ Land Suitability Rating System (LSRS) Classes 2, 3 and 4 is highly correlated to Canada Land Inventory (CLI) 1, 2 and 3. These land classes, often referred to as prime, provide farmers the greatest flexibility with respect to the choices of crops to be grown and resilience with respect to variable weather conditions.

⁵ Comments received from individual farmers during the consultation process.

players. This sector generates an estimated \$3.7⁶ billion in annual revenues and employs over 6,000 people.

- **World leading research:** We are home to several world leading institutions and special-purpose facilities established to support the agriculture and food industry. These include:
 - University of Alberta and the Edmonton Research Farm,
 - St. Albert Research Farm,
 - University of Alberta Botanic Garden,
 - Agri-Food Discovery Place,
 - Alberta Agriculture & Forestry with the Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc,
 - the Crop Development Centre in northeast Edmonton,
 - NAIT and the Culinary Program, and
 - the Pioneer DuPont Seed Research Farm in Strathcona County.
- **Existing critical infrastructure:** In addition, the Region has high quality supporting infrastructure equipped with the necessary facilities and logistics to ship fresh or frozen food products to destinations both nationally and internationally including:
 - superior roadways,
 - rail-lines, and
 - the Edmonton International Airport.

Why a Plan for Agriculture?

The rural area lands in this Region represent over 85% of the total land base. As the Region grows, these areas are confronted with unique challenges, particularly when it comes to the future growth and sustainability of the agricultural sector. These growing pains shared by many towns, cities and counties were identified in the Growth Plan.

Agriculture is a significant part of this Region's cultural heritage and economic history and will continue to be significant and essential to our future. The agricultural sector in this Region has shown strength and resiliency. The dedication of farmers, ranchers, and producers who have committed to making their livelihood from the land has shaped the past and present of this Region. The importance of available productive land, water and predictable climate are critical inputs to determining what commodities can be produced and how those commodities contribute to local food security and food sovereignty.

As our local and global populations grow, there will be more demand for food, fibre and fuel, which will also require a secure supply of productive agricultural land.

⁶ The economic multiplier (Alberta Treasury Board and Finance) for food and beverages – direct, indirect and induced is 2.308. Thus, this revenue multiplies to \$8.5 billion in total economic impact.



We need to produce in the next 40 years the equivalent of all food produced in the last 10,000 years.

Murad Al-Katib, President and CEO, AGT Food and Ingredients



Agriculture is also increasingly recognized as a major contributor to the environmental well-being of the Region with its inherent ability to sequester carbon, protect surface and ground water, as well as foster biodiversity.

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region has some of the richest agricultural and productive lands in the country. Agriculture is the single largest land use in the Region (approx. 1.7 million acres) but over a 10-year period from 2002-2012, 38,250 hectares of farmland in the Region were converted to non-agricultural uses – 60% of the loss being prime agricultural lands.

Regional growth includes a healthy and expanding agricultural sector which depends on conserving a supply of prime agricultural land. As the second largest sector in the province after oil and gas, the agricultural sector is well positioned to contribute to the provincial goals of economic diversification, growing GDP, creating jobs, and attracting investment. In fact, agriculture production and food processing together generate over \$4.5 billion in direct annual revenues. There is an unprecedented opportunity for this Region to meet the needs of future generations as well as support the growth and diversification of our provincial economy.

Land is the foundation of all these activities - an irreplaceable resource that is essential for the future growth of the Region's agriculture and food system.

The Growth Plan focuses on responsible growth, including policies that direct the future growth of urban municipalities to be accommodated through in-fill development and higher densities. The Growth Plan also emphasizes growth in a manner that builds out existing employment areas and makes better use of infrastructure. Implementing these policies will mean that future growth happens within a smaller footprint and retains an estimated 250 quarter sections of agricultural land in production for longer.

The Growth Plan also identified an opportunity to focus on responsible growth throughout the rest of the Region in the rural municipalities. The Regional Agriculture Master Plan is an unprecedented opportunity to plan for agriculture at a regional level, as opposed to planning around it.

What do we hope to achieve through RAMP?

RAMP is the first-ever regional plan for agriculture that will provide our counties, towns, and cities with policy direction to effectively plan for and manage land use for the future of agriculture and the agriculture sector. Through RAMP, the EMRB is focused on creating certainty among farmers, producers and landowners who rely on land to support the production of food, fibre and fuel. The development of

RAMP is also a means to elevate the importance of the sector as an economic generator with the ability to contribute to economic diversification, lead in technological innovation, attract investment, talent, jobs, provide a local connection to food and sustain rural communities and lifestyle.

RAMP Objectives

The Growth Plan specifically directs the EMRB to develop consistent, regional policies to address the following three objectives for regional agriculture:

1. Identify and conserve an adequate supply of prime agricultural lands to provide a secure local food source for future generations.
2. Minimize the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses.
3. Promote diversification and value-added agriculture production and plan infrastructure to support the agricultural sector and regional food system.

These objectives recognize all forms of agriculture are critically important, including primary production, processing, and value-added agri-foods.

Challenges facing the Agriculture Sector

The identification of the issues facing the agricultural community were collected through stakeholder engagement sessions held by the four EMRB-member counties between 2015 and 2018 to inform the development of local agricultural plans and strategies. From those engagement sessions, common themes were identified and assembled into the RAMP Situation Analysis report⁷, which provide important context for RAMP. One of the most significant challenges to be addressed is to reduce, slow and effectively manage the rate of loss of agricultural land in the Region to non-agricultural uses.

The challenges facing the agriculture sector were identified as:

1. **Agriculture is viewed as a low or non-priority.** The farming community believes that the agriculture industry has little to no priority for municipal governments or for the Government of Alberta and is not appreciated for its contributions to the provincial economy, to rural communities, and to the environment.
2. **Agriculture has an uncertain long-term future in the Region.** The low priority apparently assigned to agriculture, coupled with the apparently inevitable urban expansion and non-agricultural rural development throughout the Region has led many agricultural operators to question the future viability of agriculture in the Region and of their own farm businesses.

⁷ from Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board – Regional Agriculture Master Plan – Situation Analysis – July 2018
<https://emrb.ca/ramp/>

3. **Ongoing friction in rural areas.** Non-farm rural residents in increasing numbers has resulted in opposition to common agricultural practices, affecting the ability of agricultural operators to carry out a range of normal and necessary farming operations.
4. **Declining political influence.** Coupled with the increasing numbers of non-farm rural residents, agricultural operators feel outnumbered and undervalued. Concerns were raised about a decline in their political influence and fear that they will eventually have to deal with “anti-farm Councils” that will restrict their ability to farm.
5. **Conservation of agricultural land.** There is a lack of consensus within the agricultural community. Most will support the idea of conserving agricultural land – in principle.
6. **Land use planning.** This issue is closely tied to the conservation of agricultural land. Again, most will support the idea of planning policies that conserve agricultural land – in principle – until such time as the principle bumps up against the plans an agricultural operator has, as a landowner, to develop agricultural land. Conversely, there is strong support for to develop agricultural land, particularly for agriculture.
7. **Topsoil management.** Continued urban expansion onto agricultural land in the Region results in the removal of topsoil – a valuable resource that should not be wasted. How that resource is managed after removal is an issue in the Region, and better removal and reclamation practices are required.
8. **Value-added and diversification challenges – and opportunities.** The success of the Region in fostering value-added production and diversification in agriculture has been mixed. There is interest and support for agriculture processing, but significant barriers, including the cost of land, has meant that development in this sector has been limited.
9. **Complex regulatory environment.** Regulatory requirements for agriculture and agri-food businesses are seen to be complex. Regulation exists at all three levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – and is necessary to protect the health and safety of the public with respect to food production.
10. **Environmental issues.** There is concern in the long term about water supply in areas of the Region where speciality crops (e.g., potatoes) may need irrigation in the future. Agricultural operators also see themselves as stewards of their agricultural land who receive little or no recognition for the ecological goods and services they provide through their stewardship.
11. **The lack of a “voice” for the agriculture and food industry.** The agriculture industry in the Region features a range of agricultural associations, commodity groups, marketing boards, etc. that can speak to sub-sections of the agriculture industry. There is no one association or organization in the Region that can speak for the agriculture industry in the Region as whole.

Part Two - Stakeholder Engagement Questions

Overview – What will we be talking about with Stakeholders?

Our discussions with Stakeholders will focus on gaining input and insight on how best to address the three RAMP objectives, test the 'policy area' approach for developing the policies in RAMP, and focus on specific topics like:

- Identifying prime agricultural areas for conservation using other criteria, in addition to soil classification, that responds to the future needs of the sector.
- Advice on how to limit and manage future fragmentation and conservation of prime agricultural lands to non-agricultural uses.
- Opportunities for growth in agriculture and agri-food and understanding what the priorities in infrastructure are to support that growth.

Challenges for Agriculture

Part one of this Discussion Guide provides the background and context for why the EMRB is focused on the development of RAMP as a priority. On pages five and six, the challenges facing the agriculture sector are listed. This list was assembled from conversations with those working in or supporting the agriculture sector in this Region and were included in the EMRB's 2018 Situation Analysis Report.

Question #1

Referring to the list of challenges from the Discussion Guide, what, in your opinion would be the most important challenge to address?

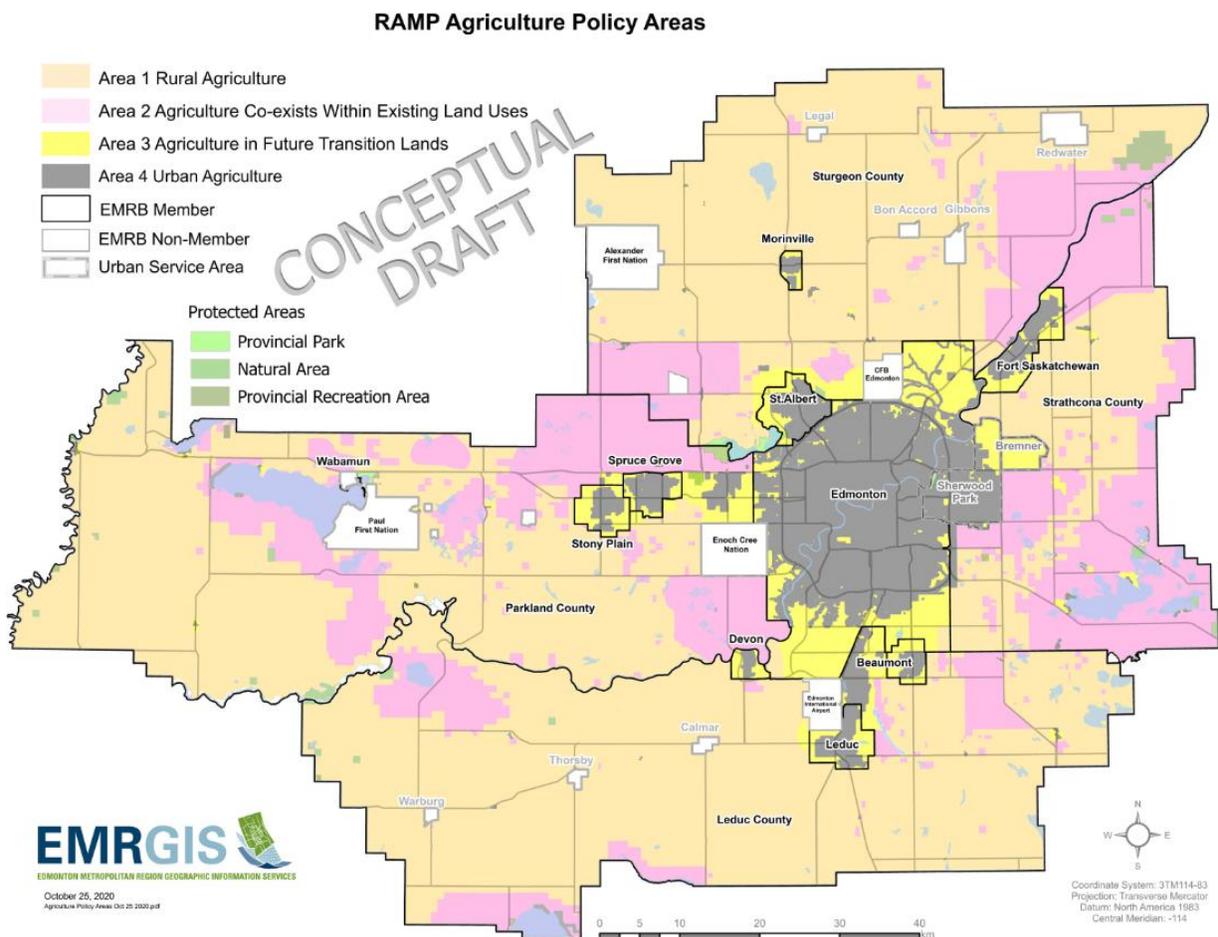
Are there other challenges we missed? Where are the opportunities for agriculture in this Region?

RAMP Approach

The RAMP Task Force wants to ensure the plan for agriculture in this Region is tailor-made for the Region. They agreed that approaches used elsewhere, like urban growth boundaries, green belts, or agricultural land reserves, were not going to work for the Edmonton Metropolitan Region. Therefore, the Task Force decided to analyze the Region from the perspective of existing land uses and the presence of common geographic features. The result is the identification on four areas of agriculture. These areas are conceptual and would inform specific policies to support the continuation of agriculture in all forms for as long as possible.

The four areas of agriculture are:

- *Urban Agriculture*
- *Agriculture Within Future Transition Lands*
- *Agriculture Co-Disexists Within Existing Land Uses*
- *Rural Agriculture*



Urban Agriculture includes the urban centres in the Region to include towns, cities and hamlets. The intent of this area is to support the emerging urban agriculture industry and its future growth. Some

examples of what constitutes urban agriculture include but are not limited to community and market gardens, vertical farming, and food processing facilities.

Agriculture Within Future Transition Lands is focused on lands approved for non-agricultural development over the next 25-50 years. The goal of this area is to keep agricultural lands in production until they are needed for urban and employment area growth, and to provide certainty for producers and for municipalities, about when lands will be needed.

Agriculture Co-exists Within Existing Land Uses identifies planned areas in the Region that have existed, historically, for a range of non-agricultural land uses. These areas may include lands zoned for country residential, lake shore developments, coal and gravel and other natural extraction areas and major employment areas. The intent of this area is to keep agricultural lands in production until the lands are needed for the designated non-agricultural land uses.

Rural Agriculture includes all the remaining lands in the Region, 63% of the Region's land base. The main intent in this area is to establish agriculture as the priority land use and to establish areas of prime agricultural lands which should be conserved for the long term. All other lands in the rural area have value for agriculture purposes and these remaining lands need to allow for opportunities for non-agricultural land uses to co-exist. This area may contain intensive livestock operations, specialty crops including fruit and vegetables, recreation and wildlife corridors and protected natural areas, as other agricultural uses as well as some non-agricultural uses like pipeline corridors.

Note: The Rural Agriculture lands identified on the Conceptual Draft map above does not identify the prime agricultural areas and the other existing land uses. Prime agricultural lands will be addressed as part of the implementation of RAMP through the identification of criteria gathered during the stakeholder engagement.

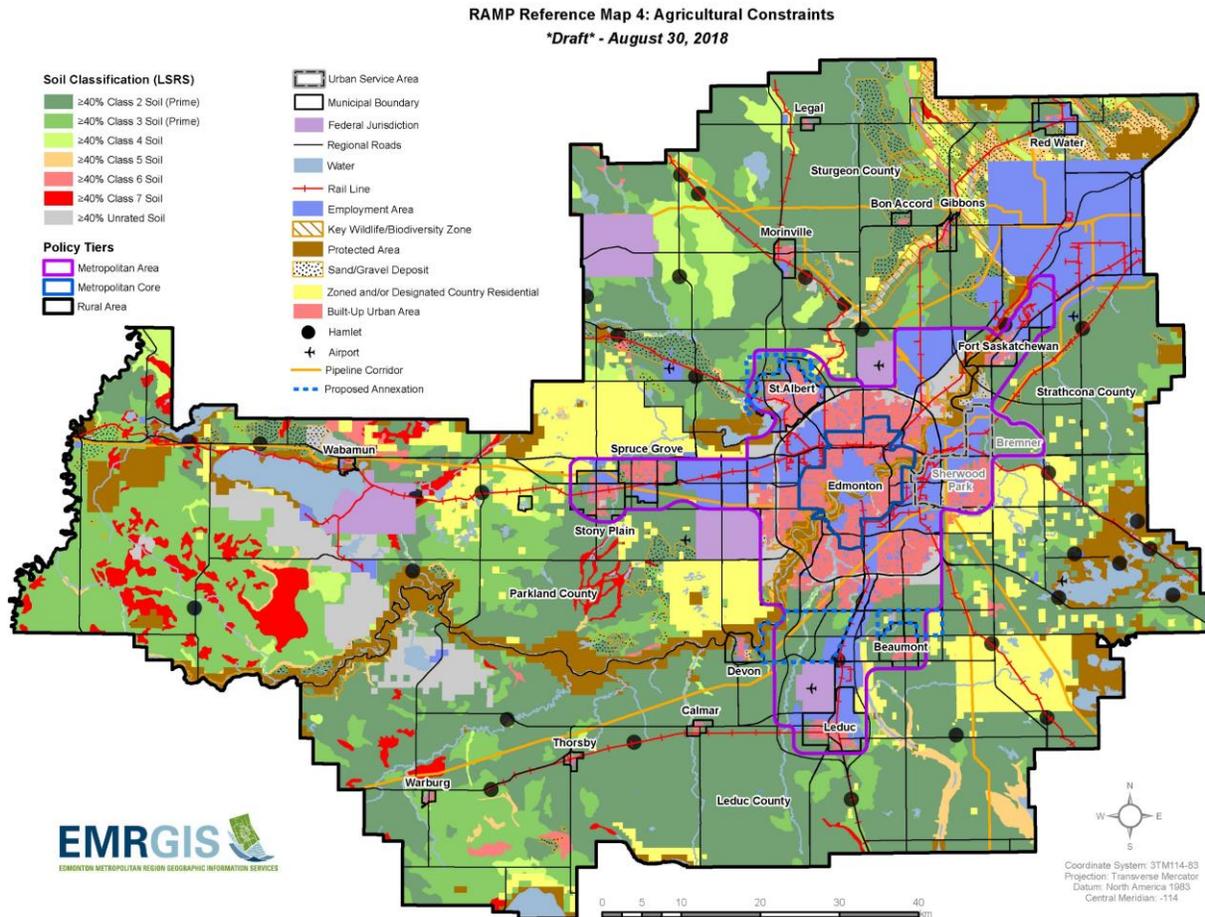
Question #2

What do you think about taking a geographic approach to defining these areas? Does it make sense to you? What do you like about this approach?

Is there anything that you think we have missed? What concerns do you have?

Exploring RAMP Objective #1 – How do we identify and conserve prime agricultural lands?

(Please refer to page 5, above, for the RAMP Objectives.)



The first objective for RAMP states, *‘To identify and conserve an adequate supply of prime agricultural lands to provide a secure local food source for future generations.’*

In the map above, areas shown in green are Class 2 and 3 soils according to the Government of Alberta soil classification system. These are recognized as the best soils for crop production. The Growth Plan also defines prime agricultural land as “Class 2 and 3 soils”. How do we ‘identify’ prime agricultural land?

First, it is not practical to identify all the green lands in the map as prime agricultural land. The map shows many other important land uses across the Region, from cities and towns to protected areas, and they all have an impact on agriculture. And soil quality does not have to be the only thing that defines prime agricultural land. For example, there may be areas in the Region that have microclimates that are

particularly good for agriculture production. We would like to know from stakeholders what other characteristics of agricultural areas make them productive, besides soil quality.

The second important word in this objective refers to the notion of *conserving* these prime agricultural lands. To help understand how we might go about conserving these lands, two ideas are being discussed. The first is that prime agricultural lands should be conserved, as much as possible, for agricultural uses; and non-agricultural uses on prime agricultural lands should be minimized as much as possible. The second idea is that the other agricultural land in the Region in the Rural Areas will continue to have value for agriculture but will also need to allow for non-agricultural uses to co-exist on these lands.

Question #3

RAMP will establish the characteristics of prime agricultural land. Then it will be up to the counties to identify the areas of prime agricultural lands in their individual land use plans. This allows for flexibility for the counties to respond to their own unique circumstances. Prime agricultural areas would then be reflected in the municipalities' Municipal Development Plans.

Currently, prime agricultural land is identified in the Region solely based on soil classification as the only factor. (LSRS 2,3, 4).

What other factors should be considered?

Exploring RAMP Objective #2 – Minimizing fragmentation and conversion

The second RAMP objective of the Growth Plan states, *‘Minimize the fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses.’*

Fragmentation is the division of a parcel of agricultural land, usually by subdivision. **Conversion** is generally understood as a change in land use from an agricultural to a non-agricultural use, and yet we know that this is not always the case.

In both cases agricultural land may be taken out of production. It is not realistic to think that fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural land is going to be completely eliminated. It is reasonable, however, to think that minimizing the amount of converted or fragmented prime agricultural land can be achieved.

There is a tendency to think of fragmentation and conversion as negative, but the Task Force believes there can be both good and bad fragmentation. For example, if prime agricultural land is lost for a new agricultural land use of some kind, the land itself may be taken out of production, but the new agricultural land use could mean there is now a net positive contribution to the agricultural economy.

Question #4

RAMP Objective #2 requires that fragmentation and conversion of prime agricultural land for non-agricultural uses be minimized.

We don’t have all the answers on how to accomplish this among a diverse and transforming agricultural sector, which is why we are interested in your thoughts and ideas on how we address the intent of this objective.

What do you think should be considered?

Exploring RAMP Objective #3 – Promoting the growth of the value-added agriculture sector

The third Growth Plan objective for RAMP is to *‘promote diversification and value-added agriculture production and plan infrastructure to support the agricultural sector and regional food system.’*

We have described RAMP as a plan for the entire Region. This objective speaks to the integration of agricultural production, infrastructure, and the consumer to grow the regional food system and regional economy.

The Growth Plan defines **value-added agriculture** as *“adding a process or service to a raw agricultural product that’s produced by a producer”*, for example, processing raw food products into consumer products in a manufacturing facility, and/or direct farmgate marketing. **Infrastructure** means roads, rail, utilities, drainage, irrigation, and broadband service.

When the Board adopted the Growth Plan in 2017, it believed that conserving prime agricultural land is essential. It recognized that growing the economic potential for the agriculture sector in the Edmonton Region is dependent on a solid foundation – a secure agricultural land base. The Board also believes there is great potential for agricultural producers in the Region to grow, to diversify, and to innovate in the value-added agriculture sector and that the Region should identify and build the infrastructure improvements that will support the growth of the agriculture industry.

Question #5

What are the opportunities to expand the agricultural sector in the Region? Value-added agriculture? Agriculture production?

Is there an infrastructure need, related to agriculture, that would be at the top of your list?

Final comments – your advice

Think about everything you have read in this Discussion Guide and the questions we have asked you to consider, along with your own personal experiences working in the sector.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to the RAMP Task Force as they move forward?

Thank you

On behalf of the EMRB and RAMP Task Force we want to thank you for your interest and contributions to the RAMP Stakeholder Engagement Session.

We will be inviting all participants from our engagement sessions to review the draft “What We Heard” Report, which will summarize the themes and input from these sessions.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at letstalkRAMP@emrb.ca .

Appendix 1

Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP)

Vision and Guiding Principles approved by the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board

Vision

A thriving globally recognized agriculture economy embraced by the community and characterized by:

- *A secure agricultural land base*
- *Leadership in innovation*
- *Environmental stewardship*

Guiding Principles

The 'Vision' is supported by the following guiding principles:

1. Agriculture is a vital sector. It contributes to the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the Region. Its long-term future requires a set of environmentally sustainable land use, economic development, infrastructure and implementation policies and requires a holistic approach to stewardship and governance.
2. Agricultural land is a permanent feature of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region's landscape and is a scarce and irreplaceable resource that must be protected.
3. A thriving agriculture economy requires strategic investment in both hard and soft infrastructure to develop entrepreneurship and provide leadership to foster a dynamic agricultural business culture.
4. Broad regional public support is critical. Agriculture will be embraced by the community through the understanding of the relationships with food, the economy, and the environment.
5. Success requires a collaborative approach including all orders of government, public and private agencies, and non-governmental agencies. EMRB is seen as a leader and cannot achieve the vision alone.

End of Document