

# Aspen Parkland Agricultural Initiative

## BACKGROUND

Nature United's (NU) Agriculture Program is focused on unlocking the potential of Natural Climate Solutions in Canadian agricultural systems to help restore nature and address climate change, while supporting community resilience. At the centre of this work, the Aspen Parkland Agricultural Initiative (APAI) is a landscape-level initiative that engages stakeholders within the agricultural economy to address barriers to the widespread adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. The Aspen Parkland is a 17.3 M ha ecoregion of the most productive agricultural land in the Prairie provinces – Canada's breadbasket.

Over recent decades, adoption of sustainable agriculture has been slow, driven at a farm-by-farm level by early adopter producers. To achieve systemic change for agricultural communities and corporations, and positive outcomes for nature and climate, NU is engaging the 'early majority' of producers, industry, and crown and Indigenous governments within the region to collaboratively identify barriers to adoption, create and invest in the enabling conditions needed for on-farm support, in value chains, and across policy platforms, and design pragmatic and scalable solutions that work within agricultural markets. APAI provides a critical governing mechanism through which cross-sectoral actors, including corporate partners, producers, policymakers, and Indigenous governments, are engaged to develop and implement collaborative solutions.

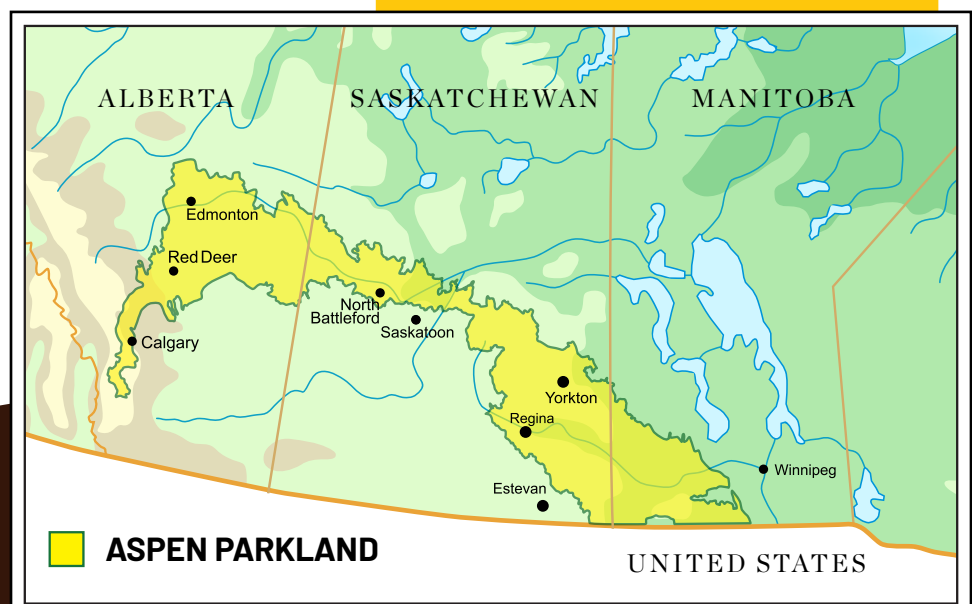
**The Aspen Parkland (the black soil zone) has the greatest potential for practice adoption due to the region's biophysical potential.**

**Multiple value chain stakeholders (e.g., buyers and processors) work within the Aspen Parkland and source major portions of their grains and oilseeds in this region.**

## GOALS

The Initiative will advance sustainable agriculture over up to 2.9M hectares and avoided conversion of grasslands and forests to deliver benefits for producers, nature (water, soil health, biodiversity), and a cumulative mitigation potential of up to 17.6 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e over six years (2024-2030).

In addition to these metrics, this work creates adaptive models for: cross-sectoral collaboration; value chain incentive programs; producer knowledge sharing; Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) systems; producer financial risk reduction; in addition to securing new public and private finance for sustainable agriculture.



<p><b>APAI COLLABORATIVE</b></p> <p>Co-develop a new model for collective action and investment through a formal multistakeholder-built and led collaborative</p>	<p>Work with select collaborators to develop a model for environmental outcomes beyond climate, including biodiversity, water, farm and community resilience, that aims to enable actors to measure their impact and gain credit for their investment. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead on the development of a multi-stakeholder collaborative of companies, producer organizations, government representatives, and other key actors to align on goals and develop solutions for the landscape. It will be guided by the interests of participants, including corporate sustainability goals. This work is currently being scoped with champions from corporates, producers, and Indigenous leaders active in the region.</li> <li>• Learn from landscape frameworks used globally, align on metrics to monitor and report progress toward the collaboratively produced action plan and build guidance for collaborators to get credit for their role in supporting outcomes.</li> <li>• Test a contributational approach to environmental outcomes, that provides a paradigm shift away from the farm-by-farm attributional approach that has been adopted in climate-focused initiatives and accounting.</li> <li>• Design and invest in impactful solutions that work for producers, increase coordination and efficiency in scaling sustainable practices, share investment, and contribute to multiple environmental and socioeconomic outcomes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATE FEASIBILITY</b></p> <p>Demonstrate the agronomic and economic viability of sustainable agriculture at field and market scales</p>	<p>We will do this by leading new research efforts to explore the agronomic, sociocultural, and economic barriers, and supporting on-farm demonstrations and advancing incentive programs and MRV systems. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contract sustainability coordinators to establish a network of model farms across the Aspen Parkland that will provide regionally relevant, on-field demonstrations of sustainable systems within the context of working farms.</li> <li>• Directly fund Applied Research Organizations to demonstrate the agronomic feasibility of diverse beneficial management practices (BMP) and deliver extension events to socialize these practices in farming communities in the region.</li> <li>• Conduct research on the cost-benefit analysis of BMPs and incentive programs.</li> <li>• Collect long-term data on agronomic, economic, and ecological outcomes of practice adoption, and communicate outcomes to diverse audiences.</li> <li>• Work with other researchers to compile and analyze data related to soil biodiversity and its relation to sustainable agriculture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ALIGN CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES</b></p> <p>Work with companies in the value chain to build incentive programs that de-risk and facilitate the adoption of new practices</p>	<p>We partner with companies in the value chain to advise on sustainable agriculture strategies and implementation of on the ground sustainability work. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch pilots with agri-food companies that provide incentives to support sustainable agriculture adoption by farmers within their supply chains.</li> <li>• Establish corporate agreements with partner companies and provide technical support to develop and test incentive solutions.</li> <li>• Participate in and align Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-Food (CANZA)'s plans to test and launch MRV systems and ecosystem services markets.</li> <li>• Work with companies in the value chain to build incentive programs that de-risk and facilitate the adoption of new practices.</li> </ul>

<p><b>BUILDING TECHNICAL CAPACITY AND STRENGTHENING NETWORKS</b></p> <p>Develop the technical capacity needed to support sustainable agriculture adoption</p>	<p>We'll do this by working with institutes of agrology to support agronomists and enhance existing peer to peer networks. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the Trusted Advisors Partnership with the Sustainable Food Lab across the prairies to support the integration of training and curriculum on improved soil health practices in mainstream educational institutions.</li> <li>• Build a robust network of sustainability advisors to facilitate information exchange and peer support.</li> <li>• Work with TNC to establish sustainable agriculture certification.</li> <li>• Leverage corporate commitments to drive demand for skills in sustainable agriculture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PUBLIC POLICY AND PROGRAMS</b></p> <p>Support and lead collaborative approaches to influencing innovative policy initiatives</p>	<p>We want to align agri-food policy stakeholders and federal and provincial policymakers around the potential of context-specific landscape approaches to accelerate the shift to sustainable agriculture at scale. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for the establishment of a \$550M Sustainable Agriculture Growth Initiative (formerly known as Sustainable Agriculture Value Chains Initiative) to advance value chain and landscape approaches in Canada.</li> <li>• Connect Aspen Parkland initiatives with Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP)'s commitment to pilot new approaches to business risk management and the Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program.</li> <li>• Leverage the government of Manitoba's net zero by 2050 plan and sustainable agriculture commitments in support of the APAI.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INDIGENOUS LED SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE</b></p> <p>Support Indigenous governments and communities to address unique challenges</p>	<p>We are committed to upholding Indigenous rights and supporting Indigenous-led approaches to the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. Key activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide agronomic support to the Bridge to Land Water Sky (BTLWS) project focused on advising the Mistawasis and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation governments on incentivizing sustainable agriculture adoption on leased reserve lands.</li> <li>• Collaborate with BTLWS to develop and implement an engagement plan for sharing knowledge across 52 different communities across the Aspen Parkland.</li> <li>• Build a relationship with the Manitoba Metis Federation, the newly recognized National government of the Red River Metis, to cultivate alignment on how to integrate Metis perspectives into NU's agriculture program and collaborate on finding solutions to addressing the unique needs of Metis producers.</li> </ul>

## Help drive strategic action towards the adoption of sustainable agriculture in the Aspen Parkland and across Canada.

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