

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2021 - 2022



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE .....	2
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE .....	3
BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND REPS 2021 - 2022 .....	3
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S GREETINGS.....	4
THE LONG GAME PAYS OFF .....	5
OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS .....	11
OPERATIONAL OUTCOME TRACKING 2022.....	14



## CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

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Dear SouthGrow Members,

Please allow me to begin with a quote from Charles Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities" which captures well my view of the past year:

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."*

Now I realize we have not been fighting the French Revolution, but the past year has definitely been "interesting" times, as year two of the pandemic slipped by around us with ups and downs of mandates and requirements, masking, vaccines (or not), travel restrictions, protests, counter protests, Zoom meetings ad infinitum, and the unavoidable personal mental stress we have all felt to some degree. It's sometimes made it difficult to keep our eyes on the target. What a relief then that we are back able to have an in-person AGM, see each other face to face, and catch up on where we have been and more importantly where we are going, both personally, and as an organization as we enter the first stages of what some have dubbed "the New Normal."

You'll see from the included reports that, when all is said and done, SouthGrow is doing very well, and the coming year looks to be, possibly, our most successful yet.

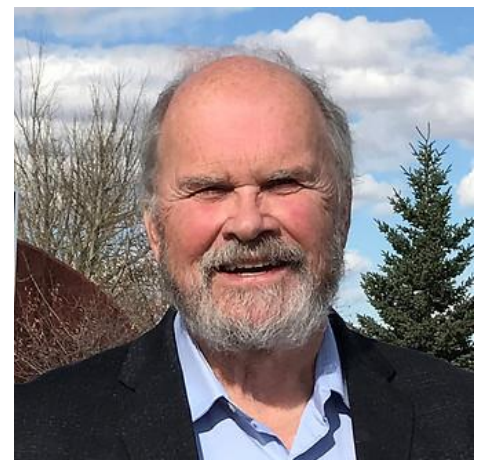
So, I welcome you all to this celebration of another year of operation, and the successes that we have seen. Thank you for your cooperation, faith, and perseverance, as together we strive to help our region reach its full economic potential.

Sincerely,



Mayor Jim Willett  
Village of Coutts, "The Gateway to Alberta"  
Executive Chair, SouthGrow

I'll share one more quote I find inspiring every day:  
"As long as there's coffee in the world, how bad can things be?"  
– Cassandra Clare, City of Ashes



## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Chairperson	Mayor Jim Willett	Village of Coutts
Vice Chairperson / Treasurer	Councillor Laurie Lyckman	Vulcan County
Director	Councillor John Turcato	MD of Taber
Director	Councillor Scott Akkermans	Town of Coalhurst
Director	Councillor Scott Alexander	Village of Warner

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND REPS 2021 - 2022

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Director	Councillor Colin Bexte	Village of Arrowwood
Director	Councillor Diandra Bruised Head	Blood Tribe
Director	Mayor Gordon Reynolds	Town of Bow Island
Director	Marsha Jensen	Town of Cardston
Director	Councillor Randy Bullock	Cardston County
Director	Councillor Doug Fraser	Village of Carmangay
Director	Councillor Dale Pickering	Town of Coaldale
Director	Councillor Allen Kuizenga	County of Forty Mile
Director	Councillor Mark Sayers	Lethbridge County
Director	Councillor Robert Donnolly	Village of Lomond
Director	Mayor Byrne Cook	Town of Magrath
Director	Councillor John Turcato	MD of Taber
Director	Mayor Dean Melnyk	Village of Milo
Director	Councillor Shayne Johnson	Town of Milk River
Director	Councillor Henry de Kok	Town of Picture Butte
Director	Councillor Matt Evans	Town of Raymond
Director	Councillor Gary Bikman	Village of Stirling
Director	Councillor Alf Rudd	Town of Taber
Director	Mayor Raymond Coad	Town of Vauxhall
Director	Councillor Cole Dunham	Town of Vulcan
Director	Councillor Marty Kirby	Village of Warner
Director	Councillor Marsha Mason	Village of Champion
Director	Councillor Brad Schlossberger	Town of Claresholm
Director	Mayor Lorne Buis	Village of Foremost
Director	Councillor Ross Ford	Warner County
Associate	Trevor Lewington	City of Lethbridge
Associate	Phillip Wright	Milk River Cable Club
Associate	Mike Warkentin	Exhibition Park



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S GREETINGS

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Dear SouthGrow Board of Directors,

It's been my pleasure to serve as your Executive Director for over 4 years and I can honestly say these have been the most professionally rewarding years of my life. I came into this role hungry and ambitious but with very little knowledge of the demands of the job or how all consuming it can become. The last 4 years have tempered my exuberance with knowledge and wisdom and helped me to become increasingly effective in the delivery of my obligations to the region.

The theme I chose to present this year in our annual report is the incredible impact sustained, consistent effort can have. The last four years have been long and filled with twists and turns we did not anticipate and which had radical effects on our goals. A fiscally hawkish new government and back-to-back global crisis' forced us to be nimble, creative, and inventive. Despite the disruptions, we've stayed the course and built on past successes in the direction of the opportunities we know we are in a position to seize. Today, agri-food investments in the region are steady, industrial land is in short supply, large industries are expanding, the unemployment rate is falling, renewable investments are surging, new infrastructure is being built, our core highway is being twinned, our institutions are credentialing workers for well-paying jobs, and connectivity has never been better - and it's growing! SouthGrow has played its role in all of these pushing steadily forward, building collaborations, delivering projects, and supporting what we can where we can in the direction of sustaining the quality of life and building opportunities for our people.

None of this is the work of one person, or even just our organization alone. We exist in part to build partnerships so that the region can reap the rewards of accelerating good-will and a shared sense of purpose. SouthGrow is proud to be the organizing force, support, or partner of so many initiatives, organisations, or efforts in the region. I am proud as well to work alongside my colleagues in the Economic Development profession, to work with the members of the Board who routinely go above and beyond to further our work, and with our expanding ecosystem of staff who help us deliver on our operational objectives.

In 4 years, we've come a long way, but in that time we've also laid the groundwork for many more years of future work. It's exciting to think of the road ahead and where we will be in four more.

Sincerely,



**Peter Casurella**

Executive Director



## THE LONG GAME PAYS OFF

The often-repeated mantra of Economic Developers to their funders is that this is a long game, and progress often requires persistence across multiple years to reach the desired results. In this year's highlight reel, I want to take you through examples of how multi-year work is yielding big results for Southern Alberta to give an appreciation of how far we've come. Progress has been made across our three core pillars of **Building Partnerships, Marketing and Communications, and Economic Development.**

### Highway 3 Twinning Surging Forward



- In **2019**, SouthGrow offered to support the Highway 3 Twinning Development Association by bringing the Administration of their organization in-house, providing matching funds to support them as they pursued an ambitious new strategic plan that called for part-time staffing and a per-capita rate. With our help, support for H3TDA was renewed, Victoria Chester was hired, and members came flooding back to the organization that had a renewed sense of purpose and vision.
- In **2019 and 2020**, H3TDA advanced a new brand for the organization, built a website, organized an advocacy campaign and operations, and launched our efforts.
- This directly impacted the decisions that led to the **2020** announcement by the Premier of \$150,000 to twin 46 kms of highway from **Taber to Burdett**.
- In **2021** we continued to develop our message, expanded partnerships to British Columbia, made in-roads with new decision makers, gathered more support and members, and prepared for H3TDA to be independent from SouthGrow (following 3 years of incubation).
- In **2022**, H3TDA became administratively independent from SouthGrow, having been successful in sustaining their operations independently with growing success. SouthGrow continues to support with in-kind work and administrative 'back-stopping'. We supported them with funding, and helped find more funding, for a new Economic Impact study being launched this year.
- Significantly: In the **spring of 2022**, the Minister of Transportation announced that she sought - and was granted - a commitment from the provincial treasury board to commit the provincial portion of the National Trade Corridor applications for two new sections of Highway 3 Twinning. These sections are **West of Seven Persons to the City of Medicine Hat and from Sentinel to east of Highway 507 (Crowsnest Pass)**. The Federal Government will have to commit their portion yet, but this is incredible progress.

**Conclusion:** From 2018 through 2022 SouthGrow made essential and critical contributions to the work of the Highway 3 Twinning Development Association which has unlocked 46 kms of twinning and which looks likely to deliver around 120 more kms of twinning. If successful, this would leave only around 75 more kms to complete the entire route.

**Multi-year sustained partnership work that has yielded incredible results!**



## Investment Attraction Takes Off

- In **2014** SouthGrow commissioned a report to identify gaps and opportunities for targeted investment attraction in the region.
- In **2015**, SouthGrow, Alberta SouthWest, Economic Development Lethbridge, and Lethbridge County formed the Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative to work together to attract attention to opportunities in our regions.
- In **2015** we also did a project with Rainmaker Global Business Development to identify specific opportunities for all of our member communities.
- In **2016 and 2017** the SAITI partners planned for and executed an investment mission to China and hosted one in return. We began to work with Agriculture and Forestry's Investment Attraction team. As part of this we compiled a list of investment ready opportunities in the region.
- In **2018 and 2019** we pivoted away from China to Europe, working to promote investments in agri-food, particularly in protein fractionation. We attended Bridge 2 Food conferences in Europe and in Saskatchewan and Calgary and worked to develop relationships with provincial players. We pushed hard on educating stakeholders about the plant protein opportunity and participated actively in both Protein Industries Canada and the Plant Protein Alliance of Alberta.
- In **2019** we also took training on investment attraction, helped our partner EDL to acquire a database to track leads for SAITI, and updated our investment readiness profiles.
- In **2020** we worked on industrial land inventories with our partners.
- In **2021** we gathered funding and built a global marketing social media campaign, then gathered funding to run it for 12 months. We also ran a 1 year trial of FDI Lead Generation, resulting in excellent exposure for the region and evolving conversations with major agri-food companies.
- Finally, in **2022** we launched our global marketing project on Twitter and LinkedIn and implemented year 2 of our FDI Lead Generation project, and began to collaborate with regional partners on food show attendance to 'divide and conquer'.

What has this accomplished? Southern Alberta is a destination for accelerating agri-food investment and hundreds of millions of dollars in investments have occurred in our region during the life of our program, from Cavendish, to the Federated Co-op fertilizer mixing facility, to greenhouse expansions, and more,



investment is pouring into the region. Avison Young's 2022 Industrial Trends report (April 2022) profiles a regional industrial market that is characterized by increasing prices, historically low vacancy rates, and high sales throughout the region. For example, Vulcan County's new industrial development is mostly spoken for while construction is still proceeding. Investments in southern Alberta are accelerating and

**Multi-year work by SouthGrow and our partners have brought global awareness in the agri-food industry that this is a good place to invest, and economic activity continues to grow.**

## The Broadband Finish Line

- In the **early 2010s**, SouthGrow helped our communities access and apply for fibre installations from players like Axia and Telus.
- In **2015** SouthGrow launched a mapping project of all of the broadband infrastructure in the region, as a part of a province-wide REDA-led effort to understand the landscape and identify the gaps.
- In **2017**, SouthGrow built a Broadband Master Plan which benchmarked all of our communities, educated them on options for deployments, and set short and long-term goals for connectivity.
- In **2018** SouthGrow released our Broadband for Unconnected Towns and Villages project which recommended specific solutions for our members that had not yet achieved CRTC minimum speeds.
- In **2019**, SouthGrow released a Cost Benefit Analysis for Rural Alberta Broadband which clearly identified the payback to society for investing in this essential infrastructure.
- In **2020**, we released a micro-grant program 'Broadband: The Final Mile' that offered up to \$3000 in matching funds to communities looking to move ahead with a local project. Multiple members took advantage of the matching grant.
- In **2020** we also launched a successful technology trial of Terragraph technology in partnership with the Milk River Cable Club, then helped Milk River to secure a grant to build out a full-community pilot project in Milk River.





- In **2020** we also held conversations with Mage Networks which resulted in a 2021 deployment of 100/100 symmetrical internet service in the Village of Foremost.
- In **2021** we worked with 10 communities to submit grant applications for \$500,000 for public-private partnership installations of terragraph networks across 10 villages and several hamlets. The grant applications were unsuccessful, but we did succeed in getting POP sites upgraded across all those communities, making the eventual build-out possible. We also advised Cardston on paths forward to network completion and presented the Blood Tribe with viable options.
- In **2021**, Service Alberta released their broadband strategy, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to match contributions from the federal government for deploying basic internet service (50/10) to every corner of the province. They specifically and publicly thanked SouthGrow for our work on the **Cost Benefit Analysis for the entire province** which heavily informed their decisions. The NDP also released a broadband strategy that also referenced our study and cited it as the justification for their investment plans.
- Today, anyone in SouthGrow can get very high-speed internet, regardless of where they live due to rapid advances in low earth orbit satellite constellations, but the vast majority of SouthGrow residents have more cost-effective options available because of the work we've done to help expand deployments. Also, more networks will be available soon for rural residents because of our work to convince the government that investing in broadband for rural Alberta is a smart investment.

The impact of SouthGrow's multi-year work to advance internet connectivity in southern Alberta is one of our crowning achievements. We are one of the most connected rural regions in western Canada when we easily could have been much farther behind, and we've created the conditions for massive expansion of connectivity in the months and years to come.

## Pea Protein Extraction Arrives

- In **2018** SouthGrow started looking hard at the plant protein opportunity for Southern Alberta, supporting Protein Industries Canada's bid for supercluster funding. We began to attend Bridge 2 Food conferences to profile our region as a great place for ingredient production and built contacts, bringing information home. We also profile the opportunity to our own people as an opportunity for local business expansion.
- In **2019**, we continued our educational work in this space, sharing resources, telling the story of our excellent growing conditions, building more networks with Bridge 2 Food, Protein Industries Canada, and the Plant Protein Alliance of Alberta, and bringing through speakers to talk to our people about these opportunities.



- Through **2020 - 2021** we've kept profiling the Ingredient production opportunity, have supported partners and communities as they've courted specific Investment inquiries, and have kept pea fractionation as one of our top opportunities that we've marketed at every opportunity.
- In **2022** PIP International Inc. celebrated the opening of a wet fractionation pilot facility in the city and showcased their plans to build a large production facility with an annual capacity of 126,000 metric tons.



SouthGrow has played a central multi-year role in beating the drum to attract global Investment to create a new protein extraction industry in southern Alberta! With the first fractionation plant being built, more protein extraction is likely not far behind.

## Supply Chain Identification Finally Funded

- In **2020**, SouthGrow and Economic Development Lethbridge proposed an import replacement project to government funders to help regional industries adapt and recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Funders liked the project, but endless delays and revisions ensued.
- In **2021** we secured buy-in for the project from Prairies Canada, who then asked the Government of Alberta to also pitch in. SouthGrow built a local funding package from partners to match.
- In **2022** we finally got full commitments from the GOA, Prairies Canada and local partners to launch the program. Funding has partially arrived and a 2-year **Supply Chain Identification Project** is imminent!

SouthGrow worked for two years to secure investment to run an innovative supply chain identification project. Hard work and partnership-building have paid off, and now we can realize the results.



## New Infrastructure

- SouthGrow has been at the forefront of regional energy advancement since 2007, and with the growing momentum of the EV transition, we wanted to make sure that our rural region was not left behind nor on the trailing edge of new technology and essential Infrastructure.
- In **2017** we partnered with Alberta Southwest and the City of Calgary to build a large partnership that secured over \$2 million and built a 20 station fast-charging network across southern Alberta, making our region the first large area on the prairies fully accessible to EVs. The network was fully operational by the first quarter of **2020**.
- In **2020**, we applied to run a program under the Zero Emissions Vehicle Infrastructure Program from Natural Resources Canada. This would allow us to subsidize EV charging stations in our region to aid adoption and lower the costs of new infrastructure.
- In **2021** we were awarded \$2 million and worked to launch our program, securing a key partnership with Alberta Municipalities resulting in access to 100% funding for EV chargers for our municipalities, which we aggressively pushed.
- In **2022** the AB Munis program opened with many of our communities enrolling, and our own program opened with a lot of applications and interest.
- We have also been leading on advocacy work to amend provincial demand rates for EV stations to make deployments more accessible and equitable.

Southern Alberta has the highest density of chargers for a rural region in western Canada because of our multi-year partnership work and is going to have by far the highest density of chargers on the Prairie provinces upon the conclusion of our EV charging program. We will have saved businesses and municipalities in southern Alberta millions of dollars in capital costs and will have made EV ownership practical for everyone in the region.



## OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

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The summary below details the operational highlights from the year. We had an aggressive plan and achieved a lot!

### Administrative Highlights

**Sustainability:** Following a committee Investigation of our options for sustainability, the SouthGrow Board of Directors approved a membership increase to \$1 per capita for the 2022/23 year, allowing us to stop pulling from reserves and stabilize our funding situation as we approach a 2023 renegotiation of our contract with the Government of Alberta.

**Large Membership:** Membership continued to grow in 2021 and we added the County of 40 Mile, Exhibition Park, and the Milk River Cable Club. However, we were sad to see Nobleford exit the membership at the end of the year despite their local industry benefiting heavily from regional growth and a large portion of their population being employed regionally. We hope to welcome them back in the future.

**Staff Resources Growing:** SouthGrow now has three individuals who work on our behalf. Mr. Casurella serves as the Executive Director, Kim Welby has the title of Economic Development Officer, and Jessie Stilson works regularly on marketing and communications tasks for us as they come. This is only possible because we hold a contract for services with Mr. Casurella's consultancy that provides us with access to an entire team. The advantages of having access to multiple skill sets are evident.

**An Award-Winning Team:** This year our Economic Development Officer, Kim Welby, won the Young Professional of the Year award at the Economic Developers Alberta Conference and Brady Schnell, Economic Development Officer for Claresholm, won the Economic Developer of the Year award as well! Well done!

### Strategic Collaborations

**Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership:** This year SAAEP added the Palliser Economic Partnership to its ranks bringing the number of communities we represent to 58 and hosting our first In-person event since the pandemic started. With our expanded political reach, we've engaged with the Energy Futures Lab out of Calgary to jointly push for provincial assistance with Investment landing and for a unified vision on grid modernization. There's many billions of dollars worth of proposed project for our region and these priorities help us get those investments. We also built and launched a brand new website with the assistance of Community Futures Chinook!



**Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative:** In 2021, SAITI partnered with Canada's Premier Food Corridor, Claresholm, and Vulcan County to build and fund a large global marketing program. We leveraged our collective money with the remnants of an old CARES grant for CPFC and by tapping into a new CanExport Grant. We also benefited from an FDI Test Drive program in the agri-food space, and got funding for a year 2 of this program in 2022-23. Our connections with AFREDs investment attraction team have grown and we routinely communicate on agri-food investments, providing them local and regional support, and our contacts with Invest Alberta have been growing as new staff have come online.

**Canada's Premier Food Corridor and Canada's Western Gateway** have become successful brands and SouthGrow continues to support them and wave their banners. CPFC's brand recognition continues to grow, as does CWG's, propelled firmly by our partners at Economic Development Lethbridge. Both brands were recognized by the Premier at the grand opening of the Lethbridge Region Airport Expansion and by Minister Sawhney at the opening of PIP International Inc. in Lethbridge. Most significantly, SouthGrow led conversations with Prairies Canada on cluster Ignition funding for both brands, and Prairies Canada invited an application for staff support to build the brands into industry led clusters. Ben Young from EDL is leading on the application for the partnerships.

**Exhibition Park** continues to develop their new agri-food hub. In the past year they've brought on a professional chef and they are moving towards being not only a gathering space, but also a development centre for the regional agri-food industry, in partnership with Lethbridge College and others. Exhibition Park fills a niche regional role and we will continue to partner with them.

**Peaks to Prairies Electric Vehicle Initiative:** The network is entering its 4th year of operating stations and usage is setting new records delivering over 14,000 kWh of charging in May 2022 alone. (4000 kWh in May 2021 by comparison). In 2021, the network had 2285 unique users, up from 806 in 2020.

**Highway 3 Twinning Development Association:** Had a very successful year of advocating for twinning with their official petition sitting at 4174 signatures and with provincial commitments this spring for 120 more kms of twinning waiting on federal matching funding. This is above and beyond the 46 kms announced in 2020.

**Southwestern Alberta Regional Tourism Initiative:** SouthGrow and Alberta SouthWest have signed on to support Tourism Lethbridge this year with a regional grant application as Tourism Lethbridge takes on a wider regional vision characterized by Agri-food tours, glamping, and out-trips from the City to the amazing tourism product scattered around the two regions. We are hopeful that this partnership will continue to grow.

## Marketing and Communication





**Global Marketing Initiative:** SouthGrow partnered with CPFC, SAITI, Vulcan County, and Claresholm to run a global marketing initiative focused on agri-food. In the last year we built the project and funded it for a 12-month run, and pushed it live in the current fiscal year!

**Internal Communications:** Keeping our own people well-informed is essential and we meet this need through twice monthly newsletters and a daily government relations report that we subscribe to and deliver to our board members. Jessie Stilson has done an excellent job preparing these newsletters and sharing resources. Her role with SouthGrow has been growing as we engage her for more and more tasks, including running the marketing initiative mentioned above.

**Photography Project:** Getting high-quality photos of regional assets for our work has always been problematic, so we partnered with EDL to split the cost of a large photography project that armed us with brilliant images that we have shared with all of our member communities for free use.

## Economic Development

**Agri-food:** Our big pushes in agri-food this year have been described in detail under marketing, and in our work to support Exhibition Park. In addition, SouthGrow works collaboratively with the Ag and Forestry investment attraction team to provide on-the-ground support. We worked on 3 inquiries with them in 2021. We also provided two scholarships worth \$2500 each to young people pursuing an education in agri-food with sponsorship support from MNP in Taber (Thank you to Bruce Warkentin) and AFSC.

**Broadband:** Building on our Terragraph projects, SouthGrow advanced projects for 11 communities (and several hamlets) hoping to get very high-speed projects started in the year. We came short on our grant funding but did get POP sites upgraded across the communities and although we didn't get the build outs fully funded, both the Milk River Cable Club and Wi-fibre are slowly pushing forward terragraph networks builds in our target communities. With the wholesale advent of Starlink, all of SouthGrow is under high-speed coverage.

**EV Bus Pilot Project:** We were awarded \$211,000 for the EV bus on highway 4, but have struggled to procure a suitable vehicle. This has largely been solved and we are chasing implementation of the project in 2022. This will be a first of its kind in rural Alberta!

**Supply Chain Identification:** Described earlier, we landed all the funding needed to drive forward a regional import replacement project to support and strengthen local industry. This will be implemented in 2022 and run for two years.

**ZEVIP:** We secured the money to run a large EV infrastructure program and built partnerships with Alberta Municipalities to enhance the impact of our project in southern Alberta. This will mean millions of dollars in investments for our region in critical new infrastructure!



# OPERATIONAL OUTCOME TRACKING 2022

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An evaluation of the operational plan from 2021-2022 tracking our independently evaluated work items in our operational plan. SouthGrow met or exceeded most of its operational objectives. Several were not achieved. Where our outcomes deviated from our goals, explanations are provided.

## 1. Strategic Collaborations

### Member Engagement

**Activity: Annual Council Presentations.**

Goal: The Executive Director will endeavor to deliver a direct report to council to half of our members on an annual basis. (14)

Target: 50% of members receive a report directly to council (15)

Progress: Presentations to councils completed. Additional presentations to Barons and a committee in the City of Lethbridge.

Status: **Completed – Exceeded Target**

Outcome: 24 presentations were delivered.

**Activity: Councillor Training (Economic Development for Elected Officials)**

Goal: SouthGrow will provide subsidized training in Economic Development to regional councilors following the municipal elections in October 2021 and deliver that training to at least 20 councilors.

Target: One session held in January 2022, 20 Councilors in attendance

Progress: Training session was successfully delivered.

Status: **COMPLETE, Exceeded target.**

Outcome: 28 councilors and 3 staff attended the training for the full day. It was well-received, engagement was good, and the information was valuable.

**Activity: Sustainability Committee**

Goal: SouthGrow will convene a sustainability committee of volunteers pulled from its members to explore models for sustaining the organization's operations beyond 2023 and will present a recommendation by March 2022.

Target: At least one feasible recommendation for organization sustainability past 2023 presented to the full board of directors by March 2022.

Progress: Committee was formed and held multiple meetings and the group carefully reviewed about 15 potential actions to take. Meetings were held with multiple stakeholders and recommendations were forwarded to the Executive Committee. Recommendations were approved for presentation to full board for discussion and voting, and were consequently approved by Board of Directors with minor amendments. Additionally, there seems to be a willingness, expressed by Minister Horner publicly at the AUMA, to refund the REDAs. We have submitted request to present to southern rural Caucus with 3 other REDAs.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: Organization sustained for the foreseeable future. More wins possible in near future.



**Activity: Economic Development Summit**

Goal: SouthGrow hosts a regional Economic Development Summit in March of 2022 that provides stakeholders with access to speakers and engagement on important economic development topics, trends, and issues that affect our region.

Target: Greater than 70 attendees from member communities, partners, and stakeholders.

Progress: Venue and date booked for end of March, 2022. Will be held in Carmangay. Event planning is on track, invites going out soon.

Status: **On Track**

Outcomes:

**Build and Sustain Collaborations**

**Activity: Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership – Community Energy Forum**

Goal: SouthGrow will increase community awareness of opportunities in renewable energy by hosting a community energy forum that offers staff and councilors an in-depth look at the opportunities available in community energy, how to pursue them, how to fund them, and the benefits they bring; and we will host this forum in the early fall of 2021, before municipal budgets are set for the coming year.

Target: 40 staff and councillors, or other interested parties attend.

Progress: Event timelines moved back to early 2022 because of Covid. Started identifying and contacting speakers. Covid-dependant so far, or switch to online platform. We hoped to do this in January of February. Gathering and pandemic concerns continue to weigh on our minds.

Planned for Taber on February 24<sup>th</sup>. Event proceeding. 60 RSVPs.

Status: **Exceeded Targets, COMPLETE**

Outcomes: Successfully held event in Taber. 60 attendees, well received.

**Activity: Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership – Website Update**

Goal: SouthGrow will update the SAAEP website in the fall of 2021 to ensure content is current and the projects map is up to date.

Target: Website updated, tested, and content is reviewed and updated. Additional resources added.

Progress: Partnership formed, \$ committed, CIP grant application has been written and submitted to leverage dollars. Partnership with Community Futures has been formed for in-kind contributions. Quotes have been collected from content contributors. Website has been wire-framed. Construction begun. Home page and visual look have been created. Content and page build outs to follow. Website construction, then on finishing name-servers repointed. Contractor in line to build news library on the page.

Status: **On Track to Completion.**

Outcomes: Site fully built, ready to launch

**Activity: Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative Participation**

Goal: SouthGrow maintains its participation and leadership in the Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative, pursuing meaningful projects under its umbrella as detailed in other plan sections.

Target: At least one project is advanced under the brand within 2021

Progress: Global Marketing Project Phase 1 has been fully complete. Phase 2 partners have committed \$20,000, grant application going to CanExport in October 2021 for doubling. Contractor to run Phase 2 of the marketing program has been identified. Canexport grant was submitted, including year 2 of FDI Test Drive. Successfully got all of the money we applied for, waiting on paperwork but project can now proceed!



Status: **On Track, Crushing it!**

Outcomes: Built marketing project. Turned \$5000 into a \$22,000 design build. Then turned \$10,000 into \$47,000 for implementation and launched project.

#### **A c t i v i t y : C a n a d a ' s P r e m i e r F o o d C o r r i d o r a n d C a**

Goal: SouthGrow supports the growth of sub-regional collaborations that promote industry clusters by convening them when necessary, hosting meetings, providing advisor services, connecting them with resources, and by actively using those brands in our own communications efforts. This support is ongoing and continual.

Target: CPFC and CWG remain active and managed by their own membership.

Progress: CPFC has had multiple meetings and is moving ahead with a video project. CWG is planning their next meeting and has been working with local MLA on designation of the corridor for marketing purposes. Dominic Ross planning to attend next CWG meeting. Timelines made difficult by blockades.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: CPFC has a slate of work moving ahead, has produced marketing videos. CWG has resumed meetings. Leadership by CWG membership still to be identified.

#### **Activity: Southern Alberta Tourism Collaboration**

Goal: SouthGrow collaborates with Tourism Lethbridge to promote the growth of the tourism Industry and tourism opportunities in the SouthGrow region to secure support for regional tourism growth and build trust between the city and region on this file. Importantly, SouthGrow pays Tourism Lethbridge to assist in a slate of services that are regionally focused.

Target: SouthGrow leverages our investment by 2x that of Tourism Lethbridge. Program targets are met within the slate of services. Relationships between regional and city stakeholders on the tourism file are improved.

Progress: Partnership was formed, contribution paid, slate of work is on-track, Tourism Lethbridge successfully leveraged dollars by 2x. Request for regional advisor to sit on Tourism Lethbridge board has been sent. Awaiting feedback. LT requested Laurie apply for a committee, we declined. New approaches need to be made, they are hiring right now. LT hired Erin Crane, excellent news. Confirmed slate of work with Erin Crane. All deliverables have been achieved. She will send a report.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: Tourism Lethbridge planning EV Familiarization tours this coming spring (delayed by Covid), hosting a workshop on market readiness (planned), has already developed regional itineraries, is planning the promised media familiarization tours, and has completed annual sales missions. Work was distorted from scope by Covid, but delivered to satisfaction.

#### **Activity: Highway 3 Twinning Development Association**

Goal: SouthGrow graduates the Highway 3 Twinning Development Association out of its umbrella and continues to strategically support its operations with matching funding, board representation, In-kind support, and regional buy-in from our membership. SouthGrow ensures that the H3TDA remains a vibrant, active, and impactful organization.

Target: H3TDA is independent at the end of 2021.

Progress: H3TDA has been meeting their goals. Association is fully independent except for mail collection. Discussions to be had near end of year on evolution of relationship. Discussions were had. Full independence is the goal, SouthGrow to continue being a core partner and providing staff support to them. Whether or not they pay us a fee will be up for discussion in the new year. Victoria will have her own mailbox for the new year and contract will be with H3TDA not SouthGrow. Contract and waiver issues all figured out and good to go. Good has been done here. H3TDA has requested to be an associate member of SouthGrow.



Status: **Completed**

Outcomes: H3TDA independent and in good shape. Mission accomplished.

## Sustain or Expand Membership

### Activity: Present to Barons and Barnwell on rejoining SouthGrow

Goal: SouthGrow presents the value of membership to the Villages of Barons and Barnwell with a request for them to re-consider membership with the association.

Target: Both villages receive a presentation. Barons elects to join SouthGrow. Barnwell elects to join SouthGrow.

Progress: In this year the Town of Bow Island requested a membership presentation and joined the association and the County of 40 Mile has requested a membership presentation booked for early October. 40 Mile Joined SouthGrow. Barnwell has requested a presentation to council. Things in Barons are still silent. They are undergoing a by-election. Presented to Barnwell, presentation well-received. Waiting to hear outcome of presentation.

Status: **Membership growing, but different – and more impactful ways - than envisioned. COMPLETE**

Outcomes: We surged to 30 municipal members this year and 3 associate members. 1 Member dropped off at end of year.

### Activity: Expand Associate Memberships to Industry and Institutions

Goal: SouthGrow engages stakeholder businesses or institutions in the region through associate memberships, making them partners in the work of regional economic development and recruits at least 2 such members in 2021.

Target: 2 Associate Members within 2021

Progress: Associate Memberships have been requested from Exhibition Park, the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, University of Lethbridge, H3TDA, and the MRCC. Other prospects include Lethbridge College and the Lethbridge Industrial Association.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: We have 3 associate memberships from industry / institutions. 1 more outstanding.

## 2. Marketing and Communications

### Regional Promotion

#### Activity: Website Improvements

Goal: SouthGrow updates its easy-to-use WIX website with additional resources from its digitization program in 2020 and makes these resources available. Links are tested, content refreshed, and meta data improved for greater visibility and impact. Backlinks to core partner websites are added in a visible location before end of year.

Target: Website is refreshed by end of May 2021 with opportunities for additional improvements throughout the year.

Progress: Scheduled work is behind envisioned pace, but I have begun making solid progress. Visual facelift updates being done, content in the resources page is being added. Profiles are getting updated, About us info is being updated

Status: **PARTIALLY COMPLETE**

Outcomes: Extensive improvements made so far. Not all goals were completed in year.

#### Activity: Market the Region Globally

Goal: SouthGrow project manages a digital marketing campaign in 2021 as part of the SAITI partnership and runs a digital campaign that raises the profile of our region in target markets



around the world, with particular emphasis on the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.  
Target: SouthGrow has the campaign built by June of 2021 in partnership with our selected consultants.

SouthGrow oversees the running of phase 2 by a qualified consultant (the actual campaign) in the summer and fall of 2021. Collect meaningful data on penetration and conversions from this pilot for base metric in future campaigns.

Progress: Phase 1 complete, entire campaign built. Qualified consultant identified, Phase 2 funded by partners, applying for CanExport grant to double project funds. Canexport grant submitted. ALL partner contributions received. This is going good, ready to launch soon. Funding all secured. Just waiting on grant to launch.

Status: **COMPLETE / ON TRACK**

Outcomes: Global marketing campaign built and funded, waiting in March for grant money to arrive. New website fully built for funneling leads.

**Activity: Regional Photography Project**

Goal: SouthGrow works with Economic Development Lethbridge to co-fund a robust still and moving digital image package of regional facilities and views capes that can be used by any of our members for websites, promotional materials, and more. This package is procured in the spring of 2021 and is available to the region by summer 2021.

Target: A couple dozen high-quality images of views capes of note, with some motion Images as well.

Progress: Photography project mostly complete, a couple of outstanding shots for sites that photographer is having a hard time reaching. Photos uploaded and delivered to membership for use. Some photos in use already. Submitted to Invest in Alberta for profile shots.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: High quality shots secured and shared with municipalities. Also being used.

## **Stakeholder Communications**

**Activity: Newsletters**

Goal: SouthGrow keeps its internal members and stakeholders well-advised of trends, opportunities, threats, and events that impact community and regional economic development. We also keep them well informed of Provincial Government initiatives.

Target: Newsletters are issued bi-weekly to a distribution list of anyone who wants it. Board members receive a daily Government Relations newsletter forwarded from the SouthGrow office. Progress: Newsletters have been delivered on-time with high-quality. AB Today newsletters regularly sent out. Subscriptions are down slightly. Talking to contractor about improvements next year and how we can push for more engagement. Jessie Stilson has signed on for another year at the same rate.

Status: **On Track for Completion**

Outcomes: Delivered consistent publications.

## **3. Economic Development and Innovation**

### **Ag-Tech Market Development**

**Activity: Ag-Tech Scholarship / Incentive Program**

Goal: SouthGrow actively supports youth engagement in the Hi-Tech Ag sector by partnering with educational organizations in the region to deliver scholarships to students attending Lethbridge College or the University of Lethbridge who plan to build a career in agri-food in



southern Alberta.

Target: At least 2 scholarships worth \$1500 each are awarded in the fall of 2021.

Applicants exceed 2020 numbers. (11)

Progress: Contributions received from MNP and AFSG totalling \$2000. Total available \$5000.

Committee is currently working to award Scholarships. Applicant numbers were down by 1.

Status: **Complete. Exceeded Target for \$, On Track for Project timelines, Missed increase in applicant numbers.**

Outcomes: Delivered 2x scholarships of \$2500 each to students.

#### **Activity: Exhibition Park Virtual Reality Program**

Goal: SouthGrow will actively support the development of virtual reality venue that replicates the new Exhibition Park pavilion and serves as a remote gathering space for meetings and a sales tool for attracting conventions and events to.

Target: VR space is built and in active operation by SouthGrow and others by March 2022.

Progress: VR space has been built, SouthGrow's logo in Park. Regional Portal and access not yet set up. Follow ups done. Ex Park applying for grants to complete. SouthGrow provided letters of support.

Status: **COMPLETE / But not in operation**

Outcomes: Exhibition park has a virtual showcase and gathering space built but it is not yet in operation by partners.

## **Broadband Deployment**

#### **Activity: Terragraph Project for Below CRTC Speed Members**

Goal: SouthGrow organizes and manages a partnership of the Vulcan County villages to jointly apply to the Canadian Healthy Communities Initiative to fund a deployment of Terragraph equipment in their communities and in hamlets where infrastructure allows. We also Shepard other communities, such as the Village of Warner, Coutts, Foremost, Cardston, and Vauxhall towards implementing this technology. Builds for all 11 remaining communities are progressing by the end of March 2022.

Target: Contract issued to an ISP to build out Vulcan County villages and hamlets.

Stretch Goal 1: Vauxhall included in RFP.

Stretch Goal 2: Cardston has build underway.

Stretch Goal 3: Warner, Coutts, and Foremost have builds underway

Progress: Vulcan County project shovel ready, Highway 4 project shovel ready, Cardston project racing towards shovel ready status. Grant applications submitted for Vulcan and Highway 4 projects. Grants sadly unsuccessful. Next approaches to be made to Service Alberta and Prairies Can, then other directions for grant funding. Fortis Pilot project for pole access is going well.

Cardston has a project rapidly approaching shovel ready status. Peter and Jim hounding Service Alberta about promised broadband grant. GOA says they are trying to leverage money out of

Ottawa. POP site upgrades proceeding. Introducing park solutions. Proposal was made to Prairies Can. Prairies Can declined to fund infrastructure projects sadly. Stretch Goal 1 hasn't been realized. Reached to. Stretch Goals 2 and 3 are well advanced.

Status: **First Grant application unsuccessful. Approaches to Provincial Government for an additional grant stream unsuccessful. \$150 Million given to UBF fund applicants to help get everyone to 50/10. SouthGrow specifically thanked by Minister of Service Alberta on the announcement for our work to help out all Albertans. Supernet POP sites in affected communities all upgraded to allow for expanded service. Following conversations with us, Mage Networks has expanded into Foremost. Foremost now has 100/100 service available. The entire region has Starlink access at up to 300 MB up available. All remaining communities**

have shovel ready projects, including Cardston. CIRA grant now open, looking at it with remaining communities.

Outcomes: Foremost past finish line. Milk River past finish line. Plans in place for Coutts to go past finish line. Shovel ready projects in Vulcan County for all villages and 2x hamlets, and in Cardston. Upgraded POP sites across Vulcan County and southern villages.

## Pilot Projects

### **Activity: Zero Emissions Vehicle Infrastructure Project (30 month)**

Goal: SouthGrow manages the disbursement of ZEVIP funding from NRCAN to fund a wide array of charging infrastructure in the region. This project is completed by 2023 and involves an active partnership with the MCCAC allowing many of our member municipalities to get fully subsidized infrastructure, and institutions and businesses to get 50% matching funding for their projects. The full amount is successfully spent by project end in 2023.

Target: Est 1.7 million dollars in spend on infrastructure, and over 100 chargers by 2023.

2021 Target. Funding is secured, Project Manager hired, operational plan is on-schedule for completion.

Contingency: Application template, technical contacts for FLO, information package on how to site chargers, and other supporting documents are supplied to members. Members are applying (at least 20) .

Progress: Agreed on contract making circulation for signatures. Long delays from the Feds.

Continual contract changes to negotiate. Committee has charted a good path forward. Changing goalposts from NRCAN have been frustrating. 46% matching funding now the reality rather than 50%. October start envisioned. Contract finally signed in November. November 18<sup>th</sup> start date.

Everything off to the races now. RFP issued for project manager. Initial entities that submitted letters of interest have been contacted. Some drop offs, others are enthusiastic. Good interest in RFP from very qualified individuals / businesses. MCCAC selected to deliver service. Contract being instituted. February 2<sup>nd</sup> press release. Program press-released. MCCAC contract in final stages of negotiation, marketing material already being developed. Many of our municipalities are pursuing funding agreements with the MCCAC already.

Status: **ON TRACK CARRY FORWARD**

Outcomes: Contract signed, Project Manager hired, press announcement had, contractor hired, project underway, first expenses claimed.

### **Activity: EV Bus Pilot Project**

Goal: SouthGrow completes multi-year application process to get EV bus for highway 4 corridor funded, with funding landed within 2021 and bus purchased and operational in-region by January of 2022

Target: FCM grant is landed by fall of 2021. Bus is purchased and delivered by December of 2021.

Progress: FCM has come back in September 2021 with requests for MORE information. Staff has begun work on alternate grant opportunity. Huge amounts of further info submitted back to the FCM. Grant was awarded, more information sent. Waiting on Contract to sign. Ross Ford identified 10% matching funds from MCCAC (possible). Contract received. Viable vehicle quotes secured from two sources, next is to submit everything to the committee for final approval.

Status: **ON TRACK CARRY FORWARD**

Outcomes: Contract received for signing. Vehicles quoted.

### **Activity: Nobleford Incinerator Pilot Project**

Goal: SouthGrow project manages the feasibility study for the possible purchase and installation of a community waste Incinerator in the Town of Nobleford, in collaboration with Nobleford and Barons. The Feasibility study is complete by the end of 2021 with intent to apply to the FCM for



pilot project funding in early 2022.

Target: Feasibility study is complete by October of 2021.

FCM has reviewed feasibility study and advises on pilot scale application by December 2021.

Progress: No progress made by Engineer. Problem appeared by engineering company leading to no progress. Need to find new way forward or way to incentivize / pay for the work. There is increased interest here from many municipalities. New approaches made to Engineer, an alternate engineer has been identified and a grant to help fund the study has been identified. Nobleford council re-approached for commitment. Waiting to hear back. Nobleford confirmed they will not renew membership in SouthGrow.

Status: **NOT COMPLETED**

Outcomes: Not completed due to partner withdrawal.

## Targets of Opportunity

### **Activity: Regional Import Replacement Program**

Goal: SouthGrow project manages a 2-year regional import replacement project that completes its work within the 2-year timespan of the project as defined by the detailed project proposals.

Target: A government funded Import Replacement project for our region is implemented and pursuing its operational goals.

Progress: JEI declined to fund, but Prairies Canada is advancing conversations. Secured additional cash from partners (Thank you EDL) and have submitted paperwork to Prairies Can for ongoing consideration. Conversation advanced. Prairies Can needs to have a ratio at or below 60%. Renewed approach to JEI. ADM of Prairies Can called ADM of JEI, money secured. Working on the paperwork to secure the funding.

Status: **ON TRACK CARRY FORWARD**

Outcomes: Moving to implement project.

### **Activity: Labour Market Partnership Work**

Goal: SouthGrow re-forms and leads a partnership to pursue next stage Labour Market work arising out of our previous Skills Gap Study.

Target: Partner commitment is secured, budget formed, project identified, grant applied for and secured, and project initiated within the fiscal year.

Progress: Partner commitment is secured, project identified, grant not yet applied for. The Grant has not yet been released. We have identified a potential pivot to a project that we could pull off in this space within the year. Permission from board given to pivot to Womens Economic Recovery grant program. We submitted the grant. Now we wait.

Status: **NOT COMPLETED**

Outcomes: Grant intake never opened. Pivoted project was not successful in grant application.

### **\*\*\*Activity: SAAEP Government Relations and Grid Modernization (New Work)**

Goal: SouthGrow and SAAEP Partners advance provincial conversation on need for unified action on Grid Modernization.

Target: S A A E P Partners present to Standing Committee Opportunities and Challenges and request MLA support and action on regulatory and legislative change.

Progress: Meetings with Ministers held, partnership secured from Energy Futures Lab, presentation to committee has been requested. Trying to wrangle partners to move forward fast. Energy Futures Lab now on board, ready to apply to present. Letters submitted to Government, partners secured, committee in Edmonton is discussing our request to present. Energy Futures Lab inspired by our work and is applying to the Federal Government to do grid modernization



work and lead on the file. Invites received to South Rural Caucus.  
Status: **ON TRACK CARRY FORWARD**  
Outcomes: Government presentations still pending, but promising.

