

Agricultural Service Board

Position Statement

Agriculture Extension

ASBs are one of many agriculture extension agents and have a unique and integral role in agricultural extension. ASBs exist in every rural municipality where agriculture production takes place, and are mandated by legislation to promote, enhance and protect viable sustainable agriculture with the view to improve the economic viability of the agriculture producer. They do this by advising their local municipal government and the provincial government on agriculture issues and concerns and promoting the development of policies and programs that support the farmers in their regions.

ASBs are responsible for implementing and enforcing legislative requirements under [4 agriculture related Acts](#) and to assist with the control of animal disease under the Animal Health Act. They are assurance partners with the province to provide monitoring, detection and enforcement services that work to minimize the risk of disease and pest outbreaks keeping markets open and accessible to agriculture producers. ([About ASBs, https://agriculturalserviceboards.com/about-asbs/](https://agriculturalserviceboards.com/about-asbs/))

Agriculture extension topics that encourage sustainable agriculture practices, that encourage compliance with the legislation, promote economic viability and enhance community/family wellbeing are important to ASBs. ASBs are empowered by their local councils to respond to both agriculture and non agriculture rate payers and so have a broad understanding of how agriculture practices impact those outside the industry.

What is the ASB's position on the importance of having a municipal perspective in agriculture extension?

ASBs have a unique and important perspective on agriculture extension, and it is important that they have input into the development and governance of agriculture extension programs and services. ASBs:

- are positioned to address regional/local issues
- have a unique mandate and therefore have unique role to play in extension, Their extension differs from that done by ARA's, post secondary institutions or private industry
- are mandated to serve both farming and non farming communities, so offer a wide perspective and insight on issues impacting agriculture.
- serve all farmers as assurance partners working to keep market access.

What financial considerations do ASB's have with respect to agriculture extension delivery?

The majority of ASBs feel that they require more base operating funding to provide quality stable extension services to meet the needs of their farmers.

- Many ASBs feel that the current ASB grant does not fund enough manpower for market assurance activities and preventative agriculture extension.
- The financial needs of each municipality vary.
- Agriculture extension agents are not evenly distributed throughout the province, so it can be expensive for ASBs to partner to provide their farmers access to relevant extension resources.
- ASB grants and grants provided to partnering agriculture extension agents are not keeping up with the increasing cost of extension delivery.

What do the ASBs believe is needed to continue to support agriculture extension?

ASBs believe the formation of an organized coordinated system that provides access to current agriculture extension resources and the specialists to adapt them to local situations is needed.

To do that:

1. A coordinating body that identifies needs in the industry and works with the relevant agriculture extension agents to meet those needs in the most efficient way possible.
 - a. ASBs need to be part of the steering and governance
 - b. ASBs are in a position to provide advice on the current issues and needs for agriculture extension because of their legislated advisory role.
 - c. A coordinating body would help to reduce competition between extension service providers and improve efficiency for the greatest value to farmers and the public.
2. Access to current unbiased information and agriculture specialists that can work with ASBs to customize innovations and agronomics to local conditions, addressing regional concerns.
 - a. ASBs staff tend to be generalists and are best suited to delivering extension messages and ideas that were well developed by the experts and known to be relevant and useful to farmer audiences.
 - b. Agriculture specialists are needed to adapt innovations, extension resources and programs to address regional concerns and fit the mandate of the ASBs.
 - c. ASBs are positioned to deliver extension across the entire province, when adequately funded
3. All extension agents need access to stable consistent reliable funding that is responsive to the cost of delivery that consists of:
 - a. Operational funding that is not traditionally covered in projects.
 - b. Opportunities for capital funding.

What current agriculture issues are impacting rural Alberta that are important to the ASBs but are not currently addressed in the CEM model?

- **Security** - Extension efforts that inform and provide practical solutions for increasing security on farm for bio control, protection from activism, and rural crime as well as increasing the understanding of laws in place to protect citizens. More needs to be done to ensure people know the laws, are being proactive to prevent crime. Coordinated
- **Mental Health/ Wellbeing** - Extension products to inform rural service providers, municipal officials, and those involved in the agriculture industry about the current state of farm wellbeing, and how to access supports is an ongoing need.
- **Economic development** - Extension products that keep farmers, agriculture associations, and municipalities up to date with the latest programs and opportunities that are designed to encourage rural economic development. The average age of farmers is 56, and only 19% of farmers are under the age of 35. This means a lot of assets and equity will need to change hands, and having access to schools, sports, health care and other amenities is an important part of encouraging families to farm.
- **Emergency planning** - Systems need to be in place to accommodate livestock in evacuation or disease outbreaks. Extension that educates farmers, first responders, and municipal emergency response teams about the processes, responsibilities, and regulations governing animal welfare and traceability are needed.
- **Conflicting land use** - Selling agricultural land to other development is financially attractive, particularly to older farmers looking to retire, but has a negative impact on the amount of farmland available to farm.
- **Soil Conservation** - Extension resources and activities that give farmers and municipalities the tools and knowledge needed are not readily available.