

HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS IN ALBERTA

Agricultural Service Boards are unique to Alberta, and have been established in the province for over 50 years. They were originally set up by the Alberta Department of Agriculture to provide local (municipal) authority over the growing problems of weed infestation, and soil degradation from wind & water. Previous efforts to handle these concerns through limited provincial staff had not been effective, and locally based programs with provincial coordination & technical support seemed to be the answer.

In 1945, enabling provincial legislation was passed. The *Agricultural Service Board Act* allowed rural jurisdictions to set up local "agricultural service boards" to deal with weeds & soil erosion, with a qualified person (the Agricultural Fieldman) hired to carry out the board's programs. Once formed, the board became advisory to the municipal council and the Minister of Agriculture. Early ASB's consisted of a mix of municipal councilors, ratepayers, and the local Alberta Agriculture District Agriculturalist.

ASB programs developed over time, and vary considerably across the province due to regional differences in land use, cropping, climate, and demographics. In general, they include demonstration and enforcement of weed control, resource conservation techniques, roadside seeding & weed control, shelterbelt tree planting, encouragement of crop seed cleaning & treating plants, livestock improvement & specialized equipment rental, agricultural pest management, and coordination of provincial agricultural initiatives. These provincial initiatives include producer education, field crop pest surveys, livestock pest control, and implementation of resource conservation programs.

Provincial grant funding historically made up the bulk of ASB program funding. This is no longer the case in most ASB's, and municipalities have necessarily assumed by far the largest share of funding ASB programs through property taxes, user fees, and other funding sources. As a result, Alberta's 67 ASB's have become more independent from the province in their programming. ASB's core areas of expertise remain weed control, soil & water resource conservation, and pest management. They have now grown into strong advocates for their local agricultural communities, & are viewed as key contacts for soil & water resource sustainability. ASB's now work directly with federal and provincial government departments of Agriculture and Environment, private industry, and various agricultural & environmental organizations from the local to international level.

Since 1967, Agricultural Service Boards from across the South, Central, Northwest, Northeast, and Peace Regions of Alberta have met annually to discuss & take action on common issues of regional, provincial, national, & international concern. The annual Provincial ASB Conference is organized and hosted by the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen (AAAF).

THE ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA AGRICULTURAL FIELDMEN (A.A.A.F.)

The Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen have always been central to the success of Agricultural Service Boards. Agricultural Fieldmen develop, implement, and control programs designed to carry out priorities and policies set by their Agricultural Service Board. In addition, they are appointed as inspectors or regulatory officers enforcing the following Alberta statutes:

- ♦ *Agricultural Service Board Act*
- ♦ *Weed Control Act*
- ♦ *Soil Conservation Act*
- ♦ *Agricultural Pests Act*

Agricultural Fieldmen are uniquely qualified to manage the diverse ASB programs across Alberta. Many members have university or college degrees in Agriculture, Biology, Environmental Technology, and/or Business Administration. Several are Professional Agrologists or Certified Crop Advisors. All AAAF members have an extensive applied agricultural or environmental science background. All share a common tie to the diverse world of agriculture, and believe strongly in the importance of the industry to society's well being.

The full AAAF membership meet annually at "In-Service Training" to obtain updated technical training, discuss relevant issues, and conduct Association business.