

Strategic Planning 2025



April 2025



Our Mission

LARA conducts local, innovative, unbiased applied agricultural research and extension throughout the Lakeland to promote sustainable agriculture practices for producers, stakeholders, and our rural communities.



Our Vision

A leader in applied agricultural research
and extension in Alberta.



Values

Integrity

- Accountable to the producers, stakeholders, and rural communities we serve
- Proper use of scientific protocol for all our research
- Transparent in our research and results
- Non-bias in our approach and all our work is rooted in integrity

Innovative

- Recognizable evolution in technology within our field leads us to maintaining an open mind for testing and evaluating new technologies and practices
- Creative in our practices to provide unique, value added solutions
- Visionary in our approach and always pushing the envelope while maintaining our integrity

Producer-Focused

- Relevant, result-focused, comprehensive research and extension activities are focused on providing bias-free information in order to promote sustainability for our local producer
- Clear communication for our comprehensive research to demonstrate the direct benefits to our producers

Collaborative

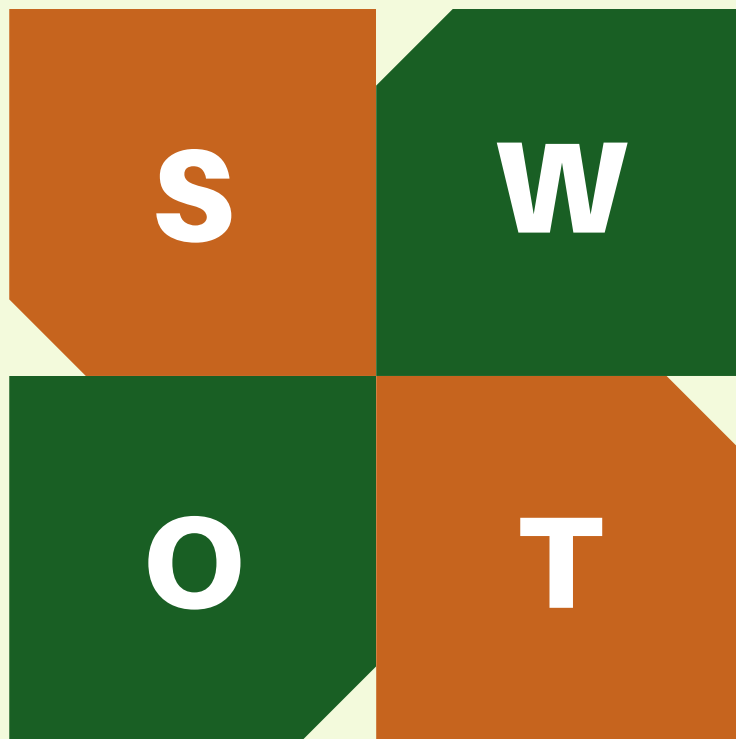
- We work together towards our Vision
 - We leverage collaboration both internally and externally
 - We support our industry and our region with a focus on inter-agency, and external collaboration with industry networks
 - We value each other's opinions and innovative ideas
 - We are respectful in all of our interactions, both with our LARA team and external stakeholders
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SWOT Analysis

Internal

WEAKNESSES

STRENGTHS



OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

External

Strengths

Internal

Previous (2011 and reviewed 2023, revised 2025):

- Personnel/quality people
- Quality information/past research information/quality of research/scope of research/unbiased research
- The quality and diversity of our extension is very strong
- Longevity of the organization
- Capacity – equipment, facilities, personnel
- Relationships and reputation with stakeholders and government
- Good representation in multiple municipalities
- Ability to provide and deliver unbiased research
- Advocacy and networking
- Great services and value
- Strong collaboration with applied research associations and partnerships for grant applications and projects
- LARA Board has belief that LARA is important
- Diverse experience, background, education of board and staff
- Access to specific funding with education level of staff
- Newer employees offer new skills, experience, new set of eyes
- Current Operational and Board of Directors Policies
- Board succession planning – attraction and new board members (2025)



Weaknesses

Internal

Previous (2011 and reviewed 2023, revised 2025):

- Ability to communicate information in a timely fashion
- Challenge connecting and limited response by producers (e.g. low response on surveys)
- Challenge to understand and have clear data and understanding of producer needs
- Ability to clearly market LARA – who is LARA, confused with other organizations (2025 note: re-branding is in process, social media presence has improved)
- Previous staff transitions and rebuilding of new team and team dynamics
- The private research done provides less data sharing
- Realistic capacity – focus on quality, risk of expanding to too many diverse projects
- Challenge to work with farmers that will adopt new technology, challenge building relationships with bigger, grain farmers
- Challenge to access funding (grant approvals)
- Long term succession planning challenging in not for profit environment; ability to attract and retain long term staff
- Rebuilding relationships with producers that previous staff had
- Clear understanding and consistent implementation of new policies
- Lack of clear goals/direction



Opportunities

External

Previous (2011 and reviewed 2023, revised 2025):

- Increase of applications and different access to funding
- Partnerships: partners willing to collaborate for shared projects (universities, colleges)
- Increase of forage funding
- Change to Grant cost share from 50/50 to 80/20
- Longer funding opportunities
- More engagement and improved relationship with all producers, including large producers
- Opportunity for field-scale research projects (expanding from small plot to also include field-scale/large field)
- Opportunity to partner with larger producers for field-scale research projects
- Opportunity to increase relationship with independent agrologists and nutritionists for collaborations and to build relationships with large producers
- Interest from public/producer participation
- Increase access to information through website/social media/podcast/videos communication with producers
- Expansion of programming
- Improved relationships/cooperation with local government
- Advocacy
- Attracting young active farmers
- Opportunity to fill the gap in the Ag field with transition of Alberta Ag
- Board of Director involvement in research and on-farm research trials
- Board of Directors supporting /monitoring needs for the Association
- Board of Director involvement in marketing LARA and providing producer feedback to LARA
- Board of Director diversity allows access of municipal involvement and a variety of the population.
- Leverage win/win projects, explore new partnerships
- Increased relationship with big ag grain producers – finding value added collaboration and partnerships
- Research language – linking to value adding, easy to understand and direct link to clients (e.g. financial value to producers, providing a clear direct link)



Threats

External

Previous (2011 and reviewed 2023, revised 2025):

- Reports on industry trials that are private
- Funding – continuity, reliance on government
- Stability of government funding especially with election year (2025)
- Increased independent private research
- Increase challenges with access to individual research funding
- Increase competition in accessing individual grant research projects including often a need for partnerships
- Decrease in number of active producers
- Project funding vs. program funding
- Industry research/competition for projects/research dollars
- Downloading from other organizations
- Relationships lost with changes in staff, organizations, farms
- Fear of misinformation that is online and people are becoming less trusting of research as there may be bias to it (not understanding who to trust)
- Producer reps – time commitment, everyone is busy
- Private agrologists and nutritionists providing direct support to producers, large producers have direct access to these resources
- Producer reps – lack of time capacity
- Access to all areas, ensure all counties feel served
- Lack of buy in from producers to give ideas and ask for future research or needs, adoption of practices



Client Review

Producers

- Cropping
- Forage & Livestock
- Environmental



CLIENTS

Rural Community

- Acreage Owners
- Horticulture
- Schools

Stakeholders

- Industry (private companies)
- Producer groups (APG, ABP, etc.)
- Funders (RDAR, Municipalities)

Client Review

What do clients want from LARA?

- Unbiased, Local, relevant agriculture research
- Up-to-date information
- Innovative information
- Agriculture extension

How does LARA know what their clients want?

- Event feedback
- Engagement/Attendance
- Surveys
- Informal discussions
- Word of mouth
- Local Agricultural service boards
- Membership
- Producer or Community list

How does LARA plan to get potential new clients?

- Keep focus on local producers
- Do we need to expand to new areas?
- Younger producers

Is LARA providing what the clients want?

- We think so-general feeling in the agriculture community that we are doing a good job
- No big complaints/concerns about what we are doing
- More participation/engagement to feel confident about this

What can LARA do to serve clients better?

- Client Relationship Management
- Website/Social media- better communication, better access to information
- Bigger field days, tours-draw producers, increase name recognition/reputation increased in industry/producer group support/partnership
- More agronomy trials- increase interest, something to talk about
- Funding grazing clubs



Priorities

- 1 Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Building**
- 2 Research Excellence & Innovation**
- 3 Extension Services**
- 4 Organizational Sustainability & Capacity**

1 Stakeholder Engagement & Relationship Building

Strengthen relationships with producers, municipalities, industry, and collaborators.

Goals

By December 31, 2025, LARA will complete a comprehensive assessment of stakeholder relationships, producer needs, and organizational visibility. Findings will be presented to the Board to guide the development of a multi-year Stakeholder Engagement & Outreach Strategy in 2026. Focus areas of this assessment and strategy include:

- Finalize a regional client database by June 30; update quarterly
- Conduct a needs assessment to understand producer priorities, engagement gaps, and relationship opportunities
- Identify key target audiences for future outreach (e.g., innovators, large producers, new producers, private ag advisors)
- Implement LARA's rebranding
- Refine communication materials by August 2025 to use clear language, highlight producer value, and align with LARA's key messaging and values

Create and launch an advocacy and stakeholder outreach strategy by December 31, 2025, focused on:

- Building relationships with key funders, municipal leaders, and collaborators
 - Positioning LARA as a leader in sustainable agriculture and regional research
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2

Research Excellence & Innovation

Deliver unbiased, independent, quality, relevant applied agricultural research that reaches our Clients.

Goals

By December 31, 2025, LARA will complete a comprehensive assessment of its current research programs, reporting practices, and priority areas to evaluate alignment with its mission, vision, and producer needs. Results will inform the development of a long-term research strategy in 2026. Focus areas of this include:

- Assess grain research needs, gaps, and opportunities for innovation based on regional producer priorities
- Review and update Quarterly Research Reporting to improve clarity, consistency, and relevance to the Board and stakeholders
- Evaluate all existing research programs to determine alignment with LARA's strategic direction and client-focused approach

Expand Large Field Trial Program: Assess feasibility and secure partner commitments to implement a minimum of three large-scale field trials by Spring 2026, focusing on innovation, economic impact, and practical on-farm adoption.



3 Extension Services

Increase the accessibility and impact of research through effective extension.

Goals

By December 31, 2025, LARA will assess its extension programming for strategic alignment, delivery effectiveness, and regional accessibility to inform a refined Extension Strategy for 2026. Focus areas of this include:

- Evaluate programming for alignment with LARA's mission, client needs, delivery formats, timing, and geographic reach
- Assess team capacity and identify high-impact delivery methods
- Review marketing efforts to ensure timely, seasonal promotion
- Include in the assessment: tiered learning models, farm tours, and the feasibility of a Grazing Club initiative

Create an annual Extension Calendar for implementation in 2026, mapping out events by topic, delivery format, and target audience

Continue with Horticulture Programming throughout 2025 to make up 10 to 15% of extension activities and a minimum attendance target of 30 participants.



4

Organizational Sustainability & Capacity

Ensure LARA is financially sustainable, well-governed, focused on priorities, and adaptable.

Goals

LARA will continue to strengthen staff retention and workplace culture through the implementation of its Human Resources Strategy, with a focus on performance development, policy education, and a collaborative, growth-oriented work environment.

By May 31, 2025, develop a 3-year Operational and Business Plan that includes:

- Financial forecasting
- Capital investment needs
- Annual priority setting and performance metrics

Identify and apply for at least one long-term funding opportunities (e.g., grants, partnerships, private sector) by December 2025 to support ongoing research and extension programming; monitor and report on progress quarterly

Review and update Board governance policies annually, with updates completed by March 31, to ensure compliance, relevance, and alignment with LARA's strategic direction



TIMELINE OF STRATEGIC PLAN



**Stakeholder Engagement
& Relationship Building**
Priority 1



Extension Services
Priority 3



**Research Excellence &
Innovation**
Priority 2



**Organizational
Sustainability & Capacity**
Priority 4

2025



May 2025
Develop 3-year
Operational and Business
Plan. Review and Update
Board Policies



Comprehensive Assessment



Plan Development (based on Assessment)

December 2025



Identify & Apply for One
Long-Term Funding
Opportunity



Continue with Horticulture
Programming



Development of Long-term
Research Strategy



Create and Launch
Advocacy and Stakeholder
Outreach Strategy

2026

Implementation of Plan



Develop Multi-Year
Stakeholder Engagement &
Outreach Strategy



Create an Annual
Extension Calendar and
Implement



Spring 2026
Expand Large Field Trial
Program

2028



