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TUESDAY 03 FEBRUARY 2026 VOL. 2 / ISSUE 39

Rural Alberta Report

— East Central Alberta and Beyond —



Local	1,2,3,4,9
Agriculture	5
Crime	6
Politics	7
Opinion/Editorial	8
Alberta/Canada	10

Quilt exhibit more than just a stitch in time

by DAVID NADEAU

With 142 quilted items on display, you might think the Chateau Three Hills' third annual quilt show January 29 was a competition.

Not so.

And with 35 exhibitors, a steady stream of visitors, there were no price tags on anything—not even cookies or coffee.

In the eyes of Carbon-area quilter Alice McIntosh, the three-hour exhibition was well worth the trip because "I love quilting and I sharing my work. I've been quilting for twenty years and see it as a wonderful way to bring people together. I've participated in all three of the Chateau's quilt days. It's a great community event."

Chateau Three Hills' Recreation Coordinator Candace McDonald worked with staff and volunteers to set up and run the exhibit.

"We welcome residents, guests, and the community to the Chateau seven times a year," she said, "for special activities like a Mother's Day tea, Valentines, a fall festival, Easter and, of course, quilt day. These events are great for smiles and wonderful in bringing family and friends together."

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County of Stettler MPC approves 24 solar panels in subdivision

by STU SALKELD

The County of Stettler Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) approved a 24 stand-alone solar panel development permit for a property in Carlisle Estates. The decision was made at the Jan. 26 MPC board meeting.

Readers should note the MPC is comprised of members of county council and chaired by Coun. Justin Stevens.

Board members read a development permit application from Orizon Energy Ltd. requesting the installation of 24 stand-alone solar panels for private utility use at Lot 13 Block 2 Plan 052 5691, which was described several times at the meeting as being located within the Carlisle Estates residential subdivision; Carlisle Estates is located near the southwest corner of the Town of Stettler, north of the Stettler Municipal Airport. Orizon filed the application on behalf of property owner Joshua Nichols.

Development Officer Carly Tateson presented a report noting there were no concerns voiced about the application except regarding the nearby airport. "The surrounding properties are made up of residential and agricultural uses," stated Tateson's report, which noted the property in question is zoned country residence equestrian. "The 24 stand-alone solar panels are roughly 14.8' wide by 39.4' long by 15.6' high.

"The stand-alone solar panel array meets all the requirements of the Land Use Bylaw (LUB) and should not interfere with the neighbouring properties."

Tateson's report noted that when the development permit application was put out for agency comments, the only concern that came back was the possibility of glare from the solar panels affecting the airport.

Tateson stated that the applicant addressed those concerns by confirming the panels contain anti-glare material. "The panels are made with an anti-reflective coating and specially treated glass to minimize light reflection," stated Tateson's report. As well, the application was sent to Nav Canada



The County of Stettler Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) approved 24 stand-alone solar panels for a property just outside the Town of Stettler. The decision was made at the Jan. 26 MPC board meeting. Screenshot/S. Salkeld

which replied the proposed development wasn't large enough or close enough to the airport for the organization to get involved.

Readers should note Nav Canada is a privately run, non-profit corporation that owns and operates Canada's civil air navigation system.

The development officer noted that staff recommended approval of the permit with conditions as the application met LUB and other requirements.

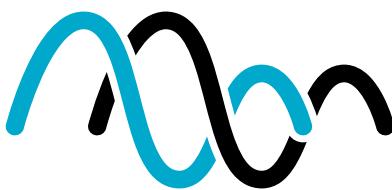
Board member Allan Gano asked if neighbours can appeal any MPC approval of this application, to which Director of Planning and Development Craig Teal responded neighbours are not generally given advance notice of MPC decisions, they learn through mail, websites or news sources afterwards although there are some exemptions to this. Teal confirmed that yes, neighbours could appeal an MPC decision.

Board member James Nibourg moved that the development permit be approved, adding that he felt there were already properties in that area with solar panels.

Board member Larry Clarke observed that the Carlisle Estates area is heavily populated and asked if every property could apply for the same solar panel development, to which Teal responded, "Yeah, they probably could." However, Teal pointed out most solar panels are installed on structures, not stand-alone like this one.

As board members discussed the application, the possibility of solar panel glare complaints connected to the airport was discussed. Teal stated that air safety is an area of provincial and federal control.

Board members approved the development permit application by a 6 to 1 vote, Clarke the lone dissenter.



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Lacombe County will begin annexation on nine quarter sections

by STU SALKELD

Lacombe County council approved moving forward with an annexation process on nine quarter sections of farmland that's currently part of Red Deer County. The decision was made at the Jan. 29 regular meeting of Lacombe County council.

Councillors heard a presentation of terms of reference for annexation of land that's currently part of Red Deer County from Nicklas Baran, planner/development officer. "Along Township Road 39-0, between Range Road 2-1 and Range Road 3-0, there are nine quarter sections of land, constituting approximately 1,440 acres, located in Red Deer County," stated Baran's report to council. "This boundary is an anomaly, because the northern quarters within these sections fall within Lacombe County."

Baran explained having the northern quarter sections of these parcels in Lacombe County has been described as "confusing" and "inefficient," especially when road maintenance is concerned. The idea for annexation originally stemmed from a Lacombe County paving project in that area where Red Deer County councillors mused that Lacombe County could annex those parcels and simplify things.

Baran stated the purpose of the proposed annexation is simply boundary adjustment, not development. The property in question is largely agricultural and currently in production, but does contain some residences, including a residential subdivision. He pointed out Range Road 2-1 is not included in the annexation.

The development officer presented a table of planning differences between Lacombe County and Red Deer County, suggesting what property owners could expect if the annexation is ultimately approved.

It was noted in the table, for example, sea cans, which are large metal shipping containers often used for storage, aren't allowed in Lacombe County's country residential areas although they are allowed in Red Deer County's.

The development officer pointed out Lacombe County's applicable municipal mill rates are noticeably lower than Red Deer County's: on agriculture land Lacombe County's is 5.560 while Red Deer County's is 12.3730, while the residential rate is 2.595 compared to 4.0933.

It was noted this is the first annexation ever initiated by Lacombe County; the provincial government confirmed such boundary adjustment annexations aren't rare, but the number of acres in this proposal sets it apart.

Baran observed that the terms of reference before council would be a blueprint for the annexation if the process isn't contested; if it is contested Lacombe County probably should back away from the annexation.

It was noted if councillors move forward with the process notices will be mailed out in April and final provincial approval may be expected in Dec. of this year.

As councillors discussed the issue, they wondered where pushback might come from. Baran pointed out some acreages on the east side of



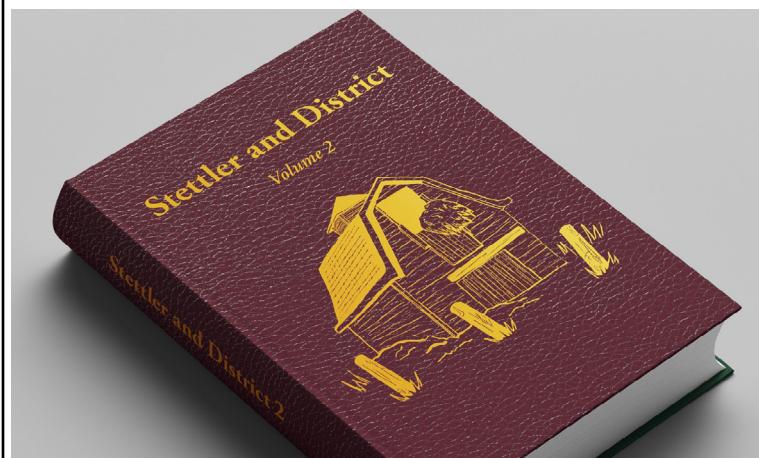
Lacombe County council approved moving forward with an annexation process on nine quarter sections of farmland that's currently part of Red Deer County. Rural Alberta Report/Screenshot the property have sea cans on them. It was also pointed out that beyond increased tax revenue and simplifying the boundaries, Lacombe County has no other benefits from this annexation.

During discussion it was noted that about 25 property owners would be affected by this annexation and that if the process is contested, it's likely a public hearing would be triggered. In that case, staff recommended abandoning the annexation.

Councillors unanimously passed a resolution to begin the annexation process under the terms of reference they were presented.

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Lacombe County council balks at 'kids tour' price tag

by STU SALKELD

Lacombe County council hesitated to delve deeper into an agricultural tour for kids as the price tag was seen as substantial. The discussion was held at the Jan. 29 regular meeting of council.

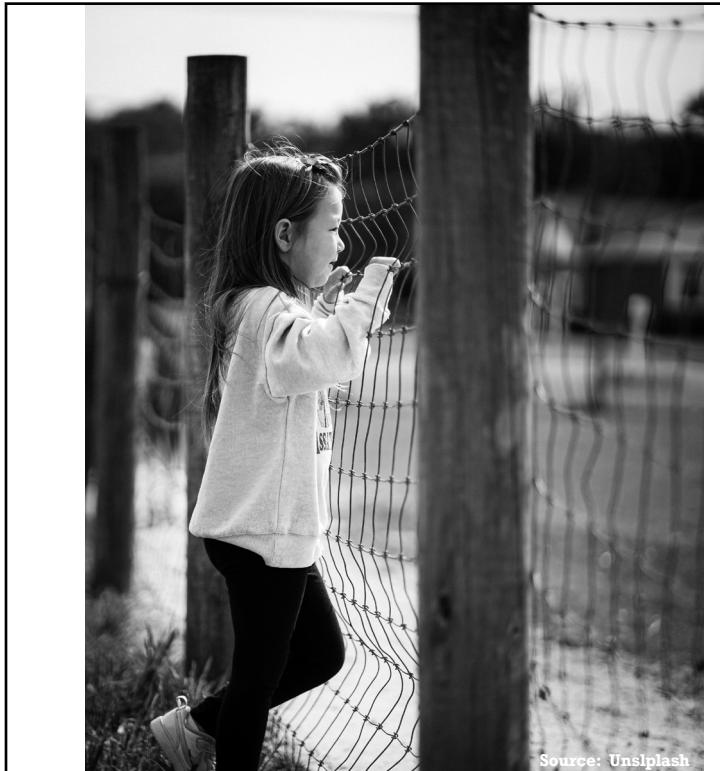
Councillors heard a report from Manager of Agriculture and Environmental Services Mike Bates regarding the Education Ag Tour (EAT), a program being offered in a neighbouring municipality.

"Administration has prepared the following report outlining the Rocky Mountain House Agricultural Society (RMHAS) and Clearwater County EAT tour," stated Bates' report to council. "The action requested of council is consideration of hosting a similar educational farm tour for elementary school students in Lacombe County."

Councillors previously discussed the EAT program and asked staff to research and report back on how the program could be introduced locally.

"The EAT tour is a partnership between RMHAS and Clearwater County," stated the staff report. "The tour is a field trip for Gr. 4 students within Clearwater County, which takes students through local farms with the overarching goal of teaching students about agriculture."

"Organization and planning of the tour is guided by a committee consisting of eight RMHAS members and six Clearwater County staff



Source: Unsplash

members. The primary partner in the tour is RMHAS, with Clearwater County providing administrative and operational support of the tour." Bates provided councillors with a breakdown of roles and responsibilities for this program, both of municipal staff and volunteers.

During discussion Bates noted the program involves field trips for Gr. 4 students to visit regional farms to see first-hand how agriculture works. Bates noted that the EAT program near Rocky Mountain House costs about \$8,000 per year to operate, including details such as busing costs, while the time commitment from staff and volunteers was estimated at about 1,440 man-hours per year, including such things as committee meetings, set-up, tour and tear-down.

Several times during the discussion EAT was compared to Lacombe County's existing student agricultural tour program, Farm Safety Day. Bates noted in his report the safety day hosts students from across the municipality and offers them activities and events with the goal of promoting farm safety. Additionally, safety day is sponsored and includes some classroom presentations. It was noted safety day's costs are lower than EAT and work is considerably less, about a third of EAT.

As councillors discussed the report they noted the EAT program appeared to be a lot more work than safety day and probably wouldn't be possible in Lacombe County unless volunteers and sponsors stepped up.

Among the comments councillors made while discussing EAT was the possibility of inviting only teachers along on an ag tour in the future.

Councillors observed that some teachers hail from urban areas where they may have been exposed to little or no agricultural activity.

Councillors accepted the EAT report for information.

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Agriculture

Rural leaders push to change dairy rules

by KCJ MEDIA GROUP

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) have moved raw milk into the crosshairs of provincial politics by forcing the issue onto the political agenda through formal resolutions. Local leaders want Canada's federal food safety regulations rewritten so that unpasteurized dairy can be sold directly from farms under controlled conditions. Their campaign challenges longstanding public health rules that ban raw milk sales for human consumption across Canada.

Under current Dairy Industry Regulations and federal Food and Drug law, producers may only sell raw milk to licensed processors, with strict penalties for violations including licence suspension. Alberta's agriculture officials currently enforce these rules and can involve additional authorities when raw products enter commercial streams or cause illness outbreaks.

Rural councils argue that small-scale dairy producers are stuck under a heavy federal framework that favours industrial supply chains and shuts out local, farm-to-consumer markets. Their proposals call for frameworks similar to some U.S. jurisdictions where raw milk sales are allowed through regulated systems requiring testing, labelling, refrigeration and traceability. The municipalities say such changes would support economic diversification in rural areas and let producers respond to consumer demand for minimally processed food.

Public health authorities counter that the prohibition reflects decades of evidence showing serious risks from unpasteurized milk,



Source: Unsplash

which can carry pathogens that cause severe foodborne illnesses. These concerns are central to Canada's federal policy and are why pasteurization became mandatory in the early 1990s.

The debate has broader implications for how agriculture and food safety are balanced in Canada. It touches on federal versus provincial jurisdiction, rural economic development and risk tolerance in food policy. With rural councils now pressing the issue, Alberta's political class and Ottawa will have to decide whether to adjust rules rooted in public health or uphold the status quo that restricts the direct sale of raw dairy.

Alberta's wild boar rules tightened

by KCJ MEDIA GROUP

The Alberta government has enacted significant changes to how wild boar are regulated in the province, shifting policy toward more restrictive controls. Recent amendments to provincial pest regulations designate all wild boar, including hybrids, as consistent pests under the Agricultural Pests Act. Under the updated regulatory framework, movement of live wild boar without specific authorization is prohibited, and all commercial or non-commercial transport, sale, purchase or acquisition of these animals now requires formal approval from provincial authorities.

Mandatory reporting obligations have been established for any person who kills a wild boar, with information on date and location to be provided to government officials to support provincial tracking and disease-response planning.

These changes dismantle the informal free-for-all that wild boar management had become and shift responsibility toward structured oversight. Landowners or occupants may still address wild boar on their own property to prevent establishment or control damage, but the general public is barred from unregulated pursuit of these animals. Operators assisting landowners on a commercial basis

must obtain appropriate permits, and pest inspectors require authorization to engage in control activities on behalf of others.

The rationale underpinning the new regime reflects growing concern about the ecological and economic impact of wild boar when they roam uncontained across agricultural and natural landscapes. Wild boar are not native to Alberta and are widely recognized by rural agencies as highly adaptable omnivores capable of devastating crops, disrupting habitats and spreading disease to livestock, pets and wildlife.



Source: Unsplash

bodies have noted continuing expansions of boar sightings across multiple counties and conservation areas, fueling pressure for government action.

continue reading WILD BOAR on page 9

Reports by agricultural advisory

Three Hills RCMP seeks assistance to identify identity theft suspects

media release ALBERTA RCMP

On Oct. 28, 2025, Three Hills RCMP received a report of identity theft and unauthorized access to a bank account. The suspect contacted the victim's bank and used their identity to gain access and transfer funds. The funds were sent to another bank account held by a different financial institution.

Three Hills RCMP determined the

account holder where the funds were transferred was also a victim of identity theft, and the account was fraudulently opened using their name and social insurance number. This victim is from Quebec.

CCTV from the financial institution was obtained, and a male and female were seen using the fraudulent account at ATM vestibules in Ontario.

Suspect 1 is described as:

Dark complexion male
Medium build and he has a beard
He was wearing a pink hoodie

Suspect 2 is described as:

Dark complexion female
Thin build
She was wearing a New York Yankees baseball hat, a grey Puma brand hoodie underneath a black jacket and black track pants

If you have any information regarding this crime, and/or can identify the suspects, please call Three Hills RCMP at 403-443-5539. If you have any further information you can contact the Three Hills RCMP at 403-443-5539, If you wish to remain anonymous, you can contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.



Suspect number one - Photo submitted



Suspect number two - Photo submitted



Strathmore RCMP Arrest Impaired Driver after Hit and Run

media release ALBERTA RCMP

On January 29, 2026 at approximately 8:20 a.m., Strathmore RCMP members responded to multiple calls concerning an erratic driver on Wheatland Trail who was passing vehicles in the oncoming lanes.



Driver's arrest inside Strathmore Town Hall - Submitted

The vehicle carried on at a high rate of speed heading South as described by witnesses and attempted to pass a moving school bus on the right near the intersection of Willow Drive. The vehicle drove onto the sidewalk and side swiped the school bus causing damage passenger side and bus doors. The vehicle continued at a high rate of speed running stop lights and stop signs until it reached a business on Lakeside Boulevard at Parklane Drive. Bystanders noticed the dangerous driving pattern and erratic behaviour of the driver and called police.

The driver fled the vehicle and was reported to have entered the Strathmore Town Hall building. Upon arrival the driver was arrested in relation to the incident, and taken to the Strathmore Detachment for further investigation where they later refused to comply with a drug recognition expert examination. The driver, a 36 year old resident of Strathmore was turned over



Depicts damage to the bus. - Submitted

for medical treat with release documents to appear in the Alberta Court of Justice on March 17, 2026 in Calgary. Charges of Operation of a Motor Vehicle While Impaired, Failure to Comply with a DRE Demand, Fail to Stop at the Scene of an Accident, and Dangerous Operation of a Motor Vehicle are expected to be laid.

“Dealing with impaired driving remains a priority for Strathmore

RCMP as part of our road safety initiatives. I'd like to thank the public for their timely reporting, provision of valuable witness observations, and the location of the driver which led to their arrest. Fortunately nobody was injured in this incident.” – Staff Sergeant Mark Wielogsz – Detachment Commander Strathmore RCMP

Eastern Slopes coal debate reignites

by CHERYL BOWMAN

Alberta's approach to coal development along the Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains has returned to the centre of provincial debate after years of policy reversals, regulatory changes and sustained public opposition. The issue has resurfaced amid renewed government action and a formal citizen initiative seeking to block new coal activity in the region.

Protections for the eastern slopes date back to Alberta's 1976 Coal Development Policy, which imposed strict limits on coal mining in the Rocky Mountains and foothills. The policy barred development on the most environmentally sensitive Category 1 lands and tightly regulated activity elsewhere, helping protect headwaters, wildlife habitat and mountain landscapes by restricting most open-pit mining in high-risk areas.

That framework was rescinded in 2020, reopening large areas of the eastern slopes to potential coal development and triggering widespread backlash from ranchers, municipalities and environmental groups.

Following intense public pressure, the government reinstated key protections in 2021. Another shift followed in January 2025, when the province lifted a moratorium on coal exploration and development, reactivating previously paused permits while launching the Alberta Coal Industry Modernization Initiative to replace the decades-old policy.

The modernization effort has drawn sharp disagreement. The province says it maintains water protections while allowing certain forms of coal development, including underground mining,



Photo: Unsplash

while continuing to block new open-pit and mountaintop-removal projects in the foothills. Critics argue the updated direction still exposes sensitive watersheds to contamination risks such as selenium. Legal pressure from coal companies seeking compensation for past restrictions has also factored into the policy debate.

Public opposition has now moved into the formal legislative process. In January 2026, Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer approved a citizen initiative application backed by

musician Corb Lund calling for legislation to prohibit all coal exploration and mining in the eastern slopes, except for mines already in production as of Jan. 1, 2026. The proposal explicitly includes projects such as Grassy Mountain and Blackstone.

Elections Alberta has issued a notice of initiative petition, triggering the next phase that will set signature requirements and timelines, with canvassing to begin only after the official petition is released.

Conservatives deliver near-unanimous support

by KCI MEDIA GROUP

In Calgary, Jan. 29-31, Conservative Party delegates delivered a near-unanimous endorsement of Pierre Poilievre's leadership. More than 87 per cent of delegates supported him in the mandatory leadership review at the party's national convention, a level of backing that exceeds historical benchmarks for Conservative leaders and reflects strong unity within the party.

The Conservatives also showed significant growth in the most recent federal election, increasing their share of the popular vote to 41.31 per cent, the party's highest result in decades. The party gained 24 seats compared with the 2021 election, demonstrating expanded support across the country and strengthening its position heading into the next electoral cycle.

Polling during the campaign indicated growing Conservative competitiveness among younger Canadians under the age of 35. In several surveys, Conservative support matched or surpassed Liberal levels, highlighting increased engagement with younger voters compared with previous elections.

Post-election assessments note that the Conservatives also made gains in working-class regions such as Windsor and northern Ontario — areas where voters had previously been more likely to support the NDP. This suggests some shifts of working-class voters in those regions.

The leadership review result reinforces Poilievre's mandate from party members and delegates as the Conservatives focus on building on recent



Pierre Poilievre and Anaïda Poilievre visit Stettler during Canada Day celebrations July 2025. Rural Alberta Report/C. Bowman

electoral gains. Convention speeches emphasized optimism, unity and shared purpose, underscoring a disciplined and

energized organization preparing for the next national campaign.

Trudeau 2.0

by CHERYL BOWMAN

Prime Minister Mark Carney's government rolled out a new package this week, Jan. 26, that it says will make food more affordable, but the plan feels like a re-run of policies Canadians have already seen and paid for. The centrepiece is a rebranded Goods and Services Tax credit, now called the Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit, boosted by 25 per cent for five years starting in July 2026 and topped up by a one-time 50 per cent increase this year. Ottawa puts the cost of the first year alone at about C\$3.1 billion, with total spending over six years estimated at roughly C\$11.7 billion.

More than 12 million Canadians are expected to receive the enhanced benefit, with a family of four potentially seeing payments rise from about \$1,100 to as much as \$1,890 in the first year, while a single person could receive up to \$950. Those numbers may sound generous, but they obscure a basic truth. This is not new money. It is taxpayer money being recycled through Ottawa, with administrative costs and political branding attached, much like the selective GST removal under Justin Trudeau in 2024.

The announcement also includes hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending across the food system. Ottawa has set aside \$500 million through a Strategic Response Fund to help businesses manage supply chain disruptions without passing costs on to consumers, added \$150 million to expand a food security fund for small and medium-sized firms, and directed \$20 million to food banks and local food infrastructure. The suggestion that government spending can shield consumers from higher costs ignores a fundamental reality. The government does not generate money. It spends money collected from taxpayers. Every dollar handed out or funnelled into a program is a dollar Canadians first earned and surrendered.

That reality matters in a country where public sector employment now accounts for roughly 21 per cent of the population, or about 4.4 million people whose wages and pensions are funded by taxpayers. Adding more programs and more oversight does not reduce costs in the economy. It redistributes them.

Mandatory unit-price labelling is also being introduced as part of the package, framed as a response to shrinking package sizes and rising prices. Most Canadians do not need a federal directive to tell them



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groceries cost more and contain less. Anyone who shops already knows that. Labelling rules do nothing to address why prices are climbing in the first place.

The broader problem with this approach is what it leaves untouched. Carbon taxes on fuel and agriculture, trade barriers, regulatory costs and concentration in food retail all continue to shape grocery prices. Instead of confronting those drivers, Ottawa has chosen familiar territory, expanding benefit programs, layering new regulations and appointing itself referee of market behaviour.

The result is another multibillion-dollar package that treats symptoms while ignoring causes.

A more serious strategy would redirect that C\$11.7 billion, along with billions sent overseas and millions spent on international travel, into domestic infrastructure, pipelines, mines and energy projects that create jobs, strengthen supply chains and raise living standards. Canadians are better served by policies that allow them to earn and build prosperity, not depend on government cheques. History shows that redistribution without growth has a hard limit, and this government appears determined to find it.

Concerns persist over China engagement

by KCI MEDIA GROUP

Canada's relationship with China continues to raise concerns as a series of diplomatic and security issues shape debate over future engagement. Recent events have reinforced long-standing worries about whether closer ties are in Canada's best interests.

The detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor from 2018 to 2021 remains a key point of tension. Their imprisonment followed the arrest of a Huawei executive in Vancouver and was widely viewed in Canada as a form of diplomatic retaliation, leaving lasting damage to bilateral relations.

Security concerns have grown in recent years. Chinese surveillance balloons were detected over Canadian airspace, adding to fears about foreign intelligence activity. Those worries were reflected during Prime Minister Mark Carney's recent visit to Beijing, when Canadian officials reportedly used temporary phones and took extra precautions with electronic devices while travelling. The measures highlighted ongoing concerns about surveillance even as the two sides held high-level meetings.

Questions have also emerged about foreign interference in Canada's democratic system. Federal investigations and intelligence agencies have pointed to efforts by foreign actors to influence Canadian elections. In addition, reports of unauthorized Chinese police stations operating in several Canadian cities have alarmed authorities, who say such operations fall outside accepted diplomatic practices and raise concerns about sovereignty.

Taken together, these developments have strengthened calls from some policymakers and observers for a more cautious approach to relations with China, including decisions about future trade and cooperation.

Lacombe County conforms to Alberta Agriculture grant

by STU SALKELD

Lacombe County council heard a report that the municipality conforms to Alberta Agriculture grant requirements and pondered some further suggestions from the provincial government. The report was made at the Jan. 29 regular meeting of council.

Manager of Agriculture and Environmental Services Mike Bates presented councillors with a report on recommendations made to the municipality after a recent visit from Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation.

"Lacombe County received a field visit from Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation on July 8, 2025," stated Bates' report to council. "Agricultural Services staff met with representatives of Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation to review applicable policies and procedures, followed by a field tour to observe some of the projects undertaken by the Agricultural Services Department."

"Field visits are conducted once every five years to confirm alignment with Agricultural Service Board (ASB) grant funding and legislative requirements. At the Nov. 4, 2025, ASB meeting, Kellie Jackson with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation presented the findings of the report to the ASB. Administration also provided a summary report of the field visit's findings."

"Overall, the ASB field visit found that Lacombe County demonstrates the appropriate use of ASB grant funds to support activities and legislative requirements under the Agricultural Service Board Act."

Bates explained in his report that during such a tour Alberta Agriculture looks at three different levels of alignment with grant funding requirements, "critical" being the most important and closely linked to grants. That is followed by significant and enhancement levels.

WILD BOAR continued from page 5

For producers already raising wild boar as livestock, the regulatory transition includes options for adjustment. Operators may elect to exit the sector with compensation or apply to retain their facilities under intensified containment and inspection protocols. The government has signaled support for affected farms during the transition period, though the heightened standards reflect a clear policy shift toward containment over expansion.

Overall, Alberta's revised approach marks a decisive tightening of wild boar management, prioritizing formal regulation, data collection and disease contingency planning. The new rules limit informal involvement by hunters and the public while creating a stricter framework for professional pest control and livestock management.



"No critical recommendations were made following the ASB field visit," stated Bates' report.

Bates did point out that Alberta Agriculture suggested some improvements under the significant and enhancement levels.

Among the "significant" suggestions was the creation of an Animal Health Act (AHA) policy.

Among the "enhancement" suggestions was "Recommend completing the review of the county emergency response plan identified in your grant application to ensure it includes information on how you will provide support during an animal health outbreak."

It was noted that along with various suggestions was also a list of recommended actions for Lacombe County to follow to address certain issues.

As councillors discussed the various recommendations, councillors wondered what the AHA suggestion would entail. Bates responded that generally Lacombe County's responsibility would be to provide help to the agencies whose responsibility it is to administer the AHA; for example, in the event of an animal health emergency, Lacombe County could provide facilities for agencies to use. He added that Lacombe County's responsibilities for AHA emergencies would be fairly limited when it came to on-the-ground responsibilities.

Councillors also discussed a recommendation under the Soil Conservation Act (SCA), with Bates responding Lacombe County has staff certified in that area. It was observed the agriculture fieldman is certified in that area and another staff member could be appointed if required, adding further training wouldn't be required.

Councillors unanimously agreed that the county manager implement the recommended corrective actions as identified in the ASB field visit recommendation report.

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Alberta restores vital wetlands

by KCJ MEDIA GROUP

Alberta's government is committing \$5.3 million to restore and construct wetlands across central and southern parts of the province, adding 67 hectares of new wetland area through the Wetland Replacement Program, according to a government press release.

The funding will support seven projects intended to strengthen natural flood and drought defences, improve water quality and enhance habitat for wildlife. The total area to be restored is roughly five times the size of West Edmonton Mall. Wetlands play a key role in managing water by storing and slowly releasing runoff, filtering contaminants before they reach rivers and lakes, and helping recharge groundwater supplies.

The province says restoring wetlands is among the most cost-effective tools available to reduce long-term risks from flooding and drought. The projects are being delivered in partnership with municipalities, conservation organizations and private landowners in regions where wetland loss has been highest.

Projects include the restoration of a drained wetland on private land in Special Area No. 3, a typically dry region where additional water storage is expected to improve local resilience. In Strathcona County, former industrial end pit lakes will be converted into wetlands designed to store and clean water near the North Saskatchewan River. In Parkland County, a low-lying upland area will be transformed into water-retaining wetlands to help reduce downstream flood risk.

Additional projects are planned in Sturgeon County and at the Ann & Sandy Cross Conservation Area, while Ducks Unlimited Canada will partner with private landowners to construct three large wetlands in central Alberta. Individual project funding in the 2025-26 fiscal year ranges from about \$267,000 to more than \$2.4 million, with the Ducks Unlimited projects accounting for more than \$1.9 million of the total investment.

Since 2020, Alberta has invested more than \$25 million through the Wetland Replacement Program, restoring or constructing roughly 676 hectares of wetlands across the province. The program allows project proponents who impact wetlands during development to pay a replacement fee to the province, which is then used to fund restoration in priority areas.

The government says rural landowners have received more than \$6 million since 2020 for hosting new or restored wetlands on their properties, supporting both environmental objectives and local communities.



Source: Unsplash



Alice McIntosh of Carbon displays her handmade quilts at a Jan. 29 Chateau Three Hills third annual quilt show Rural Alberta Report/ D. Nadeau

Essentials outpace wages as affordability strains persist

by CHERYL BOWMAN

Canada's affordability crisis continues to tighten its grip on household finances, with essential costs rising far faster than paycheques.

According to Kaylie Tiessen, chief economist at The Canadian SHIELD Institute, the pressure on family budgets shows little sign of easing even as headline inflation appears to moderate.

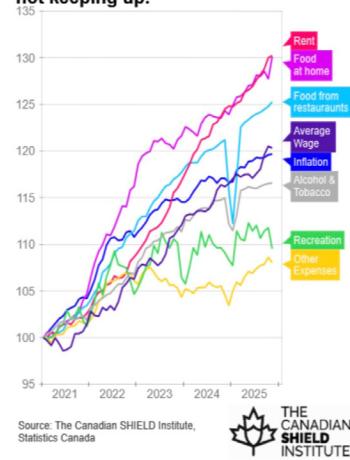
Statistics Canada data shows overall inflation at 2.2 per cent in November, but grocery prices climbed 4.7 per cent over the same period.

Tiessen's analysis underscores a persistent problem: everyday necessities are increasing at more than twice the pace of the broader inflation rate, deepening the burden on households.

Public concern reflects those realities. Repeated polling places food and housing costs at the top of Canadians' economic worries, far ahead of other issues like taxes or discretionary spending.

For many families, these pressures are not abstract data points but weekly stressors at the checkout and monthly strains when rent or mortgage bills arrive.

Affordability continues to get worse: Price of essentials rise and wages are not keeping up.



Since 2021, the cost of groceries and rent has climbed roughly 30 per cent, while average wages have risen about 20 per cent.

Tiessen highlights this divergence between income growth and the price of essentials as a key factor eroding purchasing power across the country.

That imbalance means the core costs of living are rising around 50 per cent faster than average hourly pay, leaving workers effectively worse off despite declines in headline inflation.

Without meaningful relief on food and housing costs, easing inflation offers limited respite to Canadians struggling to keep up.