

# COUNTY OF ST. PAUL

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www.county.stpaul.ab.ca



*Our Mission - To create desirable rural experiences*

July 16, 2021

Honourable Devin Dreeshen  
Minister of Agriculture & Forestry  
229 Legislature Building  
10800 – 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB  
T5K 2B6

## **Re: Drought Conditions and AFSC Crop Insurance**

The County of St. Paul is very concerned about the effects the extended period of hot, dry weather is having on the crops in the province, particularly in northeast Alberta. It has been over one month since much of our County has had any precipitation, and we have grave concerns with how agriculture producers will be able to manage this catastrophic crop failure.

AFSC has put out a bulletin that provides producers with information regarding what to do if they choose to put their crop to an alternate use. The bulletin provides for this to happen, but the producer will need to provide at least five days advance notice to AFSC in order to provide time for the crop inspector to attend the field to inspect the loss of production. This requirement is extremely problematic as we are experiencing several days of over 30 degree weather for the third week in a row.

The decision to take a crop out of harvested production is a difficult one for a producer to make, as it often happens quickly after office hours and impacts the whole farming operation. Leaving test strips or enclosures isn't operationally feasible for producers to go back to and pick up later, when they have access to equipment and manpower now. It will be imperative that producers be able to salvage crops by putting them to an alternate use such as pasturing, silaging, or

baling as quickly as possible. The County would request that when crop adjusters are inspecting fields, they be given the authority to take into account the short-term weather forecast as they determine the potential yield of the crop. Given the unprecedented heat wave we are experiencing, and the amount of stress crops have been under, any salvageable feed will be drying up at an alarming rate and the quicker the salvage can take place the better.

We urge AFSC to allow producers to salvage these crops now so that they can achieve some value from this year's production and potentially assist with the problems for the livestock industry that is struggling to find enough feed. It is apparent that there will be a glut of cattle in the market very shortly as there is no pastureland left and the hay crops are very poor. It is estimated that hay crops are less than 1/3 of previous year's production.

This marks the fourth year that has been extremely challenging for agriculture producers in our region. Many farmers would have contracted a portion of their anticipated production with grain companies as commodity prices have been very good. Generally, farmers will contract up to 30% of their expected production to ensure they can sell grain in the fall. This ensures they have cash flow during harvest to cover the costs of producing these crops. Some farmers are anticipating only 5-10% of what they would normally harvest due to the drought. This, of course, adds to their financial stress as they will be required to buy out the contracts they have entered into at current commodity prices (which due to reduced global supply, the current prices are significantly higher than what most producers would have contracted at) as they will not be able to fulfill them with what they may be able to harvest. Early access to insurance proceeds from AFSC or other assistance for uninsured producers will be necessary to assist these farmers to be able to pay their input costs, buy out contracts that they will be unable to fill, and put food on their own tables.

The County is extremely worried about the mental health of our agriculture producers. The challenging weather conditions along with the pandemic is stretching the strength of these individuals that feed the world. We urge the province to advertise and promote the Crisis Text Line for Alberta (Text CONNECT to 741741) as well as the Mental Health Helpline (1-877-303-2642) so that farmers are aware that there are avenues for them to turn to.

As you know, agriculture is one of the largest sectors in our province and employs a significant portion of the population. It is essential that we support them during these difficult times.

The Province of Saskatchewan has recently made an announcement regarding the drought and their approach to assisting farmers with Crop Insurance issues.

Please see this news release as an example of how this same process could work for Alberta producers. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2021/july/14/government-of-saskatchewan-enhances-support-for-producers-dealing-with-dry-conditions>

If you require further information regarding the drought conditions in the County of St. Paul region, please do not hesitate to contact our Chief Administrative Officer, Sheila Kitz at 780-645-3301 ext. 1208.

Sincerely,



for Steve Upham  
Reeve

Cc: Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier  
Honourable Ric McIver, Minister Municipal Affairs  
Dave Hansen, MLA Bonnyville – Cold Lake – St. Paul  
Glenn van Dijken, MLA, Athabasca – Barrhead – Westlock  
Paul McLaughlin, President RMA  
Darryl Kay, CEO AFSC (Please share with the AFSC Board Members)