



## Twenty-two Years of Local Value

# Monthly Report

For Councils

# March 2026

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Dear Councilors,

At the request of our Executive, staff has put together a Value report for SouthGrow. With new councils in place (and communication of our work always being a hard problem to overcome) it seemed like a good moment to review the work that your association has done over the decades and how it has produced value for your ratepayers. Budgets are tight and responsible councils need to know what their dollars are funding.

This report aims to close that gap, remind our members of the work we've done and are doing, and inspire you with what is possible – because this organization is an efficient vehicle that can be used to propel forward even more future work.

## **ACTION REQUEST:**

Please share this for inclusion in your council reports and use it to report on the work of the association as part of your regular reporting.

Sincerely,

Peter Casurella  
Executive Director  
SouthGrow Regional Initiative  
1-403-394-0615

## **REMINDER OF UPCOMING EVENTS:**

- Southern Alberta Economic Summit, March 26. (get yer tickets!)
- Next Quarterly Meeting – Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 6-8 pm.
- Economic Development for Elected Officials - May 8th (all day)

## SouthGrow's Value

This document explains the value that SouthGrow creates for the communities of the region. SouthGrow is funded by member municipalities, which means local taxpayers help support its work. Because of that, it is important to clearly show what SouthGrow does and what communities receive in return. This document gathers real examples from SouthGrow's history and organizes them in a simple way so members can see the results of regional cooperation.

The goal of this document is to provide a clear and honest record of value. It focuses on measurable outcomes such as research, partnerships, training, and regional initiatives that benefit multiple communities. By documenting these results, SouthGrow can help members understand how working together strengthens the region and helps communities achieve things that would be harder to do alone.

### How SouthGrow Creates Value for Our Communities

SouthGrow is a partnership of towns, villages, and counties in southern Alberta. These communities work together because some challenges are bigger than any one town. By sharing ideas, research, and resources, they can do more together than they could alone.

This document shows the real value SouthGrow has created for the region. It does this by looking at the work SouthGrow has done over many years and the benefits that work brought to local communities and taxpayers.

Regional organizations like SouthGrow create value in several ways. The work may look different each year, but most of it falls into seven types of value. These seven areas help explain why communities choose to work together.

#### 1. Leveraged Funding

One of the clearest benefits of regional work is bringing new funding into the region. Many grants from provincial and federal governments are large and complex. Small municipalities often do not have the staff time or expertise to pursue them on their own. A regional organization can help identify opportunities, prepare applications, and manage projects.

SouthGrow has helped secure and coordinate funding for regional projects. One example is the **Peaks to Prairies EV Charging Network**. SouthGrow and Alberta SouthWest, put in mere tens of thousands of dollars, and then used that seed funding to stack large grant contributions from both Federal and Provincial Sources to reach a funding pot of over \$2 million. This funding enabled a 20-station network spanning southern Alberta opening up the region to EV travel.

REDAs are also excellent at leveraging their own members dollars with proven leverage ratios over 9:1 with a sustained multi-year trend. Over 13 years of professionally audited financials, for every \$1 that our membership has committed we have leveraged over 9 times. This is good value.

Year	Memberships	Total Budget	Leverage Ratio
2013	19,944.00	375,967.00	18.85
2014	17,477.00	652,550.00	37.34
2015	17,641.00	128,807.00	7.30
2016	20,029.00	182,766.00	9.13
2017	23,679.00	147,836.00	6.24
2018	31,927.00	383,072.00	12.00
2019	32,364.00	335,154.00	10.36
2020	37,049.00	375,835.00	10.14
2021	41,730.00	235,403.00	5.64
2022	49,605.00	169,900.00	3.43
2023	90,024.00	497,641.00	5.53
2024	93,336.00	871,800.00	9.34
2025	93,358.00	1,041,685.00	11.16
	<b>568,163.00</b>	<b>5,398,416.00</b>	<b>9.50</b>

## 2. Shared Research and Strategic Intelligence

Good decisions require good information. Many small municipalities do not have the budget to hire engineers or technical experts to study complex infrastructure issues on their own.

SouthGrow helps solve this problem by coordinating research that benefits many communities at once. This work gives local leaders better data when planning for growth, investment, and new services.

A strong example is the **SouthGrow Broadband Project Master Plan**. SouthGrow worked with technical consultants to study broadband service levels across the region and identify where major connectivity gaps existed. The study mapped infrastructure needs and outlined practical options for improving internet service in rural communities.

This shared research gave municipalities reliable information they could use when speaking with internet providers and applying for broadband funding programs. By producing the study once at the regional level, SouthGrow helped communities access professional technical analysis that would have been difficult and costly for them to obtain on their own.

This project led to several projects that were actioned on by our communities. Milk River worked with the Milk River Cable Club to deploy a high-speed pilot project and an infrastructure upgrade pilot project with Fortis Alberta. This led to technology validation and further deployments in Warner County, along with the data being used to secure federal funding for more network expansion across parts of Warner County and the County of 40 Mile. Additionally, the work informed a P3 in Vulcan County that involved SouthGrow building a coalition of 6 municipalities, aided by political influence from the Government of Alberta, to strike a deal with two private companies to upgrade internet access for the entire region. The Town of Cardston also used their plan to build and issue a public RFP for local system upgrades which prompted the incumbent to come to the table and provide the necessary upgrades.

## 3. Regional Coordination

Economic development works best when communities work together instead of competing with each other.

SouthGrow helps municipalities coordinate around shared regional priorities. By speaking with one voice, communities can have a stronger impact when working with provincial and federal governments.

A good example is SouthGrow's support for the **Highway 3 Twinning Development Association**. SouthGrow works with municipal partners across southern Alberta to advocate for the twinning of Highway 3, an important transportation corridor for agriculture, trade, and regional travel. In 2019 when the Association was going through a transition period, SouthGrow took over the administration of the organization, backed its nascent operations with funding and expertise, and professionally set it up to operate effectively as a lobby group. We administered it for 3 years, securing a strong member base, overseeing the production of a cost-benefit analysis from PricewaterhouseCooper, and gathering 5000 signatures on a petition. This work took Highway 3 from aspirations to results with the Premier Kenny announcing the Twinning of one section in 2021, and Premier Smith announcing the Twinning of the entire corridor the next year.

As our region's major east-west link this project is upgrading trade access and helping land investments that benefit the economy of the entire region.

By helping coordinate regional support for the project, SouthGrow ensured that rural communities have a stronger collective voice when discussing transportation infrastructure with provincial decision makers. This kind of regional coordination helps advance projects that benefit the entire region.



#### 4. Capacity Building

Many smaller municipalities have limited economic development staff. Training and knowledge sharing can help local leaders make better decisions and respond to new opportunities.

SouthGrow regularly organizes training events, learning sessions, conferences, and forums for municipal councils, administrators, and economic development professionals. These sessions bring experts to the region and allow communities to learn from each other.

One example was the “**Community Energy Forums**” which SouthGrow hosted for a number of years. These events brought speakers and regional leaders together to discuss innovation, collaboration, and effective municipal leadership in the energy space. Ideas and industry connections at these events directly contributed to Several of our Towns and Villages pursuing solar energy offsets, which has saved our communities many thousands of dollars in energy costs every year. Early success in places like Raymond, Stirling, Cardston, and Carmangay has led to widespread adoption and has spurred interest in programs like municipal energy management. The MEM program was also introduced to the region through our training events, and several towns embarked on programs with huge impacts. The Town of Taber in particular has realized savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year from their MEM program.

By providing training and connections in this space, SouthGrow seeded the necessary ideas, knowledge and connections for communities to pursue and realize big wins.

#### 5. Network and Partnership Access

Strong partnerships are important for economic development. Regional organizations can connect communities to networks that might otherwise be hard to access.

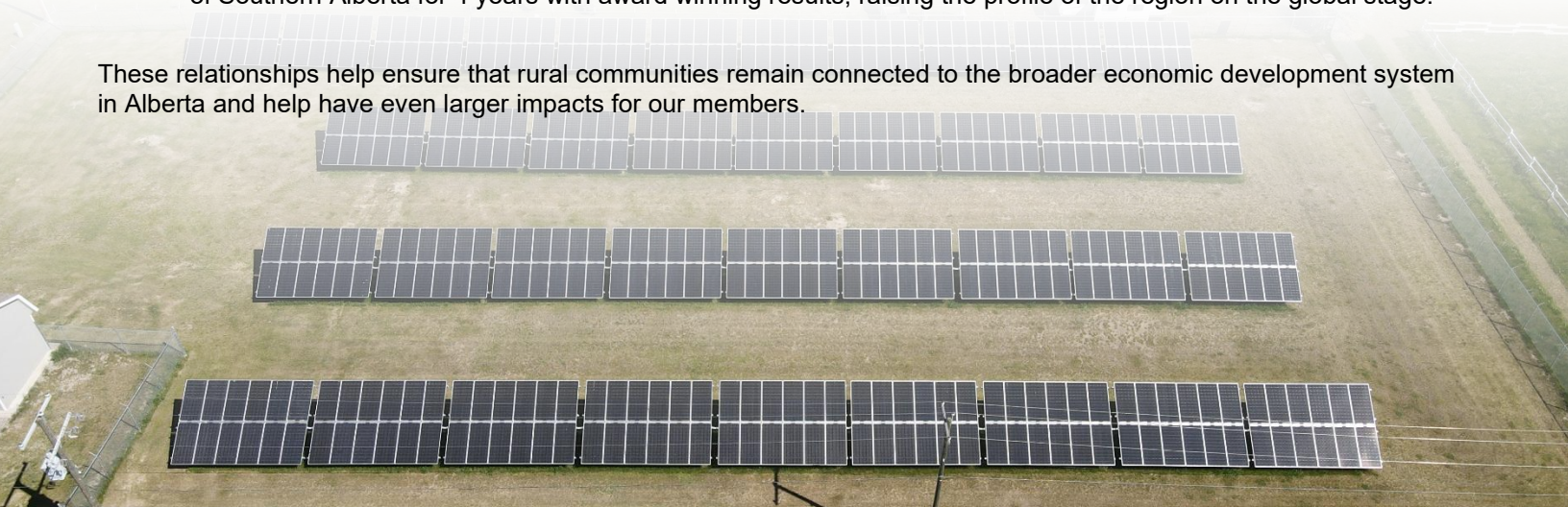
SouthGrow works closely with organizations such as Community Futures Lethbridge Region, Economic Development Lethbridge, Lethbridge College, the University of Lethbridge, and the National Research Council’s Industrial Research Assistance Program.

Through these partnerships, SouthGrow helps link local businesses and communities to innovation programs, expertise, and funding opportunities. Some great examples of the impacts these programs have had are the success of Prairie Hill Farms in Lethbridge County, Advanced Ag in Raymond, or Flexihopper in Lethbridge.

Other major partnerships include:

- **The Blackfoot Signage Project** (5 organisations) which has funded over 200 signs for 49 organizations in the region.
- **The Southern Alberta Economic Summit** (7 organizations) which hosts a high-quality southern-Alberta specific ec dev summit
- **The Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership**, (4 organizations) which pools resources to chase investments and engage the government on policy and which educated and marketed the investment opportunity in the lead up to the huge wave of investment in this pace.
- **The Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative** (4 organizations) which has done awareness marketing of Southern Alberta for 4 years with award winning results, raising the profile of the region on the global stage.

These relationships help ensure that rural communities remain connected to the broader economic development system in Alberta and help have even larger impacts for our members.



## 6. Regional Advocacy and Policy Influence

When communities speak with one voice, their message carries more weight. SouthGrow helps represent the interests of rural municipalities when governments are making policy decisions that affect economic development and infrastructure.

A strong example is SouthGrow's participation in the **Cost Benefit Analysis for Alberta Broadband** which demonstrated a better than 3-1 return on investment from broadband infrastructure. This work helped demonstrate the economic and social benefits of improving broadband access in rural areas. By contributing regional data and perspectives, SouthGrow helped ensure that the needs of southern Alberta communities were included in the analysis. The result was a renewed funding program from Service Alberta for rural and remote communities to hit the 50/10 national connectivity target which led to funding opportunities for small ISP's in rural southern Alberta like the Milk River Cable Club, Wifibre, and Xplornet.

This type of advocacy helps decision makers understand the importance of rural connectivity and supports stronger investment in broadband infrastructure across the region.

## 7. Regional Brand and Investment Readiness

Economic development also means helping people outside the region learn about the opportunities that exist in southern Alberta.

SouthGrow works with partners to promote the region to investors, businesses, and site selectors who are looking for new places to expand. This work helps ensure that rural communities are visible in provincial and global investment conversations.

Good examples are the **Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative (SAITI)** and **SouthGrow's Investment Readiness work with Invest Alberta**. Over four years of targeting marketing, SouthGrow has accumulated over 100 million views of awareness ads telling the story of our agrifood industry in southern Alberta BY global agri-food execs. This has resulted in a marked increase in awareness of the region and our value to the global industry. In 2024, SouthGrow helped profile the economic assets of every member community, including industrial land, infrastructure, and key sector opportunities. This information was added to Invest Alberta's regional investment database so that site selectors and companies exploring Alberta can easily identify opportunities in southern Alberta communities.

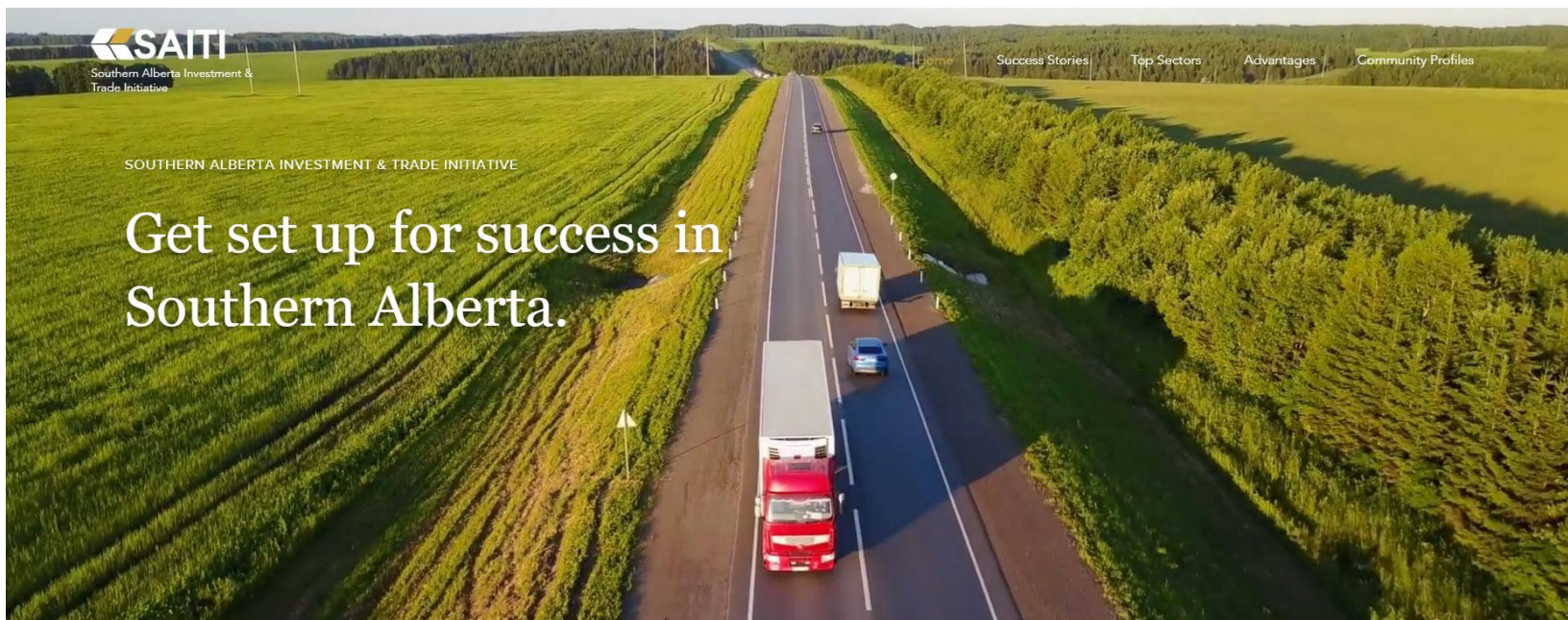
This work helps ensure that rural communities are included when investors search for new locations and strengthens the region's ability to compete for new business and investment.



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## Working Together for Regional Success

SouthGrow's work takes many forms. Sometimes it involves research, sometimes training, and sometimes advocacy or partnerships. But the goal is always the same: to help communities succeed by working together.

The following pages show examples of this work and the results it has produced. Each entry in the document helps demonstrate how regional cooperation can create real value for the people who live and work in southern Alberta.

This is not an exhaustive list either, nor does it account for the constant day-to-day supports that staff engages in, providing information, advice and support to members or connecting with stakeholders, building relationships with external entities, and maneuvering projects into place. **We do a lot.**

## Recurring Initiatives

Year	Project	What it is	Why it matters	What did you get?
2009- Present	Regional Training	Every year SGRI provides free or subsidize training in Economic Development to regional councils and staff.	SGRI can provide affordable and efficient training to large groups at a time on issues of the day while giving our members a venue to connect and network.	Member councils and staff receive low-cost training close to home instead of arranging it alone.
2022- Present	Agri-food Conference Representation	SouthGrow budgets for staff to attend major agri-food conferences and trade events on behalf of the region.	This keeps staff current on industry trends and creates leads and contacts for southern Alberta.	The region gets current market intelligence and new investor or partner introductions without each community attending on its own. Members can access this knowledge.
2022- Present	Agri-food Scholarship Program	SouthGrow and partners fund scholarships for students pursuing agri-food careers in southern Alberta.	The program supports the next generation of workers and professionals in the region's largest industry.	Students receive direct financial help and the region strengthens its future agri-food workforce.
Multi-year	Community Energy Forums	SouthGrow, through the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership (SAAEP), organized regional Community Energy Forums that brought municipalities, utilities, industry experts, and energy innovators together to discuss emerging opportunities in renewable energy, electric vehicle infrastructure, municipal solar, and energy transition strategies. The events featured presentations, expert panels, and networking opportunities designed to share knowledge and connect communities with energy investment opportunities and funding programs.	Rural municipalities often lack access to specialized energy expertise and information about new technologies, funding programs, and regulatory changes. Without coordinated forums, communities risk missing opportunities to participate in emerging energy markets and infrastructure investments.	The forums gave municipal leaders and local stakeholders direct access to industry experts, utilities, and funding programs related to solar development, electric vehicle infrastructure, and energy transition initiatives. By connecting communities with partners and practical project examples, the events helped municipalities understand how to pursue new energy projects that could generate local revenue, reduce energy costs, and attract investment. This led to outcomes like several

				communitys fully offsetting municipal load with solar.
2013- Present	Ec Dev Newsletters	SouthGrow issues regular newsletters and updates on funding, policy, events, and economic development issues.	Regular information sharing helps members stay current and respond faster to opportunities and risks.	Members receive timely economic development information without having to monitor every source themselves.
Ongoing	Ec Dev Tool Library	SouthGrow developed and maintains an online Economic Development Tool Library that serves as a centralized repository of regional studies, planning documents, investment profiles, templates, and links to external economic development resources. The library is updated periodically to incorporate new research, funding programs, policy updates, and tools that member municipalities can use in their local economic development work.	Many rural municipalities do not have full-time economic development staff or the capacity to track evolving best practices, research, and funding programs. Without a centralized resource, communities would need to independently locate and interpret information that is often scattered across government and industry sources.	The Tool Library gives municipalities a single, trusted location to access research, templates, and planning resources that support local economic development efforts. By maintaining this shared knowledge base, SouthGrow reduces duplication of effort across communities and helps local staff and councils quickly access tools that would otherwise require significant time and cost to assemble individually.
2012- Present	Economic Development Summit	SouthGrow hosts regional economic development summits to share information, gather input, and connect partners.	The summit gives communities a place to hear about issues affecting the region and help shape SouthGrow priorities.	Members get region-specific training, networking, and a stronger voice in setting shared priorities.
2025- 2026	Farm and Crop Conference	A proposed one-day conference focused on crop production, farm innovation, and producer issues in southern Alberta.	The plan responds to a gap for region-specific farm information and networking.	Farm producers gained access to the latest research, crop practices, and market information affecting their operations. This helps farmers improve yields, manage risk, and stay competitive in a changing agricultural industry.
2009- Present	Sponsorships	SouthGrow provides sponsorships for events and initiatives that align with its mandate and benefit member communities.	Small sponsorships help regional partners deliver more programming and create stronger local networks.	Members benefit from events and projects that SouthGrow helps enable without each municipality carrying the full cost.

## Projects

Year	Project	What it is	Why it matters	What did you get?
2009-2010	Water for Economic Development	The Water for Economic Development project was a SouthGrow-led regional study that compiled and analyzed water licence, supply, and growth capacity data across member municipalities to provide a shared evidence base for long-term economic and infrastructure planning.	This study was a critical tool in providing long-term access to water licenses for economic development in the South-Saskatchewan Basin. Water access is critical for growth, and there is a charted pathway for access because of the work we did.	Communities received a shared water evidence base and a clearer path for planning future growth and infrastructure.
2013-2014	More than Enough Marketing Campaign	A regional marketing campaign which was SouthGrow's first major global marketing push.	SouthGrow was learning how to build awareness marketing and advance our messaging to a world that didn't know who we are or why we mattered in agrifood.	The campaign introduced southern Alberta's agricultural strengths and business advantages to audiences outside the region. This increased awareness among potential investors, companies, and partners who may bring new business and markets to local producers.
2013-2014	Community Renewable Energy Toolkit	SouthGrow's renewable energy co-op project produced toolkits for First Nations and other communities interested in local renewable energy development.	The toolkits gave communities practical guidance on how to organize and move renewable energy projects forward.	Communities received planning tools they could use to assess and structure local renewable energy projects.
2014-2015	Investment Attraction and Lead Generation Project	SouthGrow worked with MNP and member communities to build current community profiles and move from research into targeted investment attraction and lead generation.	Good profiles and investment material are needed before communities can market themselves to outside firms or respond to leads.	Members received updated profiles, stronger investment material, and training to improve local attraction and retention efforts.
2017 - 2021	On Farm Energy and Solar PVP Program	SouthGrow administered a program for the Ministry of Ag and Forestry providing program support for 25 counties in southern Alberta.	Our team helped producers in southern Alberta access over \$11.5 million in energy efficiency grants to improve on-farm equipment and reduce costs.	Producers in southern Alberta received help accessing on-farm energy funding and equipment upgrades.
2017-2018	SouthGrow Community Business Retention, Expansion, and Marketing Plans	SouthGrow commissioned a region-wide Business Retention, Expansion and Marketing study and conducted interviews with each member municipality. The project produced a customized economic development and marketing plan for all 24 SouthGrow communities.	Many rural communities lack the staff or resources to conduct detailed business retention research or develop formal economic development strategies.	Each community received a practical plan identifying local assets, business opportunities, and marketing priorities to support business retention and investment attraction. This gave municipal leaders clearer direction on how to support existing businesses and pursue new economic development opportunities.

2017-2018	Broadband Master Plan	SouthGrow's 2017 Broadband Master Plan benchmarked member communities, explained the problem, and laid out steps to improve service.	A shared plan helped communities understand the broadband gap and coordinate next steps.	Members received a practical roadmap for improving service instead of starting from scratch community by community.
2018-2019	Red Tape Project	SouthGrow planned and developed a red tape reduction project in response to provincial interest in barriers to growth.	Reducing unnecessary process barriers can make investment, non-profit work, and municipal projects easier to advance.	Businesses in SouthGrow community had items that impact them submitted for review and inclusion in reducing red tape. Notably, grant application processes and reporting for municipalities improved.
2018-2021	Townfolio Profiles	SouthGrow purchased and rolled out Townfolio community profiles for member communities as a shared investment readiness tool.	These profiles gave communities current, web-ready information for investors and site selectors.	Member communities got a professional information tool at group rates and lower maintenance burden.
2019-2020	Farm Efficiency Demonstration Trailer	SouthGrow built a demonstration trailer under its farm efficiency work to show producers practical technologies and program options.	Demonstration equipment helps producers understand savings and make informed decisions before buying.	Producers could see technologies in action and better assess potential energy and efficiency savings.
2019-2020	Broadband Finish Line Project	SouthGrow commissioned community-specific plans for places still below 50/10 internet service to identify realistic upgrade options.	The project moved the region from broad planning to actionable last-mile solutions.	Communities received custom upgrade pathways instead of a one-size-fits-all broadband plan.
2020-2026	EV Bus	SouthGrow helped secure funding for a year-long electric bus pilot for the Highway 4 corridor. The project eventually pivoted to the Claresholm and Vulcan handibus group.	The pilot intends to test lower-emission regional transit infrastructure and new service options in real world rural conditions.	The region gained access to capital and project management for a transit pilot that local groups likely could not deliver alone.
2020-2021	Economic Recovery Taskforce	SouthGrow and Economic Development Lethbridge convened an economic recovery taskforce during the pandemic to share supports and advice.	Businesses needed fast, reliable information and problem solving during a fast-moving crisis.	Regional businesses received coordinated advice, updates, and volunteer support during COVID disruption. Importantly, the project provided free professional services to business owners across the region.
2020-2021	POP Site Project - Vulcan County	SouthGrow brokered P3 deal in Vulcan County that included local communities, government, and private firms to upgrade obsolete network infrastructure.	Upgrading POP site infrastructure was a practical way to improve speeds across a large rural area.	Communities in Vulcan County gained access to faster internet service and stronger backbone infrastructure.

2021-2022	Invest Alberta / Ag and Forestry IA Supports	SouthGrow worked with provincial partners including Invest Alberta and Alberta Agriculture & Forestry to connect southern Alberta communities and regional businesses with provincial investment attraction programs and sector development initiatives. This included sharing information on provincial programs, facilitating connections between communities and provincial agencies, and supporting regional participation in agriculture and value-added investment opportunities.	Provincial investment attraction programs often operate at a scale that can be difficult for smaller rural municipalities or businesses to access directly. Without regional coordination, many communities would have limited awareness of available provincial supports or how to position projects for investment attraction.	SouthGrow helped bridge the gap between provincial investment programs and rural communities by ensuring that local opportunities in agriculture and food processing were visible to provincial agencies. This improved the region's ability to participate in provincial investment initiatives and increased the likelihood that southern Alberta projects would receive attention from investors and government programs.
2021-2022	Exhibition Park Virtual Reality Supports	SouthGrow sponsored a 3D virtual walkthrough model for Exhibition Park's agri-food hub proposal.	A strong visual model helped the project explain its case to funders and decision makers.	The project team gained a better tool to support a successful funding case for major regional infrastructure.
2021-2022	Nobleford Incinerator Pilot Project	SouthGrow investigated the feasibility of a community-scale micro-incineration pilot with Nobleford.	The work tested whether a small community waste solution could be viable under the right conditions.	The community received an early-stage feasibility review that clarified whether to keep pursuing the concept.
2021-2023	FDI Global Outreach Phase 1 and 2	SouthGrow worked with a professional Lead Generation firm to get special introductions to 12 leads over 2 years who were seriously interested in investing in Southern Alberta.	Southern Alberta often suffers from a lack of visibility on the global stage. Using Lead Gen professionals to introduce us skips marketing and awareness building stages when attracting investment.	Increased awareness by major global agrifood companies of the value proposition and investment potential of the region.
2021-2024	SouthWestern Alberta Tourism Collaboration	SouthGrow partnered with Tourism Lethbridge to develop and market regional tour routes over a multi-year period.	Joint tourism marketing can promote more destinations than any one community can market alone.	The region gained shared tourism products such as themed routes that help draw visitors across multiple communities.
2021-2025	Zero Emissions Vehicle Infrastructure Program	SouthGrow applied for and managed a Natural Resources Canada program to subsidize EV charging stations across the region.	Charging infrastructure lowers the barrier to EV adoption and prepares communities for changing transportation needs.	Municipalities, institutions, and businesses gained access to subsidy dollars and project administration for charger installs.
2022 to Present	SouthGrow Power Project	SouthGrow advanced a proposed solar project intended to create a long-term revenue stream for the organization while adding local generation.	A new earned-revenue source could improve long-term sustainability and reduce reliance on public funding and grant programs.	If successful, the REDA will be largely financially self-sustaining, guarding municipalities against member rate increases and providing a stable funding floor while expanding fiscal capacity to have more impact.
2022-2023	ARRCUS Energy Mapping Project	The SAAEP Partnership worked with a company called ARRCUS to display hourly energy production in southern Alberta on the SAAEP website.	Showing the strong renewable energy market helped us tell the green energy story to companies and also emphasize the	The region got a visual data tool that really showed how important renewable production has become and which helps investor conversations.

			depth of renewable energy investment in-region.	
2022-2023	Broadband Completions (Vulcan County, Highway 4, Town of Cardston)	SouthGrow worked with partners to complete broadband projects in Vulcan County, along Highway 4, and in Cardston-area communities.	These projects addressed known last-mile or backbone gaps that limited reliable modern service.	More communities crossed the 50/10 threshold or moved closer to it through coordinated regional work.
2022-2023	Rural Immigration Pathways Training	SouthGrow planned rural immigration pathway training as part of labour force and retention work.	Labour shortages are a major regional constraint and communities need tools to attract and retain workers.	Regional stakeholders enjoyed a one-day conference discussing issues and solutions which led to the expansion of Rural immigration programs across the region.
2022-2025	Local Intel Profiles	SouthGrow brokered a group deal for Local Intel community profiles for member communities.	Shared procurement reduced costs and improved access to investor-facing information tools.	At least 13 communities received group-rate community profiles without negotiating alone.
2022-Present	Global Investment Attraction Marketing	SouthGrow and partners refreshed and ran a global digital marketing campaign to promote agrifood opportunities in southern Alberta.	Regional digital marketing helps place local opportunities in front of outside investors and site selectors.	The region gained a shared external marketing campaign and common content that local communities could also use.
2023-2024	IEDC Accreditation	SouthGrow joined the International Economic Development Council and pursued Accredited Economic Development Organization status.	Accreditation can strengthen credibility, improve systems, and benchmark practice against international standards.	Members benefit from stronger organizational standards and outside validation of SouthGrow's economic development practice.
2023-2024	Community Ec Dev Matchmaking	SouthGrow surveyed member communities about local economic development projects and offered introductions where interests aligned.	Communities often work on similar issues but do not always know who else is doing related work.	Members got connections to peers, examples, and resources that can reduce duplication and speed up local projects.
2024-2025	Organizational Sustainability	SouthGrow began formal sustainability planning to determine how the organization can remain viable with or without future provincial funding.	Long-term planning is necessary when grant programs are uncertain.	Members get a clearer path for maintaining regional services instead of reacting only when funding changes.
2025-2026	Tarrif Response Taskforce / Export Expansion Project	SouthGrow partnered with several other associations to provide response work to newly imposed tarriffs from the United States. SouthGrow began to work on Trade and Export development.	Southern Alberta has a strong over-reliance on a single market. Encouraging trade diversification is a way to guard against economic shocks.	SouthGrow did a fact-finding mission to Japan which got us invited to pitch in China as well. A \$500 million biofuel investment was landed for Alberta, and a industry-led mission to Japan was planned for the following year.

# Studies

Year	Project	What it is	Why it matters	What did you get?
2003	Confectionary Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow produced an investment attraction profile highlighting the region's advantages for sugar confectionery manufacturing, including access to sugar beet production, irrigation agriculture, transportation corridors, and low operating costs.	Rural communities often struggle to attract food processing investment because companies lack clear information about local supply chains, logistics, and cost advantages.	The report promoted the SouthGrow region to potential food processors by demonstrating competitive advantages such as access to sugar beets, a modern Rogers Sugar refinery in Taber, and lower operating costs compared to U.S. locations. This positioned the region as a potential location for confectionery manufacturing investment and job creation.
2003	Solar Energy Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow produced an investment attraction report outlining the region's potential for solar energy development, including solar electricity, solar thermal, and passive solar applications.	Emerging renewable energy industries require detailed information about local resources, research capacity, and market conditions before companies consider locating projects in a region.	The report positioned the SouthGrow region as a competitive location for solar energy investment by highlighting strong solar insolation levels, supportive municipalities, research capacity in Alberta, and transportation access to North American markets. This helped promote the region to renewable energy companies and investors looking for new development locations.
2003	Agricultural Assessment - Grow your Own	SouthGrow commissioned an agricultural sector assessment that analyzed the region's agricultural strengths, infrastructure, and emerging value-added opportunities.	Agriculture is the backbone of the regional economy, but producers and communities often struggle to identify where new value-added processing or diversification opportunities exist.	The study identified practical opportunities for producers and processors such as greenhouse and organic vegetables, pulse processing, essential oils, and pet product manufacturing. This helped communities and agricultural businesses better understand where new value-added agriculture investment and diversification could occur in the region.

2004	Ready Meals Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow developed an investment opportunity profile examining the feasibility of establishing a regional ready-meals and meal-component production facility to supply institutional and consumer markets.	Demand for convenient, nutritious prepared foods is growing rapidly among busy families and institutional buyers such as hospitals, seniors facilities, and correctional institutions.	The profile highlighted a potential \$2.5–\$3 million food processing opportunity that could create 15–20 jobs while sourcing a large share of ingredients from local farms. By identifying a viable institutional market of roughly 940,000 meals annually, the project positioned regional producers and processors to capture more value from SouthGrow-grown agricultural products.
2004-2006	Gateway to Alberta Phase 1 and Phase 2	A multi-phase early SouthGrow initiative that profiled logistics and trade opportunities linked to southern Alberta's gateway position.	The work helped identify sector opportunities and frame the region as a place for trade and investment.	It gave the region an early strategic case for cluster development and investment marketing.
2006-2007	Alternative Energy Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow commissioned a regional assessment examining opportunities to develop wind and solar energy industries, municipal renewable energy applications, and a regional carbon credit system involving agriculture and municipalities.	Southern Alberta has some of the strongest wind and solar resources in Canada, positioning the region to attract renewable energy manufacturing, project development, and related service industries.	The study identified opportunities for SouthGrow communities and farm producers to participate in renewable energy development and carbon credit markets. It highlighted the potential for wind and solar manufacturing, municipal solar installations, and carbon credit pooling that could generate new revenue streams for farmers, livestock operators, and local governments.
2006-2007	Feasibility Study – Integrated Bio-Diesel Refinery	SouthGrow partnered with regional economic development organizations and industry partners to support a feasibility study examining the viability of developing an integrated biodiesel refinery and oilseed crushing facility in Southern Alberta.	The project explored how the region's strong oilseed production base could support value-added biofuel manufacturing while contributing to the growing renewable energy economy.	The feasibility study assessed opportunities to convert locally grown oilseeds into biodiesel through a regional crushing and refining facility, creating a potential new market for farm producers while generating value-added processing jobs and strengthening the region's role in renewable fuels.
2007-2008	Green Growth Plan (SAAEP Economic Development Plan)	A Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership plan that examined how to grow the alternative energy economy in the region.	The plan helped organize regional thinking around wind, solar, bioenergy, and related investment opportunities.	Partners received a shared economic development framework instead of working on energy issues in isolation.

2007-2008	Waste to Energy Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow partnered with Economic Development Lethbridge and Alberta SouthWest through the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership (SAAEP) to commission an engineering study examining waste streams across the region and evaluating technologies that could convert municipal and agricultural waste into energy. The study analyzed regional waste generation, assessed waste-to-energy technologies such as gasification and plasma arc systems, and evaluated economic and operational considerations for potential facilities.	Municipal waste management costs were rising and most waste in the region was being landfilled. Communities needed credible analysis to determine whether new waste-to-energy technologies could reduce landfill demand and create economic value from waste streams.	The study provided municipalities with a regional understanding of waste volumes, disposal costs, and potential energy recovery options. It demonstrated that recovering energy from waste could significantly reduce landfill use while generating electricity and heat, helping communities explore long-term solutions that could lower waste management costs and create new economic opportunities.
2008-2009	Carbon Credit Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow produced an opportunity profile analyzing how farmers, feedlots, municipalities, and other organizations in the region could generate and sell carbon credits through emerging emissions trading systems. The report examined potential offset projects such as low-till farming, methane capture, improved manure management, and renewable energy integration.	Carbon markets were emerging as a new revenue opportunity for agricultural producers and municipalities, but participation required technical knowledge, verification processes, and scale to make projects economically viable.	The profile helped producers and local governments understand how carbon markets could create new income streams from improved environmental practices. It also identified the potential for cooperative or pooled approaches that could reduce administrative costs and allow more farms in the region to participate in carbon credit markets.
2008-2009	Innovation and Commercialization Study	SouthGrow helped assess the case for a southern Alberta innovation and commercialization network and then facilitated the network's creation.	Businesses need better access to commercialization supports, research links, and technology advisors.	The region gained the foundation for RINSA, a shared innovation support network.
2009-2010	Productivity Improvement Study	SouthGrow led a regional productivity initiative that surveyed businesses, conducted focus groups, and analyzed productivity challenges in the region's manufacturing and value-added sectors to identify strategies for improving competitiveness and operational performance.	Productivity improvements drive economic growth by helping businesses produce more value with the same or fewer resources, increasing wages, competitiveness, and long-term economic stability.	The project connected regional manufacturers and value-added businesses through a productivity networking group, developed a regional productivity publication, and distributed 32,000 copies highlighting best practices and successful local companies. These efforts helped businesses in SouthGrow communities learn practical strategies to improve efficiency, adopt new technologies, and remain competitive in global markets.

2009-2010	SouthGrow Business Trends	SouthGrow commissioned a regional economic study analyzing business trends across southern Alberta communities, examining industry performance, business conditions, and emerging economic patterns affecting the region.	Local governments and economic development leaders need accurate data on business conditions in order to make informed decisions about investment attraction, workforce development, and economic policy.	The study provided SouthGrow communities with evidence-based insights about regional business trends, helping municipal leaders and economic developers understand which sectors were growing, which were struggling, and where new opportunities existed. This information helped communities make better decisions about economic development strategies and business support programs.
2009-2010	Wind Power Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow produced an investment attraction opportunity profile outlining the region's wind energy potential, including market trends, infrastructure advantages, and opportunities for wind turbine manufacturing, assembly, and project development in southern Alberta.	Renewable energy development can create major investment, construction jobs, and long-term energy infrastructure in rural regions with strong wind resources.	The report positioned SouthGrow communities as a prime location for wind energy development and related manufacturing by highlighting strong wind resources, transportation links along the CanaMEX corridor, and supportive municipal partnerships. This helped communities promote the region to renewable energy investors and developers seeking locations for wind farms, manufacturing, and supply chain operations
2010-2011	Bio Energy Opportunity Profile	SouthGrow served as the managing partner of the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership (SAAEP) and coordinated a multi-project research initiative examining bio-fuel and alternative energy opportunities for the region. The initiative included a biodiesel feasibility study, regional consultations through the Green Growth Plan, identification of bio-fuel industry investment opportunities, and analysis of waste-to-energy technologies relevant to southern Alberta.	Agricultural producers and rural communities were facing volatile commodity prices and increasing interest in renewable energy. Regional stakeholders needed credible research and coordinated planning to determine whether bio-fuel production, waste-to-energy systems, and alternative energy industries could become viable economic opportunities.	The initiative produced multiple technical studies and consultations that helped producers, municipalities, and investors evaluate new value-added markets for agricultural feedstocks such as canola. It also positioned southern Alberta as a region actively pursuing alternative energy investment and provided the information needed for producers and communities to participate in emerging renewable energy industries.
2015-2016	Broadband Infrastructure in SouthGrow	A broadband infrastructure study that documented regional assets, gaps, and service issues in southern Alberta.	Communities needed evidence before they could push for upgrades or plan local solutions.	Members received a clearer picture of broadband conditions and where future work should focus.

2015-2016	Hospitality and Tourism Investment Study	SouthGrow partnered with Alberta Culture and Tourism and regional partners to commission a comprehensive study identifying tourism development opportunities in the region and preparing investment-ready business cases to attract private tourism investors.	Tourism investment requires clear market data and defined opportunities before private investors will commit capital to new attractions, accommodations, or tourism businesses.	The study identified specific tourism development opportunities capable of increasing visitation and tourism spending in the region. It also produced investment packages and strategies to promote these opportunities to entrepreneurs and investors, helping position SouthGrow communities as destinations for new tourism businesses and economic growth.
2016-2017	Community Broadband Report	SouthGrow commissioned and coordinated the development of a regional broadband master plan to assess internet infrastructure gaps, map underserved areas, and identify strategic investment opportunities to improve high-speed internet access across SouthGrow member communities.	Reliable high-speed internet is essential infrastructure for modern rural economies, enabling businesses, farms, schools, and residents to participate fully in digital markets and services.	The master plan gave SouthGrow communities a shared roadmap for improving broadband connectivity and a credible evidence base to pursue provincial and federal infrastructure funding. This strengthened the region's ability to advocate for rural broadband investment and helped communities compete for programs designed to expand high-speed internet access.
2018-2019	MicroCHP Pilot Project	SouthGrow partnered with ATCO Gas and Alberta Agriculture and Forestry to administer an applied research project testing micro combined heat and power (microCHP) units in a real agricultural production facility. The project involved installing two microCHP units, monitoring their performance for a full year, and producing reports on energy usage, costs, and greenhouse gas impacts.	Energy costs are a major expense for agricultural operations. Producers need reliable data before investing in new technologies that could improve efficiency and reduce operating costs.	This project generated real-world data on an emerging energy technology in an agricultural setting, helping producers and policymakers understand whether microCHP systems could reduce energy costs and improve efficiency on farms. The findings also informed future government programs and private sector investment in on-farm energy technologies.
2019-2020	Regional Skills Gap Study	A regional labour market study focused on skills gaps and workforce needs in southern Alberta.	Understanding skills shortages helps shape future labour attraction and retention work.	The region gained evidence to guide future labour market projects instead of relying only on anecdote.

2019-2020	Renewable Energy Impact Report	SouthGrow commissioned an independent third-party analysis to evaluate the economic impacts, property value effects, and community experiences associated with the proposed Buffalo Plains wind project in Vulcan County.	Large renewable energy projects can create community debate, and municipal leaders need credible independent analysis to understand the real economic impacts and risks before supporting major developments.	The study provided communities with evidence-based analysis showing the potential economic benefits of the project, including millions in municipal tax revenue, landowner payments, construction jobs, and long-term employment. By clarifying real impacts and comparing experiences from other Alberta communities, SouthGrow helped local leaders and residents make informed decisions about renewable energy development in the region.
2019-2020	Cost Benefit Analysis of Alberta Rural Broadband	A study that examined the costs and benefits of better rural broadband access in Alberta. For maximal impact the study covered the entire province.	Evidence on costs and benefits strengthens the case for government and partner action. The benefits demonstrated were sizeable and convincing.	Members got research they could use in advocacy for better rural internet service. The study was influential in unlocking public funding for broadband projects at a time of tight budgets.
2021-2022	Terragraph Pilot Project	SouthGrow evaluated and piloted Terragraph wireless broadband technology in southern Alberta, coordinating a trial deployment in Milk River and developing regional expansion projects with internet service providers and municipalities. The initiative included building a community scale pilot network and preparing shovel ready regional deployments for multiple villages and hamlets.	Small rural communities often face extremely high costs for fibre broadband infrastructure, leaving them behind in the digital economy. Affordable alternatives are needed to deliver high speed connectivity to villages that traditional providers will not serve.	SouthGrow helped identify and demonstrate a lower cost technology capable of delivering fibre like internet speeds to rural villages for a fraction of the cost of traditional fibre builds. By coordinating pilots, partnerships with local ISPs, and funding applications, SouthGrow advanced a scalable model that could close the digital divide for multiple small communities in southern Alberta.
2022-2023	Regional Grad Retention Strategy	SouthGrow served as funding partner and convener for a regional graduate retention strategy project.	Keeping young talent in the region is important for long-term labour force and business growth.	Partners received a regional strategy to inform future retention and workforce projects.

## Collaborations

Year	Project	What it is	Why it matters	What did you get?
2004 to Present	REDA Collaboration	SouthGrow works with Alberta's other Regional Economic Development Alliances on shared advocacy, provincial relationships, and joint initiatives.	A collective voice gives rural regions more influence than any one alliance speaking alone.	Members benefit from stronger provincial advocacy for REDA funding and rural economic development priorities.
2007 to Present	Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership	SouthGrow is a founding partner in SAAEP, a regional collaboration focused on alternative and renewable energy development.	Energy issues cross municipal lines and require shared planning, policy work, and investment attraction.	Communities gain access to shared energy education, advocacy, and project development support.
2011 to Present	Regional Innovation Network of Southern Alberta	SouthGrow participates in RINSA with post-secondary, research, and economic development partners to support innovation and commercialization.	Rural businesses often need links to expertise and innovation systems beyond their own community.	The region gains a shared innovation network that connects businesses to support and technical resources.
2016 to Present	Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative	SouthGrow helps lead SAITI, a regional investment and trade collaboration for southern Alberta.	A regional platform lets communities market shared strengths to outside investors and trade partners.	Members gain a broader investment and trade brand than most could build on their own.
2017 - 2020	Peaks to Prairies EV Network	SouthGrow participated in the Peaks to Prairies EV network work that linked charging infrastructure across southern Alberta.	A connected network makes EV travel more practical across rural areas and tourism corridors.	The region gained early EV corridor planning and infrastructure momentum that later supported charger programs.
2019 to Present	Highway 3 Twinning Development Association	SouthGrow supports H3TDA with board participation, matching funds, and advocacy support.	Highway 3 is a major trade and transportation corridor that affects business costs, safety, and investment readiness.	Members gain a stronger, coordinated voice for twinning and corridor improvements.
2020 to Present	Canada's Premier Food Corridor	SouthGrow supports Canada's Premier Food Corridor as a sub-regional cluster brand for agri-food growth.	Cluster branding helps market sector strengths that cross municipal boundaries.	The region gains another shared tool for promoting agri-food opportunities and partner projects.
2021 to Present	Canada's Western Gateway	SouthGrow supports Canada's Western Gateway as a sub-regional collaboration focused on trade and logistics positioning.	Trade and logistics opportunities often depend on corridor scale rather than single municipalities.	Members gain shared branding and coordination for corridor-based opportunities.
2023 - Present	Blackfoot Signage Project	SouthGrow and partners support a Blackfoot place-name signage program across southwestern Alberta.	The project advances reconciliation and strengthens cultural tourism through visible Indigenous place names.	Communities gain access to grant support, shared branding, and translation support for signage they may not deliver alone.

## Community Supports

Year	Project	What it is	Why it matters	What did you get?
2012-2013	Community Ec Dev Strategies	SouthGrow supported community economic development strategies for member municipalities through planning work and local consultation.	Smaller communities often need outside help to build clear economic development priorities and action plans.	Members received local strategies and action items to guide future development decisions.
2012-2013	Investment Readiness Assessment	SouthGrow worked with member communities and site selection specialists to assess local investment readiness.	Communities need current information and preparedness before they can respond well to investor inquiries.	Members got a clearer picture of what they needed to improve to compete for investment.
2023-2024	Regional Investment Initiative with Invest Alberta	Through SAITI, SouthGrow worked with Invest Alberta to complete and share community opportunity profiles.	A province-connected profile system helps local opportunities move into wider investment conversations.	Member communities received profiles that could be shared with Invest Alberta and used in SouthGrow marketing. These profiles also inform Invest Alberta's internal database of opportunities.
2023-Present	Grant Advice Hotline	SouthGrow offers direct grant advice and funding strategy support to municipalities, non-profits, and regional partners.	Many groups need help finding the right grant and building a strong funding case.	Communities and partners receive expert support that can improve their chances of landing outside funding.
2024-2025	Housing Needs Assessments	SouthGrow completed affordable housing needs assessments for member communities that could not easily produce them on their own.	These assessments are often needed before communities can plan housing projects or pursue housing funding.	Members gained a required planning document to support housing strategy and grant applications.
2025-2028	Community Economic Development Program	SouthGrow secured funding for a three-year community economic development program and assigned dedicated staff support.	The program shifts more capacity to the local level while keeping regional support in place.	Member communities gain direct economic development support that many could not fund on their own.



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### About SouthGrow Regional Initiative

SouthGrow is an economic development alliance of twenty-nine south central Alberta communities committed to working together to achieve prosperity for the region. Representing over 180,000 people, SouthGrow is committed to assisting communities, organizations, businesses, and people in the region to further their economic development goals and to maintain the high quality of life.