

Fragmentation and Conversion of Agricultural Land- Analysis of Values to Inform Policy

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In Canada, particularly Alberta, urban areas are rapidly expanding their boundaries, resulting in the conversion of valuable agricultural and open lands. The economic demand for greenfield development near the urban-rural fringe has contributed to high-value land prices; in part, due to pressures from urban overspill and alternative uses. At the same time, public concern about the loss of agricultural land and open space has been rising. Alberta's municipalities are experiencing tensions regarding the desire to conserve agricultural land and the perceived rights of landowners to develop their land. While Alberta has made strides in improving land-use policies and protective management efforts, local decision-makers are still obligated to decide the irreversible consequences of land-use decisions. Allusive provincial language and open-ended conditions remove the legally binding capacity of protection efforts, allowing for impulsive societal factors to supersede policy. To date, shaping agricultural land preservation efforts have been primarily dominated by non-agricultural voices and urban populations. Land protection policies must reflect not only environmental perspectives and the romanticized urban ideologies of open space; but also consider deep-rooted agrarian ideals and influential political boundaries. Examining the social tensions and political context within which land use planning decisions are made, can aid in understanding how these issues may affect policy development, implementation, and long-term effectiveness.