



INTRODUCTION

There are almost 850 sq. km. of land in Strathcona County being used for agriculture purposes. This amounts to approximately 67% of the County's 1,265 sq. km. of land.

The agriculture base in Strathcona County for many decades has consisted of traditional farms, such as large-scale field cropping and large intensive livestock operations. In recent years there has been a growing presence of non-traditional and part-time farms with a mix of specialty operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, and specialized livestock.

The County's agriculture industry is affected by both local and global influences. Strong population and industrial growth within the Edmonton metropolitan region has put the agriculture sector under considerable pressure over the last several years.

CURRENT TRENDS

- Agriculture in Strathcona County is under pressure due to urban development and other forces.
- The number of farms has declined dramatically over the last 20 years, from 1,053 in 1981 to 658 in 2011.

- There has been a major decline in livestock numbers.
- Crop acreage from traditional farming operations has remained relatively stable.
- There is a strong presence of acreages with a mix of specialty operations such as greenhouses, horticulture, vegetables, fruits, and specialized livestock.
- Land for farming is becoming increasingly unaffordable.
- The average age of farmers is on the increase.

WHAT DOES THE 2007 MDP SAY?

Some of the key objectives and policies in the Strathcona County 2007 MDP include:

- Enhance the viability of the agricultural industry.
- Maintain prime agricultural lands and protect class 1 and 2 soils.
- Minimize non-agricultural development within agricultural areas.
- Reduce the fragmentation of agricultural land.
- Accommodate the diversification of agricultural activities in suitable areas.
- Minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses.
- Support the growth of value added agricultural uses such as food processing.
- Encourage the practice of agriculture in an environmentally responsible manner.
- Closely monitor and evaluate confined feeding operations and limit conflicts between these operations and other land uses.

The MDP defines five 'Policy Areas', based on proximity to urban development, as well as soil classification and other physical, environmental characteristics. Each Policy Area provides for different scales and forms of agriculture uses:

1. Agriculture – Large Holdings Area

- » Extensive/large traditional agriculture operations promoted.
- » Fragmentation of land minimized through limiting subdivision.

2. Agriculture – Small Holdings Area

- » Agriculture uses promoted, environmental areas conserved and large residential developments allowed, where compatible.
- » Subdivision of agriculture land for small agriculture operations allowed, where compatible.

3. Agri-Industrial Transition Area

- » Development of light industrial and synergistic agri-industrial uses encouraged.

4. Beaver Hills Moraine Area

- » Agriculture uses supported on lands not identified as high priority environment management areas.
- » Limit subdivision of land and conserve the ecosystem.

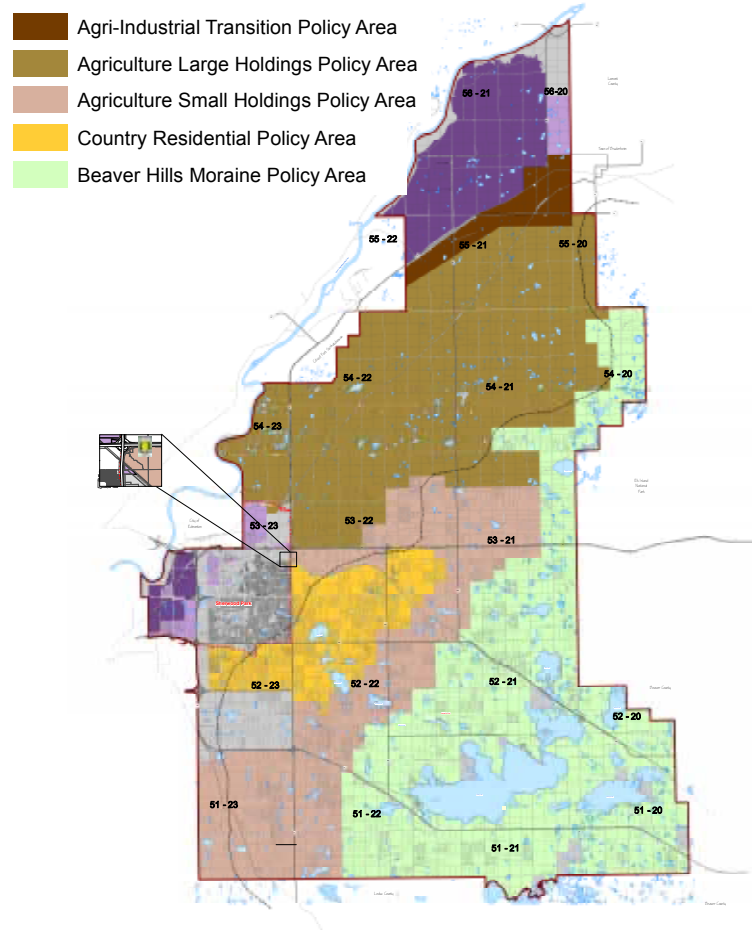
5. Country Residential Area

- » Existing agriculture operations allowed to continue.
- » Ensure new residential development addresses potential conflicts with agriculture.

THE AGRICULTURE MASTER PLAN (IN PROGRESS)

The County is in the process of preparing a comprehensive Agriculture Master Plan (AMP) to address the numerous issues facing the agriculture industry.

This important plan is scheduled for completion this spring. It will provide crucial information and be instrumental in helping shape the policy direction taken in the County's updated MDP. The MDP will not only address land use issues related to agriculture, it will also provide policy on other matters (e.g. economic development, promotion, etc.) with respect to maintaining a viable and sustainable agriculture industry.



The general goals for the AMP update process are to:

- Provide agricultural recommendations that align with the County's strategic plan and sustainability pillars.
- Raise the profile of agriculture by promoting the importance of agricultural stewardship and the protection of heritage farmland.
- Identify future trends in agriculture to advance opportunities in Strathcona County.
- Develop a long-term vision and policy to protect agricultural operations within a diverse land use framework.
- Identify measurable implementation strategies.

The completed AMP will meet the needs of the community based on the information gathered during extensive public engagement. The AMP will also provide a framework for Council to make informed decisions regarding agriculture in Strathcona County.