

# HERITAGE Acres

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## *Farm Museum*

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### *A regional asset in transition*

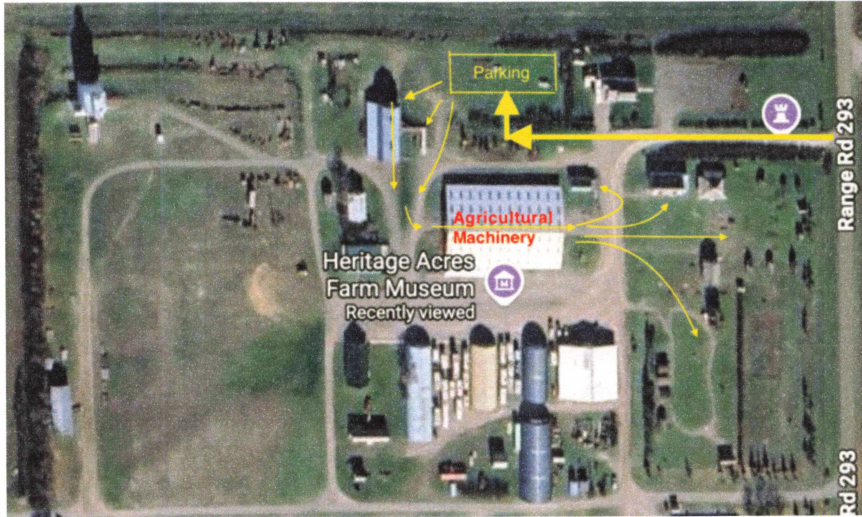
Heritage Acres Farm Museum occupies 180 acres just outside the Town of Pincher Creek and operates as a working agricultural museum stewarded in the public interest. The site preserves, documents, and demonstrates artifacts representative of agricultural life and technology in Southern Alberta between approximately 1880 and 1960, in accordance with its established collections mandate. The museum's holdings include more than 150 tractors and implements, historic buildings relocated to the site, and associated archival materials, all supported by long-standing volunteer expertise and community governance.

The scale of the site has become both its defining strength and its central operational challenge. As the collection and grounds expanded, the informal, volunteer-driven model that once served the museum well began to encounter predictable limits. Buildings and artifacts accumulated without a consistent interpretive sequence, visitor circulation became diffuse, and the experience increasingly depended on prior knowledge. While the collection itself remains exceptional, its public legibility has not always kept pace with its growth.

Current work at Heritage Acres is therefore focused on alignment rather than expansion: aligning visitor experience with mandate, interpretation with collections policy, and daily operations with the long-term responsibilities of a public-facing institution. The guiding concern has been how visitors encounter the site, i.e. where they arrive, how they orient themselves, and how the story of agriculture unfolds spatially and intelligibly from that first moment.

Within the scope of its mandate, the museum is being clarified as an industry and technology museum of agriculture. Horses, hand tools, threshing equipment, early tractors, steam engines, and later mechanized systems are interpreted as part of a continuous story about energy, labour, and technological change. This approach reflects the museum's existing tiered collections framework, which distinguishes between permanent, operational, and educational uses of artifacts, and allows demonstration, learning, and preservation to coexist without compromising care standards.

Two phased, low-risk improvements anchor this work. The first is a proposed reconfiguration of the visitor arrival area so that parking and orientation occur adjacent to the Doukhobor Barn, establishing a clear and appropriate threshold into the agricultural landscape. Entering through a working barn foregrounds labour, animals, and scale, and situates visitors immediately within the conditions that made mechanization necessary.



From there, visitors move directly into the Agricultural Machinery Pavilion, which is being redeveloped from a dense storage-oriented hall into a structured interpretive environment. In partnership with professional exhibit designers *Know History Inc.*, the pavilion will present the evolution of agricultural machinery in a chronological and thematic sequence that supports self-guided learning, school

programming, and guided tours. The artifacts themselves remain unchanged; the emphasis is on documentation, contextualization, and clarity, consistent with accepted museum practices.

These adjustments improve safety, accessibility, wayfinding, and dwell time while respecting the museum's policy commitments to responsible stewardship and phased development. They also strengthen the museum's position within the regional tourism corridor linking Waterton Lakes, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, the Crownsnest Pass, and surrounding municipalities, allowing Heritage Acres to function as a coherent and complementary destination rather than a site requiring explanation.

Operationally, the museum is making parallel adjustments grounded in sustainability and governance. Event programming is being refined rather than expanded indiscriminately. Opening hours are being aligned with volunteer capacity and maintenance requirements. Training initiatives are being developed to support skills transfer and succession among volunteers, particularly in areas related to machinery operation and care. Throughout, changes are being implemented incrementally, with attention to risk management, volunteer well-being, and long-term viability.

Heritage Acres is not seeking to redefine its purpose. It is working to bring its existing mandate, collections, and governance structure into clearer focus so that the site can continue to serve the public effectively. The intention is a museum that is legible, durable, and useful to the region it serves, one that people understand on arrival, return to over time, and trust as part of Southwest Alberta's shared technical infrastructure.

I welcome further conversation, questions, or opportunities to share this work in more detail, including site visits or presentations. I can be reached at [executive.director@heritageacres.org](mailto:executive.director@heritageacres.org).

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