

RESOLUTION E1-23

STABLE REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION FUNDING

WHEREAS The RDAR lead Extension Task Force presented their recommendations for a cooperative extension model on November 28, 2022 which considered research extension exclusively, and there are many agricultural extension topics outside of research important to farmers;

WHEREAS ASBs and other agriculture not for profits work collaboratively on provincial priorities that address regional needs of farmers on topics such as sustainable farming, business acumen, rural economic development, food safety, animal welfare and other best management practices that impact public trust;

WHEREAS ASBs collaborate with the province and not for profits such as the Applied Research and Forage Associations, ALUS, Cleanfarms, Environmental Farm Plan, riparian and watershed associations and Ag in the Classroom on topics outside of the RDAR mandate;

WHEREAS ASBs and their not-for-profit partners do not currently have a stable reliable source of funding to support non research extension activities in their regions;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST

That the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation make available five-year stable regional funding for ASBs and their agriculture not for profit partners to hire and maintain the staff and operational costs associated with maintaining regional agricultural extension networks.

SPONSORED BY: (name of sponsoring municipality)

MOVED BY: _____ MD Peace_____

CARRIED

STATUS: _____ Provincial _____

DEPARTMENT: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2019/20 – Alberta Agriculture restructured and moved research and extension programs out to post secondary and arms length organizations. The Ag-Info Centre was restructured as a referral service and farmers calling the centre with agriculture production questions were redirected to their local ASB, Applied Research or Forage Association, or Commodity Board/Association. At the same time the Agriculture Opportunity Fund that had been available for core operational funding for the Applied Research and Forage Associations (ARECA associations) was cut.

Up until this time, these organizations largely relied on the Ag-Info Centre staff and specialists employed by the Ministry for production extension support for their members and their programs. They would encourage their farmer members to phone the Ag-Info Centre for production support. As a result, most of these organizations were not resourced to field the questions from the Ag-Info Center referrals.

As a transition measure the Ministry granted money to the ARECA associations to hire “retired” Ministry specialists on a contract basis, and the new association Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) was given short term funding to support the operations of the Applied Research and Forage Associations as they transitioned to a new funding model.

2020 – the ASB’s Legislative Stream grant was reduced from \$8.5 Million to \$3 Million, and the Environmental Stream funding was delayed until after municipal budgets were finalized resulting in massive reductions to ASB extension staff and programs.

In 2022 RDAR and the Ministry pulled together an Extension Task Force who with the help of MNP, engaged with agriculture extension stakeholders in the province (post secondary, applied research associations, and commodity/industry groups). These activities focused on agriculture research related extension activities and needs. The ASBs were felt to be more regulatory partners in the process so were left out of engagements. However during the course of the work being done, business consultants working with the Applied Research associations identified that ASBs were key partners in many of their programs and activities, and realized that there was more agriculture extension than just that related to production research. Scott Ackerman reached out to the ASBPC through the Executive assistant to explore how the ASBs and Applied Research associations work together and what roles they each play in agriculture extension.

At the same time ASBs from various regions reached out to their regional ASBPC rep to express their concerns with how regional agriculture extension needs would be met in

the new developing system. The ASBPC reached out to RDAR and asked them to attend as a delegation to the May 16, 2022 regular ASBPC meeting.

CEO Mark Redman and Chair Dave Chalack attended and presented what RDAR was doing for research extension, and how the ASBs were represented in their review by Ministry staff at the Extension Task Force meetings. ASBPC members explained the role that ASBs play in agriculture extension, the diversity of programs and how many ASBs are very supportive of the local applied research and forage associations. RDAR delegates indicated that ASBs would be included in stakeholder engagements held to discuss the findings of the Extension Task Force in the summer of 2022. These engagements were delayed again and again, and at the time of this resolution still have not taken place.

Since the engagement with the ASBPC in May, RDAR has not responded to any inquiry made by the ASBPC regarding the upcoming stakeholder engagements or to speak to concerns brought forward by ASBs.

In July 2022, the Federal Provincial Territorial Ministers of Agriculture met to discuss and to agree in principle to the content and direction of the new 5 year Ag Policy Framework called [Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership \(SCAP\)](#). The new agreement is to come into affect for April 2023, and it includes a \$500 Million dollar increase. Part of this increase is earmarked for a new Resilient Agriculture Landscapes Program (RALP) which aligns well with many of the ALUS programs that ASBs partner in.

By fall of 2022 the province was looking at surpluses and extraordinary inflation. For this reason, it is thought that now is a good opportunity to ask for Stable Regional Agricultural Extension Funding. The idea is that the funding would be allocated regionally and available to ASBs and their partners to continue to deliver extension on agriculture topics broader than just the research extension funded through RDAR project grants.

Conversations about agriculture extension funding and the needs of ASBs continues with Ministry staff. In October the ASBPC wrote the Minister reiterating the reduction in ASB staff and services to deliver extension due to the disruption to the timing of funding from the environmental stream funding and the reduction to the ASB's Legislative Stream grant. See below:



Agricultural Service Board Provincial Committee
c/o Aaron Van Beers, #101, 1101 5th St., Nisku, AB T9E 2X3

October 31, 2023

Honourable Nate Horner
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry
and Rural Economic Development
Office of the Minister
AFRED
229 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

SENT VIA EMAIL: AFRED.minister@gov.ab.ca

RE: Restoration of the ASB funding with inflationary increase

Dear Minister:

In 2020 the ASB's Legislative Stream grant was reduced by \$3 million dollars to \$8.5M and the Resource Management Stream funding was withheld until March 2021 after municipal budgets are finalized. The result was a loss in staff and an inability to maintain partnerships and support for programs like Environmental Farm Plan, ALUS and regional agriculture research and extension activities.

In recent years, the pressures on ASBs and their municipal staff / fieldmen has increased as they are filling gaps in ag extension, pest surveillance and business development and are frequently taking calls directed from the Ag-Info Centre. ASB's have not been adequately resourced to provide unbiased agriculture production support, as these functions were historically provided by the Ministry (see Resolution 2-22).

ASBs are asking for secure stable funding and would like the ASB Legislative Stream grant to be restored to its historical amount along with an inflationary increase.

Secure Stable funding was an ask in the 2019 ASB Program review recommendations.

In service,



Sebastien Dutrisac
ASB Provincial Committee Chair

Enclosures: DM Jason Hale; ADM John Conrad; Program Manager Doug Macaulay

In addition to the letter, the ASBPC discussed the need and desire for restored and if possible topped up funding with DM Jason Hale, and ADM John Conrad on November 7, 2022, and later with Minister Horner and staff when they met with them at the Legislature on November 30, 2022. While the Minister was unable to commit to anything he assured the ASBPC that he had received their request and was in favour of restoring the funding if at all possible and they were looking into what could be done.

On December 2, 2022 the ASBPC received the following response from the Minister.



ALBERTA
AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION

Office of the Minister
MLA, Drumheller-Stettler

AR-78866

DEC 2 2022

Sebastien Dutrisac, Chair
Agricultural Service Board Provincial Committee
Box 490
Two Hills, AB T0B 4K0
asbprovcommittee@gmail.com

Dear Sebastien Dutrisac:

Thank you for your October 31, 2022 letter requesting the restoration of Agricultural Service Board grant funding, including an inflationary increase.

Agricultural Service Boards (ASBs) play a critical role in the promotion, enhancement and protection of viable and sustainable agriculture to improve the economic viability of agricultural producers. Agriculture and Irrigation (AGI) is committed to supporting the important work ASBs undertake each year to implement and enforce the Agricultural Service Board Act, Weed Control Act, Agricultural Pest Act, Soil Conservation Act and assist with the Animal Health Act.

I appreciate your request to restore ASB Grant Program funding, with an inflationary increase. The economic downturn, and onset of COVID 19, led to significant reductions in government revenue under Budget 2020. This required tough decisions in many areas of government and ultimately led to a reduced 2020-24 ASB Grant Program. I understand you discussed this matter during your meeting with AGI Deputy Minister Jason Hale and Assistant Deputy Minister John

Conrad on November 7, 2022. Though I cannot promise an increase at this time we are committed to exploring the possibility.

Following staff reductions at AGI, Agricultural Fieldmen and municipal staff have faced increased requests from producers seeking assistance with expertise and technical knowledge; I commend municipal staff for the support they have provided to our producers in recent years.

Results Driven Agriculture Research is exploring this gap and created the Extension Task Force that is looking at a Co-operative Agricultural Extension Model. I anticipate the task force will be holding additional working group sessions and dialogue with stakeholders to ensure they have a say in the model as it is finalized. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Honourable Nate Horner
Minister, Agriculture and Irrigation

cc: Jason Hale, Deputy Minister, AGI
John Conrad, Assistant Deputy Minister, AGI

While the letters deal specifically with the Legislative Stream funding, they effectively communicate the hardship created by the reduction of funding and its impact on ASB programs as a whole. This resolution if passed we hope will communicate the importance of agriculture extension activities broader than the RDAR mandate and the desire for a stable funding source to support these activities that will encourage engagement of farmers in the initiatives inspired by SCAP federally and provincially.