

## Agriculture, Agri-Food & Bio-Products



### **Agriculture**

Southern Alberta is the largest, most fertile and productive agricultural region in Canada. It has rich soil, 2,300 hours of sunshine and 140 growing days per year, all supported by the largest irrigation system in Canada. It is recognized as a leader in Canola production, as well as, confined feeding operations.

Growth in agriculture has accelerated as efficiencies in farming operations, crop and livestock techniques have improved. There are ample opportunities in this ideal setting for traditional and innovative agricultural development. In addition to crops, it accounts for a large portion of the cattle and calves, hogs, hens and chickens raised in the Province of Alberta.

In much of southern Alberta, there is not enough rainfall and moisture to naturally sustain agricultural crops. Therefore, agriculture is supported by an irrigation area that involves 13 irrigation districts. Irrigation in Alberta accounts for nearly 4.1 billion cubic metres of surface water.

This region is home to 4,470 farms encompassing a land area of 4.2 million acres. Farm revenues are \$3.11 billion per year, the highest of all areas in Alberta. The on-farm livestock and poultry are valued at \$885 million, with 1,060,830 cattle and calves reported. Cropland totals 3.7 million acres and this area is the largest producers of durum wheat, fodder corn, potatoes, flaxseed, dry beans, sugar beets and vegetables (such as sweet corn and green peas) in Alberta.

Crops produced in the region include:

- Spring & Durum Wheat
- Canola
- Barley
- Forage crops (such as alfalfa)
- Sugar Beets
- Potatoes
- Corn
- Pulse Crops (such as beans, peas and lentils)
- Honey

Livestock is also a key agricultural product, with the mainstays of beef, pork, and poultry in addition to eggs, cheese and milk, that contribute significantly to Canada's and the world's protein supply. Alberta has some of the largest confined feedlot operations in Canada and our region in the province produces approximately 60% of all Canadian beef. These confined feeding operations focus on the nutrition, health management, and maintenance of the facilities and environment in order to finish livestock such as beef cattle, hogs, horses, sheep, turkeys, chickens and ducks to the highest food health standards prior to processing.

The agriculture industry in Southern Alberta is recognized for its entrepreneurial and progressive farmers who experiment with new specialty crops, new equipment and advances in precision agriculture, and land management practices. The business of agriculture is broadening in Alberta, shifting from food producers to agri-business.

As new global markets for agriculture and agri-business products grow, so do the opportunities for trade and investment. Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge have focused on advancing the agriculture industry, and have established a number of programs and resources for data-driven productivity in agriculture. This region is also actively pursuing opportunities with non-traditional, high value crops that are ideally suited to the region.

## **Agri-food**

Southern Alberta's processed agricultural products are literally consumed around the world. Home to more than 120 established processing businesses, producing food and/or feed for Canada and the world, Agri-food companies report:

- A combined annual revenue of \$1.3 billion
- Employment of 1,679 people
- Operating facilities that cover more than 30 acres
- Wage costs of \$72.8 million annually
- The majority (64%) invested in equipment and/or the adoption of new technologies within the past year

Southern Alberta has a long history of being an agricultural production, distribution and service centre. In fact, The Lethbridge Research Centre (established in 1906) is the largest within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's national network of 19 centres and leads Canada's research in the development of bio industrial platforms. Success in this industry is due to the proximity to the crops produced in the region, with food and feed processing surrounded by agricultural production.

### **Interesting Facts:**

- **Sunrise Poultry Ltd** processes 14.5 million fowl per year; 290,000 per week.
- **Richardson Oilseed Ltd.** was the first in the world to market canola oil.
- **Sunnyrose Cheese** (Agropur) processes 300,000 litres of milk per day, producing millions of pounds of cheese per year.
- **Green Prairie International**, a global supplier of forage products, has a state-of-the-art compressing facility which allows 26 Metric tons to be shipped in one 40 foot container.

Companies in Southern Alberta are growing and prospering with employment in the Agriculture and Agri-Food cluster growing by 25.5% in the last 10 years. A large portion of locally grown crops are processed in the region, and global producers such as Richardson Oilseed, McCains, Cavendish, PepsiCo Foods, Lucerne Foods, Sunrise Poultry, Sunnyrose Cheese, Maple Leaf Meats, and Parmalat are distributing their high quality Canadian food products around the world.

- **Richardson Oilseed** invested \$15 million in 2012 to increase their facility by 40%. Currently a \$70 million expansion is underway that will further increase their production capacity when operational in 2017.
- **PepsiCo Foods** is in the midst of adding a multi-million dollar expansion that will be the first facility of its kind in Canada.
- **EPIC** (Egg Processing Innovations Cooperative) is the first egg breaking plant of its kind in Alberta and produces liquid egg, as well as eggshell membrane and eggshell powder.

In addition to food processing in Southern Alberta, this region is home to firms that process crops, such as Green Prairie International, and send them across Canada and the world.

### **Bio-Products**

The biochemical/biomaterial industry is an emerging sector in the region which is developing bio-based chemicals and materials from hemp, corn, canola, sugar beets and other Alberta crops. This is a sub-sector of the chemical manufacturing industry, which generates \$2 trillion in annual revenue.