FACTORS AFFECTING AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOOTHILLS
This resource includes high-level insights on the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental context.

The short report provides existing and prospective agritourism industry members the needed context to understand agritourism development as it pertains to businesses in the Foothills region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECONOMIC</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIOCULTURAL</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGICAL</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGAL</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENTAL</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contents for this resource draw from Foothills Tourism Association’s summary report on agritourism as a growth opportunity. For more information, please refer to the report or contact Foothills Tourism Association.
The Foothills is comprised of multiple municipalities including the hamlet of Bragg Creek in Rocky View County at its northern tip, the Town of Nanton and the surrounding area of the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26 as its southern tip, the mountains to the west, and Highway 2 to the east.

This means the area is comprised of three municipal districts or counties, six urban municipal governments, and two First Nations reserves.

These 11 municipal jurisdictions include: Rocky View County, Foothills County, the Municipal District of Willow Creek No.26, as well as the towns of Nanton, Okotoks, High River, Turner Valley, Black Diamond, the Village of Longview, Eden Valley Bearspaw First Nation (which forms part of Stoney Nakoda Nation), and Tsuut’ina First Nation including the townsite of Redwood Meadows. Within the Foothills, Foothills County encompasses most of the area, including which encompasses most of the Foothills, includes the hamlets of Aldersyde, Cayley, De Winton, Hartell, Heritage Pointe, Millarville, Naptha, Priddis, and Priddis Greens.

The Calgary Metropolitan Region Board is a not-for-profit government corporation made up of elected officials from the 10 member municipalities of the Calgary Metropolitan Region. It was established in 2018 through the CMRB Regulation under the Municipal Government Act, and four of its member municipalities include Foothills County, Rocky View County, the Town of Okotoks, and the Town of High River. The mandate of the corporation is to “support the long-term sustainability of the Calgary Metropolitan Region by 1) Ensuring environmentally responsible land-use planning, growth management and efficient use of land; 2) Developing policies regarding the coordination of regional infrastructure investment and service delivery; 3) Promoting the economic wellbeing and competitiveness of the Calgary Metropolitan Region; and 4) Developing policies outlining how the Board shall engage the public in consultation.”

In 2018, the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board, released its Interim Growth Plan, pending the approval of its 2021 Growth & Servicing Plans. These plans were developed to serve as a best-practice guide for achieving long-term prosperity in the Calgary Metropolitan Region by providing policies and high-level guidance to member municipalities including: 1)
Residential, commercial and industrial land use; 2) Corridors for transportation, recreation, energy transmission, utilities and transit; 3) Infrastructure planning and development; 4) Water quality, water use and management (including flood mitigation); and 5) Environmental sustainability and the conservation of agricultural lands. Importantly, these plans are aligned with policies of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and any parent policy documents, the Alberta Land-use Framework and enacting legislation, and the Alberta Land Stewardship Act.

The Calgary Metropolitan Region Growth Plan (2021) and Calgary Metropolitan Region Servicing Plan (2021) were finalized and approved by the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board in May 2021. They have been submitted to the Minister of Municipal Affairs for review, and if approved by the Minister, will replace the Interim Growth Plan and Servicing Plan. These plans are important to consider when planning for the development of agritourism activities in the Foothills as member municipalities will need to align their strategies and plans to these documents, noting that non-member municipalities may not be required to align with their strategies and plans. Relevant non-member municipalities include the towns of Black Diamond, Turner Valley, Nanton, the Village of Longview, and the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26. When planning for the development of agritourism, it is important to consider where development is occurring in the Foothills as different municipalities will have different goals, strategies, regulations, and bylaws that will impact agritourism development. In other words, having a clear understanding of the jurisdictional landscape is key to the success of agritourism development in the Foothills.
In 2017, Calgary Economic Development—a not-for-profit corporation funded by the City of Calgary, community partners, other orders of government, and the private sector—released an *Agribusiness Value Chain Study*. The study identifies agritourism activities as growth opportunities for the local economy. More specifically, it mentions the opportunity of building and expanding the distillery, brewery, and micro-brewery base of the city and its surrounding area, as well as scaling agritourism through craft beer tours, and promotions with premiere restaurants as examples. The study identifies the interest of Canadian and Albertan travellers in participating in agritourism activities as well as the opportunity to incorporate agritourism as a marketed offering for Alberta tourists. It specifically mentions fostering partnerships between established tourism assets and artisanal growers and/or farmers that could take on, or scale existing agritourism activities. Similarly, Calgary’s economic development strategy—*Calgary in the New Economy* (2018)—identifies tourism as an “emerging & growth cluster”.

As noted, the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board has released the *Calgary Metropolitan Region Growth Plan* (2021). The growth plan is “a policy framework for managing growth and implementing long-term vision for the Calgary Metropolitan Region.” The plan identifies driver industries that are expected to lead employment growth in the immediate term (1-2 years), short term (3-5 years), medium term (6-10 years), and long term (11-20 years).

More specifically, the plan identifies four driver industries that are connected to agritourism and are expected to lead employment growth in the years to come.

In the immediate term, this includes value added agriculture, which according to the Regional Employment Forecast Final Report (2020) includes “specialized food and beverage manufacturing.” During the short term, value added agriculture is identified, which is described as “speciality food manufacturing, seed cleaning, cannabis production.” Finally, in the medium term, both value added agriculture, including industries focussed on “plant proteins, micro-breweries/wineries”, and tourism, which includes “food accommodation sector, outdoor adventures, equestrian,” are identified.
Within the Foothills, the towns of Black Diamond and Turner Valley published an *Intermunicipal Economic Development Strategy* (2019). The strategy identifies five strategic goals to improve economic development in both municipalities:

1. Build economic development capacity;
2. Foster a friendly-environment for new development and existing businesses;
3. Support business retention and expansion entrepreneurship;
4. Target community-based economic development;
5. Make Black Diamond and Turner Valley a destination.

The strategy also notes that both towns will continue to experience population growth rates comparable to many of Calgary’s suburban communities. Importantly, the tourism industry is identified as a large sector of the local economy in both towns, and it was highlighted in previous strategic plans as a key source of economic activity. More specifically, the strategy identifies agritourism as an emerging consumer trend that rural communities should leverage for economic development growth.

As a result of the pandemic, major tourist hubs such as Calgary continue to experience a steep decline in economic activity, with a year-over-year decrease in hotel occupancy rates of 66%. However, there is recognition of the role that agritourism can play in the tourism recovery effort. For example, Rocky View County released its *Economic Recovery Task Force 2020: Rocky View County’s Economic Recovery and Resilience in Response to COVID-19* (2020). It identifies the development of a comprehensive marketing plan for Rocky View County to raise awareness of what the county has to offer; noting the success of “Shop Local” campaigns and their online business directory on their website, which highlight many local agricultural producers who offer farm-to-table experiences. Furthermore, the Economic Recovery Taskforce identified the need for future marketing to grow the business directory into business-to-business (B2B) opportunities and cooperatively oriented packaging of complementary products and services for growing markets including tourism and agritourism.

**Understanding the economic development context of the Foothills is key to successfully developing agritourism.**

As is identifying ways that agritourism is aligned with existing economic development strategies and recovery plans. It also fosters stronger opportunities to receive support from municipalities and economic development corporations.
Since time immemorial, the land known today as the Foothills has been the home of Indigenous peoples. It forms part of Treat 7 Territory, which is comprised of the Blackfoot Confederacy members, Siksika, Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations, the Stoney Nakoda of Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley First Nations, and the Dene of Tsuut’ina First Nations. Additionally, the land is within the Metis Nation of Alberta’s Region 3.

The Foothills has a diversity of agricultural areas with varied weather and soil conditions.

The southwest is more suitable for grazing, while the east is more suitable for crop farming. The region produces beef, bison, poultry, eggs, and various crops, and it is home to both small- and large-scale processing plants as well as grain handling facilities. Bar U Ranch National Historic Site (1882–1950) is also located in Foothills County, and it is considered “one of the first and most enduring large corporate ranches of the West [and it] achieved international repute as a centre of breeding excellence for cattle and purebred Percheron horses.”

Since the late 1800s, the Foothills has had a strong coal and oil history. In the early 1900s, the town of Turner Valley became a boomtown after the discovery of oil and gas. As a result, the region grew in population. Between 1914 to 1947, the area was known as the heart of Alberta’s petroleum industry. The Turner Valley Gas Plant, which is now recognized as a National and Provincial Historic Site, remained a large contributor to Western Canada’s energy supply until 1985. During these early flourishing years, the Village of Longview was made up of two communities, Little New York and Little Chicago. However, as the surrounding industries declined, Little Chicago became a ghost town. Many of its remaining buildings were moved to Black Diamond’s downtown to rebuild the area after the 1949 fire that destroyed the downtown core. Nanton, which is at the southern tip of the Foothills, was known as the Tap House. It would provide free water collected from the foothills of the Rockies to travellers. Eventually, the town became one of the first places in the country to bottle and sell water through what is known today as Nanton Water & Soda Limited.

According to the Vanier Institute of the Family, family farms have played a key role in the history of Canada through their contributions to both local and provincial economies. They also helped to shape communities and familial identities. As per Unlocking the Foothills Tourism Potential (2020), family farms in Alberta
are an important means for communities throughout the province to sustain their food security and stable supply chains. For example, farm direct marketing allows producers and family farms to assume accountability and benefit from the delivery of quality food products directly to the customer through various methods. These include, farm gates, farmers’ markets, u-picks, community supported agriculture, and direct sales to restaurants. More and more people are interested in knowing where and how their food is grown and raised, as well as who is behind its production. Family farms can cater to these interests while increasing their business revenues and sustaining their family farms and rural way of life.

Additionally, a study conducted in Missouri, concluded that farms implementing agritourism activities had an impact on the conservation of tangible cultural heritage resources, such as historic buildings and artifacts related to the local agricultural history. Since part of the appeal of visiting a farm is learning about where food comes from and how it is grown and harvested, farmers are able to use these tangible culture heritage resources to tell the story of their farm, while simultaneously maintaining the intangible cultural heritage value of continuing the practice of agriculture.

In 2020, the Foothills had a population of approximately 80,000, with almost 7% identifying as a visible minority and 4.32% identifying as Indigenous. Additionally, 3.74% of the population identified as speaking a non-official language. The median annual income for families (couple families, lone-parent families, and people without children) was $113,746 as of 2018. During the same year, of the approximately 2,800 businesses in the Foothills, 97.5% were small businesses employing between 1-49 employees.

In 2016, the Foothills listed over 1,000 farms, with the main agricultural activities being cattle and calf raising (approximately 125,000 animals) and cropland use (over 350,000 acres). Notably, at the provincial level there was a 27.5% increase in young farmers under 35 years (n=1,890) between 2011 and 2016. Additionally, female farm operators in Alberta are above the national average at 30.8 percent. The Foothills Tourism Association also identifies approximately 409 visitor-facing businesses and service providers with a range of experiences, including food & drink and agritourism. Of these businesses and service providers, 29% (n=120) can be categorized as existing or prospective agritourism businesses.

Understanding the diverse makeup of the peoples, histories, and cultures of the Foothills is essential to developing agritourism activities. The unique stories connected to agricultural production, the people behind agriculture and food, and the tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources present in the area, all make the experiences for visitors unique and difficult to replicate.
Agritourism development often requires tourism-specific skills and experience to be developed by individuals who are primary focussed on agriculture. Some examples include customer service, hospitality, and online marketing.

**Having an online presence as an agritourism business is particularly important.**

Providing accessible information to visitors about a business, such as its operating hours, is essential for attracting agritourists. Visitors need guarantees when planning trips. This is especially evident in rural areas, where negative experiences can be had if after a driving all the way to a farm or other agritourism business a visitor finds it closed. This is compounded by the fact that urbanites are not always accustomed to “calling ahead,” which means strategies that may attract locals to an agritourism business may not necessarily work for out-of-town guests.

As a result of the pandemic, technology has become even more important for offering services and delivering value to prospective visitors. Having an online presence with key information, such as descriptions of product and service offerings on readily used platforms by agritourists, has become essential for many businesses’ survival in both rural and urban areas. Additionally, establishing innovative partnerships, such as those between customer delivery applications and producers, has become a more common service offered by businesses that have been forced to pivot in the current climate.

Providing online spaces for industry members, locals, and visitors to connect is an excellent way to build community around agritourism and support local businesses. In many cases, industry members, locals, and visitors are unaware of what is next door to them and as a result may lose out on opportunities to experience an agritourism activity or to develop a unique agritourism partnership with another business. The official Foothills Tourism Association Facebook page, entitled *Explore Foothills*, has garnered over 2,100 Likes and is updated almost
Daily. Content on the page features local businesses and destinations in the region, including food & drink experiences. Similarly, an industry-oriented Facebook group, created by the Foothills Tourism Association, entitled Growing Foothills Together, has over 800 members, comprised of local business owners and tourism operators. These high numbers of online engagement show the strong desire that people in the Foothills have to network and find information about visiting and experiencing the Foothills, including experiencing agritourism activities.

Ongoing growth and maintenance of the region’s broadband internet service is vital to connecting rural businesses with visitors. In November 2020, the federal government announced a $1.75 billion investment into a Universal Broadband Fund which aims to support high-speed internet infrastructure projects to remote and rural communities nationally. While several communities in the Foothills were identified in the original project proposal for broadband internet expansion, including the hamlets of Priddis, Millarville, and Bragg Creek, only Bragg Creek qualified for infrastructure funding in March 2021.

As the Foothills enters the post-pandemic era, there may be new opportunities to use technology to benefit the agritourism industry. More specifically, there may be opportunities related to ensuring the health and safety of visitors and staff, including providing information around up-to-date protocols, or creative approaches to connecting visitors to agritourism experiences. In the meantime, it is important for industry members in the Foothills to continue to grow their online presence and explore different partnerships that will further increase their resiliency in the years ahead.
There are many policies, laws, and related regulations that impact where and how agritourism activities can be developed in a municipal jurisdiction. Health and safety regulations, heritage conservation policies, or environmental policies will all impact these decisions.

**However, land-use frameworks, plans, and policies are perhaps one of the most significant influencers of where and how to develop agritourism.**

It is important to remember that the Foothills is made up of 11 municipal jurisdictions, with four being part of the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board. Four being part of the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board: Foothills County, Town of High River, Town of Okotoks, and Rocky View County. Every municipal jurisdiction has its own municipal development plan and subsequent sub-plans and land use bylaws. This is important to consider when developing agritourism in the Foothills, as different policy and regulatory frameworks will come into play depending on the location of a potential agritourism business. Below are some of the legal frameworks that will or currently influence agritourism development in the Foothills.

**LAND-USE FRAMEWORK**

Land-use planning in Alberta begins with the Land Use Framework, which was implemented by the Government of Alberta in 2008. This framework outlines an approach for managing both public and private lands as well as natural resources, towards achieving the province’s long-term economic, environmental, and social goals. This includes how land use will be managed, as well as how decisions will be made regarding growth pressures at the provincial level. The *Land Use Framework* establishes seven land use regions and requires the development of a regional plan for each region.

**SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL PLAN**

The *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan* is one of the seven regional plans that establishes a long-term vision for the South Saskatchewan Region, which includes the Foothills. The plan aligns provincial policies at the regional level and includes strategies for responsible energy development, sustainable farming and ranching, recreation, forest management, and nature-based tourism. Although the plan does not identify agritourism
specifically, it does identify tourism as a key area of growth and opportunity. Additionally, it references objectives that could be achieved through agritourism development. This includes reducing the fragmentation and conservation of agricultural land, specifically recognizing that smaller parcels contribute to the diversification of the overall agricultural economy, particularly in the areas of local food, value-added production, and agricultural supporting activities.

CALGARY METROPOLITAN REGION GROWTH PLAN

The Calgary Metropolitan Region Growth Plan (2021) is a policy framework for managing growth and implementing long-term goals for the Calgary Metropolitan Region. This includes future population and employment growth that reflect the aspirations for the Region. Pending the approval by the Government of Alberta, the draft policy framework will guide future growth and development in the Foothills, including agritourism development. The plan defines agri-tourism as, “tourism that supports commercial agricultural production at a working farm, ranch, or processing facility; tourism that generates supplemental income for an agricultural producer; tourism related to activities that promote or market livestock and agricultural products such as fairs, market gardens and rodeos.” In the plan there are three areas that relate directly to agritourism development, including Section 3.1: Blueprint for Growth, Section 3.2: Economic Wellbeing, and 3.6: An Amazing Quilt of Rural and Urban.

Section 3.1: Blueprint for Growth

In Section 3.1.6.1, it states, “Municipalities shall comply with the following locational criteria when designating areas for placetypes: (a) employment areas should only be located in preferred growth areas, except the following, which have no locational criteria: i) resource extraction and energy development; ii) agriculture-related business including processors, producers, and other agri-business and related accessory uses; and iii) home-based business.” Since agritourism can be considered a home-based business or an agriculture-related business including processors, producers, and other agri-business and related accessory uses, agritourism activities within these parameters are not required to be in urban municipalities, hamlet’s growth areas, or joint planning areas. Instead, they can exist in multiple locations within the municipality.

Processors, in this plan, are defined as, “Businesses that process (or transform) primary agricultural products into intermediary or final products for consumption (i.e. seed processors/crushers, milling, slaughter houses, wool/leather production, milk/cheese production, food manufacturing, fibre production, preservation, packaging, etc.)."
Producers, in this plan, are defined as, “Primary producers are ranchers and farmers, greenhouse operators, aquaculturalists, beekeepers, and other individuals who create primary agricultural products via biological processes.”

Section 3.2: Economic Wellbeing

In Section 3.2.3: Agricultural Economy, it sees agriculture playing an important cultural and economic role in large and small communities across the Calgary Metropolitan Region. More specifically, it highlights the importance of having a balance between conserving agricultural land and promoting other forms of economic development; in a manner that promotes new land uses which are compatible with existing ones. Additionally, it recognizes the importance of supporting value-added agriculture and related industries in proximity to producers as important for supporting the agricultural industry.

Subsection 3.2.3.1 states, “Municipal Development Plans shall: (a) identify the role that agriculture plays in the municipality and include policies to support a strong, resilient and diversified agricultural economy; (b) include policies to support growth of agribusiness and value-added agriculture and related industries, especially when located in proximity to producers, as appropriate to the local scale and context; (c) identify more opportunities to buy, share and sell locally produced food; and (d) identify opportunities for agri-tourism, as appropriate to the local scale and context.” Municipal jurisdictions are mandated to identify opportunities for agritourism development, as well as develop policies that will support a resilient and diversified agricultural economy. This includes supporting the growth of agribusinesses and value-added agriculture and related industries, such as businesses with the potential for agritourism development.

Section 3.6: An Amazing Quilt of Rural and Urban

In Section 3.6: An Amazing Quilt of Rural and Urban, it mentions how the growth plan will cultivate growth in a way that maintains the rural, agricultural, and environmental characteristics of the rural area. It will focus most urban growth to higher density and mixed-use areas, including towns, city centres, hamlet growth areas, and strategic joint planning areas. It identifies this approach as benefiting all member municipalities by promoting, enhancing, and supporting the common regional framework in two ways, with one pertaining more to agritourism development.

Specifically, “offering lifestyles in rural places where people can live in nature, hobby farm, keep horses for pleasure or sport, or explore opportunities to generate their own power, grow their own food, or operate a home-based business or a
large agricultural operation.” Although it does not have specific policies related to celebrating the amazing quilt of rural and urban, this approach intersects within the policies contained in the Growth Plan. Agritourism can be a catalyst to maintaining and offering lifestyles in rural places where people are able to live by having an agritourism business on their property and grow or raise their own food.

**INTERMUNICIPAL & MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS**

Each municipality has its own municipal or intermunicipal development plan. It is a statutory policy document prepared by a municipality and enforced by provincial regulations. It outlines how growth and development will be managed in a municipality. It also identifies how a community will address immediate needs and create long-term goals for guiding future development. An intermunicipal development plan is one that is prepared collaboratively between two or more municipalities.

Within the Foothills, the municipal development plans of Rocky View County, Foothills County, the towns of Okotoks and High River, all need to align with the *Calgary Metropolitan Region Growth Plan*. In addition, the municipal development plans of these four jurisdictions—along with those in the towns of Black Diamond, Turner Valley, Nanton, the Village of Longview, and the Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26—must align with the *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan*.

In many cases, municipal development plans and strategies do not explicitly mention agritourism.

However, many do include terms and reference activities that are connected to agritourism, such as local food production, value-added agriculture, urban agriculture, and farmers’ markets. Below are some examples found in the Foothills.

**Town of Turner Valley & Town of Black Diamond:**

In the *Joint Growth Strategy for the Towns of Turner Valley + Black Diamond* (2016), future development recommendations are included to “Build sustainable communities by encouraging the following programs and planning techniques: agricultural urbanism and local food production to physically and programmatically integrate a local sustainable food culture and system into the towns’ environment and communities, through programs such as: community gardens, farmers markets, farm-to-table start-up, and educational events or school programs.

**Town of Nanton:**

In the *Town of Nanton Municipal Development Plan* (2019), two policies concerning economic development
relate to agritourism. The first focusses on agriculture, specifically mentioning supporting the production of primary agricultural commodities and value-added agriculture industries, as well as supporting locally produced food and food products to be consumed at home and exported to all markets as a component to health and wellness. The second focusses on tourism, and encourages businesses, volunteers, public service groups, and cultural amenities oriented to Nanton’s tourism industry to work together and continue to define Nanton as an Authentic Alberta experience.

**LAND USE BYLAWS**

Because land use bylaws are reflective of intermunicipal or municipal development plans, most bylaws do not explicitly mention agritourism in the Foothills. However, many do identify activities that can be considered part of agritourism, such as bed and breakfasts, guest ranches, farmers’ markets, or lodging for example. Since there is a vast array of land-use bylaws with different yet sometimes similar activities related to agritourism, it is important to collaborate among the different municipal jurisdictions to build awareness amongst industry members about the pathways available to develop agritourism activities in different areas. Below are some examples found within the Foothills.

**Town of Black Diamond:**
The Town of *Black Diamond Land Use Bylaw No. 98-14* (2007) identifies bed and breakfast accommodation as an activity that it defines as, “a principal dwelling where sleeping accommodation with or without light meals is provided to members of the traveling public for remuneration.” It also specifies requirements such as providing one (1) parking spot per rented room, plus the number required for the dwelling, and to not employ any person other than an occupant of the principal residential building in which the bed and breakfast accommodation operation takes place.

**Town of Okotoks:**
The *Town of Okotoks Draft Land-use By-law* (2021) mentions agritourism as an example of an activity permitted in Agricultural & Land Holdings Districts. More specifically, it mentions that “agritourism can support local agriculture and economic development.” It also mentions agritourism activities, including farmers’ markets, farm gate sales and other farm-based businesses. Last, it identifies Agriculture-Urban zoning as “community oriented, small-scale agriculture including, (but not limited to), community gardens, edible landscaping, rooftop gardens. It excludes Cannabis production. It may include keeping of animal(s) in accordance with relevant municipal and/or provincial regulations.”
**Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26:**
The Municipal District of Willow Creek No. 26: Land use Bylaw No. 1826 (2020) identifies certain agritourism related uses as discretionary uses for rural zoning, such as bed and breakfasts, tourist homes, and guest ranches. It specifically defines a guest ranch as, “a ranch or resort in an agricultural setting designed for vacationers offering primarily lodging, horseback riding and other activities typical of western ranches.”

**Town of Nanton:**
The Town of Nanton Land Use Bylaw 1246-13 (2013) also identifies bed and breakfast; breweries, distilleries, and wineries; markets; and market gardens as permissible activities. More specifically, it defines a market as, “a development indoors or outdoors which provides to vendors, stalls or other similarly restricted areas for the demonstration of products and services, disposal and sale of goods, wares or merchandise to the public, at a single location or premises, including but not limited to farmers’ markets, flea markets, craft shows or trade fairs.” Market gardens are defined as “the growing of vegetables or fruit for commercial purposes. This use includes an area for the display and sale of goods or produce grown or raised on site.”

**Foothills County:**
The Foothills County Land Use Bylaw (2019) identifies bed and breakfasts in its bylaws. It specifically identifies this activity as a discretionary use within Agricultural Districts. It also mentions the maximum number of commercial accommodation units (4) and the maximum stay time (14 days). Additionally, the bylaws identify Direct Control District #32 – Agricultural Societies, which allows for, “the operation of agricultural societies, and accessory community recreational facilities providing services and facilities for the agricultural related, recreational, tourism, or social needs of the community. This recognizes the need for the community associations and agricultural societies to operate as a viable business thus allowing for a multitude of uses accessory to the principal use of the site...” Some discretionary uses as accessories to the primary use as an Agricultural Society include minor campground, cultural facilities, food service, and public market.
The landscape of a destination is one of its most prevalent features and can have a significant impact on a visitor’s agritourism experience and satisfaction. Agricultural landscapes reflect local cultures, traditions, and ways of living by illustrating how people have altered the natural environment. Alberta is divided into 6 Natural Regions and Subregions. These are based on features such as soils, landscape patterns, and vegetation. The Foothills is in the “mixed grassland” Natural Subregion. Over the last century, much of Alberta’s grasslands have been converted to agricultural land uses.

The Foothills’ location in the Rocky Mountains-Prairie transition zone, means visitors do not need to travel far to witness noticeable landscape changes in the area.

In fact, the Foothills sits at the transition of three physiographic regions, the Rocky Mountain Foothills, the Southern Alberta Uplands, and the Western Alberta Plains.

This makes the East-West corridor a defining landscape feature since the area’s change in elevation impacts vegetation, wildlife, and weather patterns. Additionally, this geographic diversity explains why the Montane Cordillera, the Boreal Plains, and the Prairies Terrestrial Ecozones converge near the Foothills.

Landscapes play a particularly defining role in agritourism development as alterations to the landscape is needed for agricultural production. In fact, many of UNESCO’s cultural heritage landscape designations around the world feature unique agricultural landscapes, from terraced rice fields to stone vineyard walls. These landscapes form part of the foodways of a place, which include the who, what, where, why, and how food is grown, produced, prepared, and shared. Foodways also reflect the uniqueness of a place’s geographic landscape and the ingredients that can be grown there because of the unique terroirs.

Conserving natural landscape features, like mountain viewsheds or forest borders, can benefit agritourism development. These natural heritage features can also help to anchor visitor activities to place. A key motivation for many rural tourists and agritourists is enjoying rural landscapes, and this can happen through farm-stay experiences, participating in farm activities, experiencing traditional hospitality, being close to farm animals, tasting farm-grown foods, viewing countryside scenes (e.g., farmstead buildings/structures, cultural/
natural landscape), and experiencing the living cultural heritage of rural life. Similarly, having healthy natural environments makes it easier to connect agritourism to other activities that agritourists may be interested in, including watching wildlife and simply appreciating the natural landscape. A key part of conserving the integrity of natural and rural landscapes is being mindful that there is a carrying capacity to visitation. At a certain point, too many cars, buses, and tourists detract from the “rural getaway” experience that agritourists are seek.

Agritourism activities are strongly connected to the landscapes in which they take place, climate impact must be considered.

It is important to consider the impact of climate change on agritourism development.

Impacts such as flooding, severe storms, and other significant changes in weather patterns, as well as soil degradation and erosion, will have an impact on what can be raised or grown in the Foothills. Agritourism development should consider integrating approaches and process that actively support healthy ecosystems, such as using renewable energy sources, encouraging organic and regenerative farming, and eliminating single use plastics from the visitor experience.