

Support for Alberta Farmland Trust
Wheatland County

WHEREAS the Alberta Farmland Trust is a new land trust organization pursuing charitable status and advocating for the advancement of mechanisms to support the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural lands in Alberta; and

WHEREAS the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, SA 2009, c A-26.8 (ALSA) establishes “the protection, conservation and enhancement of the environment,” “the protection, conservation and enhancement of natural scenic or esthetic values, and “the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural land or land for agricultural purposes” as valid purposes for conservation easements; and

WHEREAS Canada’s Ecological Gifts (EcoGift) Program offers “significant tax benefits to landowners who donate land or partial interests in land to a qualified recipient” by way of a conservation easement with the purpose of protecting and preserving ecologically sensitive lands, but no similar program exists in support of the protection, conservation and enhancement of agricultural lands (Government of Canada, 2019); and

WHEREAS cultivated lands do not qualify under the EcoGift program, but many of Alberta’s high quality, productive soils are found in areas with high development pressure and therefore are at risk of loss without an effective mechanism for legal protection (Carscallen, 2018); and

WHEREAS Multi-generational farm families have farmed high quality land for many years and have expressed a desire to be able to conserve those agricultural lands, but are unable to do so because of risks and costs that would be alleviated by supports offered only for ecologically sensitive lands (Carscallen, 2018); and

WHEREAS rural municipalities, as managers of land use in agricultural regions, are bound by terms of regional plans that have a focus on maintaining an agricultural land base such as the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, and, as a voice for rural landowners, have an interest in the availability of effective tools for the preservation of agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS financial barriers to placing conservation easements on agricultural land render them economically unavailable for legal protection at this time; meanwhile funding, tax benefits, and support offered to ecological conservation easements have proven to be an effective tool for the conservation of ecologically sensitive lands; and

WHEREAS according to sections 25-26 of ALSA the Lieutenant Governor in Council is responsible for establishing, supporting or facilitating funding and cost-sharing initiatives, mechanisms and instruments to support or enhance conservation easements and instruments designed or intended to support, encourage or enhance the protection,

conservation and enhancement of agricultural land or land for agricultural purposes, and this function may be delegated to the Stewardship Minister;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that Alberta's Environment & Parks and Agriculture & Forestry departments implement policies and programs that support the creation of agricultural conservation easements on lands within Alberta's highly productive, food-producing areas. These should include: first, the establishment of agricultural conservation as a priority under the Alberta Land Trust Grant Program so that agricultural land trusts can access funding, and benefit from policy support; second, the initiation of work towards an "AgriGift" program parallel to the EcoGift program in cooperation with the federal government; and third, any other policies and programs that the Lieutenant Governor and/or Stewardship Minister see fit in order to create functional mechanisms for the protection and conservation of farmland in Alberta; and

FURTHER, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta request that the Federal Government work with Alberta and other provinces to establish an "AgriGift" program similar to the existing Ecological Gifts Program but in support of the protection, conservation and enhancement of Canada's most valuable food producing agricultural lands.

Member Background

In January of 2020 Wheatland County's Agricultural Service Board received a presentation from Stan Carscallen, a lawyer, rancher, and co-founder of Alberta Farmland Trust. Carscallen described challenges faced by landowners and land trusts seeking to protect, conserve and enhance Alberta's agricultural lands, and efforts made by Alberta Farmland Trust to improve supports available to them. Wheatland County's Agricultural Service Board and Council were inspired to join advocacy efforts for the development and implementation of programs and policies that support agricultural conservation easements in Alberta, with recognition of the importance of preserving and protecting our most valuable agricultural lands. We hope that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta are also inspired to stand with us and act, using our collective voice, to advance initiatives in this area. We hope that agricultural conservation easements will soon become a feasible option for the landowners in our municipality, and others, through this advocacy work.

Please see Carscallen's attached paper titled "The Urgent Need for the Formation and Support of an Alberta Farmland Trust," as background support for our resolution.

Bibliography

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