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# AGRICULTURE

IN BIG LAKES COUNTY, ALBERTA  
#GOBIGLAKES



## AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW – BIG TIME!

Big Lakes is a prime area for scalable agriculture start-ups. It is also a place of interest for investors looking for low-risk returns or seeking to connect food sources — canola, beef, barley, wheat, and peas — to growing populations abroad. Agriculture possibilities are endless in Big Lakes for those with the vision to see them and make them grow. [LEARN MORE →](#)



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# QUALITY LAND FOR LESS



**Agriculture land in Big Lakes County is the third most affordable in the province<sup>1</sup>. The average value of land is \$841.45 per acre, in comparison with the provincial average, which is \$2,479.88 per acre<sup>2</sup>.**

Big Lakes County also has quality agricultural land, especially around Lesser Slave Lake and the town of High Prairie, where much of the land ranks in Class 1, 2, and 3 — according to the Canada Land Inventory classification system.

This combination of low land values and high quality means opportunity for those looking to enter the agriculture industry in Alberta, which is the fourth largest agriculture producer and second largest agriculture exporter in Canada.

# ALBERTA'S TOP EXPORTS

Big Lakes County producers **specialize in Alberta's top exports such as beef as well as wheat and oilseed (canola)** — two crops that make up the majority of Alberta's agricultural exports and rank in the top 10 for overall exports. Primary international export markets for Alberta's agriculture products include the United States of America, China, Japan, Mexico, and South Korea.

TABLE: ALBERTA'S TOP AGRICULTURE EXPORTS, 2016

EXPORT PRODUCT	VALUE IN 2016	RANK
Oilseed (Except Soybean)	\$1.91	5
Wheat	\$1.82	6
Beef	\$0.62	12

Source: Trade Data Online, 2017

## DID YOU KNOW?

Since the privatization and sale of the Canadian Wheat Board in 2012 and 2015 respectively, prairie farmers have the option of directly marketing and selling wheat to foreign markets as they do with other agriculture products.



## AGRICULTURE QUICK-FACTS



... with an **AVERAGE INCOME** of **\$192,277** per farm...



**BIG LAKES COUNTY** is home to **306 FARMS...**

... for a **TOTAL GROSS AGRICULTURAL INCOME** of **\$58.8 MILLION** (in 2016)



# NICHE INNOVATIONS

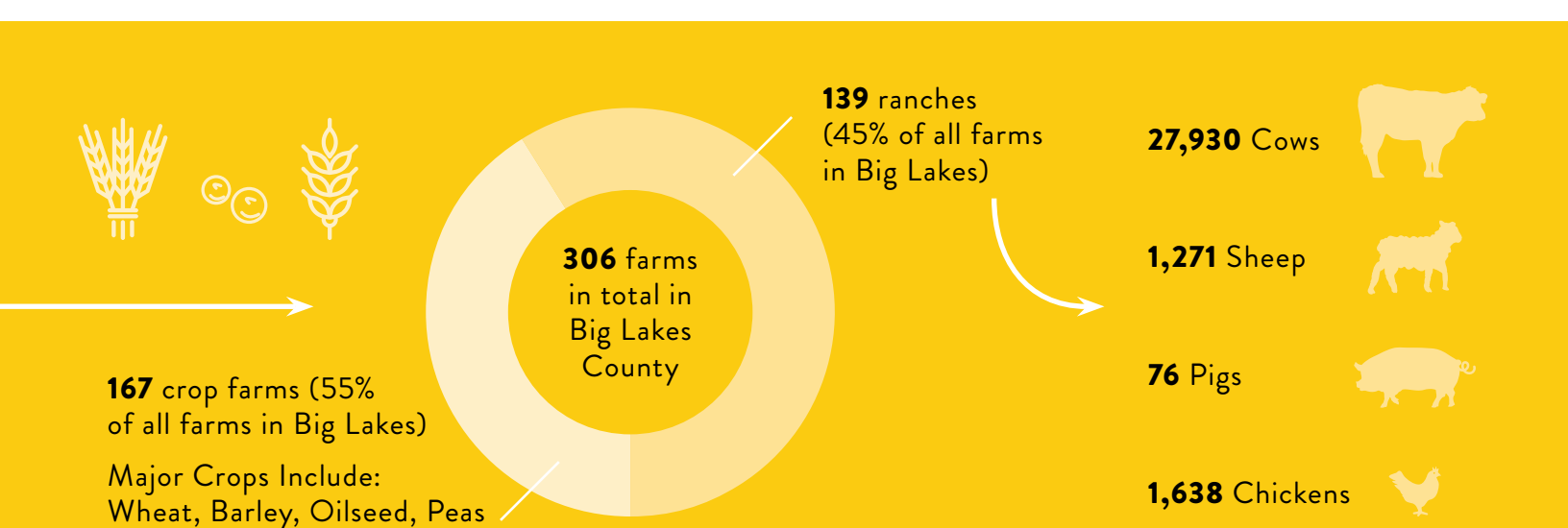
**Premier seed cleaning technology and award-winning energy efficient greenhouses** are just two examples of innovation in the county. The companies behind these innovations already have reach beyond county limits and even more potential to scale. They are well-run and ambitious operations.

## THE HIGH PRAIRIE SEED CLEANING CO-OP

County producers saw the need for an up-graded and advanced seed cleaning facility. In 2010, The High Prairie Seed Cleaning Co-op built a \$3.6-million high tech seed cleaning facility in High Prairie that attracts customers from all over northern Alberta due to its ability to sort by colour and its flexibility to work with all kinds of crops. The Co-op is constantly exploring new revenue streams, working with new crops, and expanding its volume.

## CHRISTIE'S GARDENS AND GREENHOUSES

Christie's Gardens and Greenhouses is winning national awards for excellence in the agriculture sector. Built in 2013, the 12,500-square foot operation was designed and constructed to conserve energy and resources. In-store customers come from within a 400-kilometre radius, but online sales have reached the U.S. and Australia. The company's approach to horticulture education is gaining also traction. In less than a year (2016) Christie's website, [learnplantgrow.com](http://learnplantgrow.com) has attracted over 10,000 visitors with the main demographic being women 25 – 35 years old.





## YOUNG & EDUCATED LEADERSHIP

Much of the agriculture sector innovation in the county is thanks to **university educated youth returning to their agricultural roots** and taking their family operations to new heights. They are foodies, they lean towards sustainable practices, and they are shaking things up, merging global connections and experience with wisdom from previous generations.

**Christie and Tanner Pollack**, (above, left) are behind Christie's Gardens and Greenhouses and Solar Agri Services. Christie has a horticulture diploma from Olds College and experience in banking and accounting. Tanner obtained a science degree in range and pasture management from the University of Alberta, and his expertise in plant health and business is an asset. He holds both Professional Agrologist and Certified Crop Advisor designations. Through his company, Tanner improves farm profitability employing sustainable, science-based approaches. Tanner was born and raised in the county and returned with his wife to help run the family farm and to start their two companies.

**Morgan Nesom** (above, centre) left Big Lakes to pursue an education and career in the food and beverage industry. She and her partner, Jesse, returned to the area to start the first rural food truck in Alberta with Jesse's parents, cattle farmers and passionate cooks. The Farm Truck, established in 2016, is a mobile restaurant and catering service that offers local take away dishes and a new way to market beef and other farm grown goods.

**Rod Marx** (above, right) grew up on a farm in Big Lakes County. He left to obtain a history and teaching degree but keen to work with his hands, decided to pursue a plumbing diploma instead. The opportunity to take over the family farm came up a few years ago. Rod now heads Marx Farms as a proud third generation farmer on some of the most premium land in the county.



# GENERATIONS OF ENGAGED ENTREPRENEURS

Agriculture in Big Lakes is not just about business, it's a way of life for many families. Most farms in the county are small and operated by sole proprietors, partnerships, and families that have been rooted here for generations.

TABLE: TYPES OF FARMING BUSINESSES IN BIG LAKES

SOLE PROP.	PARTNERSHIP	CORP (FAMILY)	CORP (NON-FAMILY)	OTHER
174	71	50	9	2

Source: Census of Agriculture, Statistics Canada, 2016

As of 2015, the economic region of Athabasca, Grande Prairie, and Peace River (which includes Big Lakes County), has approximately 6,800 people working in the agriculture sector.

The sector is expanding rapidly in the region, as it added 1,400 new jobs between 2014 and 2015 – a growth of approximately 25.9%.

Farmers in Big Lakes County are also serial entrepreneurs. They help to grow other sectors through diverse business activities and get involved in local politics. Most run multiple companies, including the farm.

Their entrepreneurial spirit is a key asset in Big Lakes County where 95.5% percent the economy and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

**Lyndon Drefs** and his wife, **Denise** (pictured below, centre), turned part of their farm into an adventure ranch called EC Bar and Ranch. The ranch has horse and sleigh rides, a slipe n' slide, and all kinds of other rural outdoor activities for families and corporate teams. The centrepiece is one of the largest and most difficult corn mazes in the province. The Drefs still farm, offer custom baling contracting, and work in the retail sector. They are one of dozens of families who contribute to and provide leadership in multiple sectors at once.



## ABOUT BIG LAKES COUNTY

Big Lakes County is one of 64 rural municipal districts in Alberta, situated 365 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, the province's capital city.

**Total Area:** 13,942.43 sq. km.

**Total population in this area:** 16,832

- » 52% Indigenous (First Nations or Métis)
- » A small, but diverse immigrant population

**Hamlets:** Enilda, Jousard, Faust, Kinuso, and Grouard

**Major Parks:** Hilliard's Bay Provincial Park and Winagami Lake Provincial Park

**Major Lakes:** Lesser Slave Lake, Winagami Lake, and Snipe Lake

**Municipal Tax Rates** (in millions):

- » Residential/Farmland: 4.25
- » Non-Residential: 14.5

**Property Tax Rates** (in millions):

- » Residential/Farmland: 6.7674
- » Non-Residential: 18.2084



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**Our visionary, coordinated, and ambitious economic development leadership is available to provide you with more information and to facilitate your success. Please contact Big Lakes County Economic Development Authority at [ecdev@biglakescounty.ca](mailto:ecdev@biglakescounty.ca).**

For up-to-date statistics on Big Lakes County, access the following resources:

The Government of Alberta Regional Dashboard:  
[regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/big-lakes](http://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/big-lakes)

Townfolio's interactive data profile on Big Lakes County:  
[townfolio.co/ab/big-lakes](http://townfolio.co/ab/big-lakes)