

Resolution E1-23: Stable Regional Agricultural Extension Funding

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST that 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.

Response:

Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR) facilitated a review of agricultural extension in Alberta with a seven-member, industry-led Extension Task Force (ETF). The ETF was to deliver recommendations to improve knowledge transfer and innovation mobilization for agricultural producers in Alberta. Work focused on understanding the current practices and existing capacity of the extension model as well as examining future needs. This work identified three opportunities for extension improvement:

- Establish shared accountability to improve cooperative extension.
- Build connections across sectors to address industry gaps.
- Ensure intentional and deliberate cooperative extension.

The ETF concluded Alberta's existing extension model has many strengths, and that it should be leveraged, not remade, to foster future improvement and success. The group recommended building a Cooperative Agricultural Extension model in Alberta.

The ETF recommendations have given all extension partners a clearer picture of the agricultural extension landscape and a road map to move forward. Agriculture and Irrigation will continue to work with partners, including RDAR, Applied Research Associations (ARA), Agricultural Service Boards (ASB), post-secondary institutions and many others to analyze and implement the ETF recommendations.

As the response to Resolution 3-23 indicates, RDAR provides the 12 regional ARAs with operational funding of \$2.5 million per year for a two-year period. This is similar to the funding ARAs received under the defunct Agriculture Opportunities Fund. RDAR also initiated and facilitated a process to examine the operational needs of ARAs. In fiscal year 2023-24, ARA funding will increase by \$1.5 million to \$4 million to support ARA operations.

Agriculture and Irrigation also provides long-term, stable funding to ASBs. The ASB grant is \$11.9 million for 2023-24 – an increase of \$3 million from the previous year.

In particular, the Resource Management stream supports regional extension work to promote the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and Environmental Farm Plans. Additionally, it supports the extension work that helps build awareness and promote the adoption of various beneficial management practices.