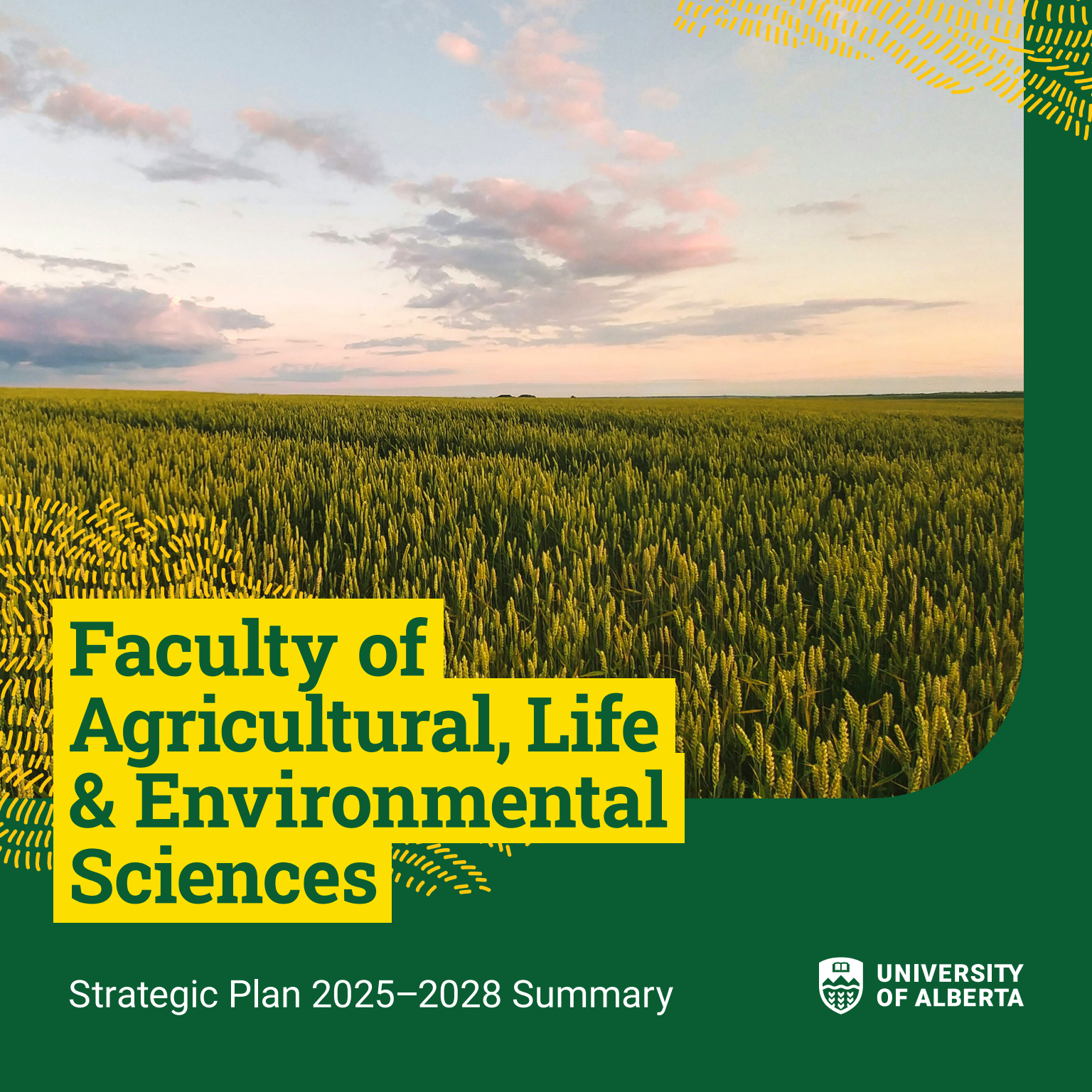




Faculty of Agricultural, Life & Environmental Sciences

Strategic Plan 2025–2028 Summary



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs and research stations are primarily located on the territory of the Nêhiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/ Saulteaux), lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7 and 8 and homeland of the Métis.

The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems and cultures of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations.

The ALES story

Over the past century, ALES has been a cornerstone institution, shaping daily life from food and clothing to energy, water, and the natural environment. Its extensive network spans academic partners, governments, communities, educational institutions and industry – from Alberta to global research hubs.

Within the University of Alberta context, ALES makes major contributions in its subject matter areas and has supported the university in ranking **8th globally** for impact on sustainability, **2nd in Canada** for UN Sustainable Development Goal #15: Life on Land and **5th globally** for #2: Zero Hunger¹. ALES's programs are nationally and globally respected, with Agricultural Sciences ranked 14th globally and 1st in Canada¹, and Agriculture + Forestry ranked 3rd in Canada².

Through 2025, ALES has undertaken the development of a Strategic Plan to direct activities over the coming 3 years. The recommendations and actions in the ALES Strategic Plan are aligned to be consistent with the University of Alberta's wider strategic plans, including:

- Shape: The University Strategic Plan
- The Strategic Plan For Research And Innovation (SPRI)
- The Student Experience Action Plan (SEAP)
- Braiding Past, Present And Future – the U of A Indigenous Strategic Plan
- The Access, Community + Belonging Action Plan
- Built for Purpose
- One University Operating Model

¹ Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), 2025

² Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), 2025

³ Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, 2025



17,500+ alumni, with over **60% still living in Alberta**, working in agriculture, environmental stewardship, health, and many other industries.



\$48 million in annual external research funding, backed by **320 sponsors** and **72 private-sector partners** over the past five years.



25,000 acres (10,000 ha) of farm and ranch land used for education, research, and outreach.

Message from the Dean



Since joining the Faculty of ALES, I've been deeply impressed by the strength of our academic programs, the impact of our research, and the commitment of our faculty and staff. We are a community of educators, researchers, and professionals working across disciplines that matter — including sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, food systems, human health, and the complex relationships between people and their environments.

However, like many faculties in today's environment, ALES faces growing pressures: faculty retirements without the ability to fully replace them, challenging resource reallocation, facility aging, and external uncertainties ranging from fluctuating student enrolment to global supply chain instability. The faculty is committed to ensuring our approach, programs and curriculum integrate Indigenous knowledges and experiences.

This strategic plan will guide us to embrace change and recalibrate our structures, programs, facilities, research priorities, and partnerships which are all necessary to sustain and enhance our relevance well into the future. It is a blueprint for impact and resilience — positioning ALES to deliver meaningful results, inspire the next generation of researchers and learners, and lead necessary progress in areas critical to Alberta, Canada, and the world.

Rickey Yada

*Dean, Faculty of Agricultural,
Life & Environmental Sciences
College of Natural and Applied Sciences
University of Alberta*

Strategic plan summary

Process

This strategic plan charts a bold path forward. It has been developed through extensive engagement with stakeholders. This included:

- Interviews and workshops with 16 members of the **ALES leadership team**.
- **43 additional interviews** with alumni, university leadership, industry leaders, Indigenous advisors, government and more.
- Over **600 survey responses** from internal and external stakeholders received between April and May 2025.
- Over **50 attendees at 6 town hall sessions** for students, faculty and staff held in person in March 2025.
- Advice, direction and feedback from the **ALES Dean and senior leadership team**.

It reflects a shared ambition to reimagine the faculty's impact, sharpen its identity, refresh its capabilities, and lead through research and education in ways that meaningfully improve lives, ecosystems, and economies.

Key Considerations

The next three years represent a transformative window. ALES faces a set of complex internal challenges such as uneven departmental structures, resource constraints, aging facilities, and reduced staffing flexibility due to hiring freezes. At the same time, the faculty must navigate a rapidly shifting external landscape. Post-secondary institutions are competing more aggressively for students and research funding. The credibility and value of university degrees are under increased scrutiny. Climate change, biodiversity loss,

and geopolitical instability are intensifying pressures on the systems that ALES seeks to protect and transform. In short, ALES must not only adapt to change but drive it.

Despite these pressures, ALES is uniquely positioned for leadership. The faculty's four departments — **Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science (AFNS)**, **Human Ecology (HE)**, **Renewable Resources (RENR)**, and **Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology (REES)** — bring together a full spectrum of natural, life, and social sciences that enables ALES to develop comprehensive solutions to the world's grand challenges.

This process revealed a wide range of internal and external considerations that have shaped the vision, desired outcomes and recommendations made in this plan.

Desired Outcomes and Vision

These considerations have shaped the 2025–2028 ALES Strategic Plan around 5 key outcomes:

1. **Increase ALES's relevance to, and impact on, society**
2. **Provide world class infrastructure for research and teaching**
3. **Improve and enhance the student experience**
4. **Effectively communicate ALES's identity and activities**
5. **Improve organizational effectiveness, accountability and resilience**

Each of these outcomes has several constituent recommendations, which are summarized on the following page.

This strategy aligns directly with other University of Alberta strategic frameworks, and the principles embedded within these documents will be considered throughout. Additionally, this strategy will support ALES to deliver against key global goals, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — especially SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, SDG 13: Climate Action, and SDG 15: Life on Land.

Above all, this strategic plan reflects the collective wisdom and ambition of the ALES community. It is grounded in evidence, shaped by consultation, and driven by a shared commitment to excellence and relevance. Through it, ALES commits to its vision to not just be a place of knowledge, but a force for impact — to advance and disseminate knowledge, innovation, and practice that serves ecosystems, communities, and economies in Alberta, in Canada, and around the world.



Key Considerations

External

- Increasing demands for **secure and sustainable food systems, ecosystems and human environments**.
- Better **integration of teaching and research with industry and real-world needs** and opportunities.
- **Growth of other institutions**, and positioning ALES as a **preferred partner** for the application of fundamental research to **real-world issues** and effective teaching.
- Ongoing **budget cuts** and hiring freezes.
- Better **communication** of ALES's identity, focus and impact.
- Reduction in **international students**.
- The **growth of AI** (Artificial Intelligence).
- **Credibility** of post-secondary institutions and value of degrees.

Internal

- A new **One University model** with colleges and university-wide services
- Evolving plans for the **south campus facilities**.
- Disparate ALES **department sizes and scopes**.
- **Balancing** research and teaching quality and increasing **experiential learning** opportunities.
- Lack of clarity regarding **existing workload policy and FEC standards**.
- Opportunities for better **interdisciplinary collaboration**.
- Further integration of **sustainability and Indigenous knowledge**.
- Better alignment of accountability with reporting.
- Shared **responsibilities for facilities and programs**.
- Limited **onboarding and support service** for all (particularly for **graduate students**).

Desired Outcomes

1

Increase ALES's relevance to, and impact on, society | ALES will deepen partnerships with industry, Indigenous communities, and society to ensure research and teaching address pressing societal needs. The faculty will incentivize interdisciplinary work, co-develop applied research with external partners, and modernize academic offerings to reflect real-world priorities.

2

Provide world class infrastructure for research and teaching | ALES will define a long-term infrastructure vision (for research farms, teaching labs etc.) consistent with Built for Purpose and complete a utilization review to support future investment, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration. This will address issues with outdated or underutilized infrastructure and facilities.

3

Improve and enhance the student experience | ALES will expand experiential learning across its programs, work to align curricula more closely with industry and societal needs though improved teaching quality and relevance — ensuring students graduate equipped to lead with purpose.

4

Effectively communicate ALES's identity and activities | ALES will clarify and promote its distinctive contributions through targeted communications strategies, stronger storytelling that highlights real-world impact, and exploring the potential for an updated and more inclusive faculty name. Internally, improved communication will break down silos and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration.

5

Improve organizational effectiveness, accountability, and resilience | To enhance its agility, ALES will explore rebalancing departments and clarify roles. New advisory structures and succession planning will help ensure continuity and better alignment of resources with strategic priorities.

Recommendations

Desired outcomes		Recommendations
1	Increase ALES's relevance to, and impact on, society	A. Create or support existing departmental external advisory committees B. Incentivize interdisciplinary research C. Develop sustainable funding partnerships for research D. Use the ongoing work on course and program rationalization and AI integration at the U of A to promote internal teaching innovation
2	Provide world class infrastructure for research and teaching	A. Create a vision and strategy for the future of research and teaching infrastructure (e.g. research farms, teaching labs etc.) in ALES B. Complete an infrastructure utilization review
3	Improve and enhance the student experience	A. Enable more experiential learning opportunities B. Use the ongoing work on course and program rationalization to review and improve program relevance to better serve students' needs and career prospects
4	Effectively communicate ALES's identity and activities	A. Explore an updated faculty name to reflect the breadth of ALES's subject matter through an identity task force B. Further define and focus departmental and interdisciplinary areas of global excellence and growth C. Improve external communication of focus areas and impact D. Improve internal communication of faculty activities
5	Improve organizational effectiveness, accountability and resilience	A. Explore realigned department sizes and influence B. Create Dean's advisory boards C. Develop and implement departmental renewal plans for key research and teaching roles D. Implement a high-performance organizational design E. Assign accountabilities and measures of success for the strategic plan F. Ensure clarity and understanding of existing workload policy and FEC standards G. Work with college and other university-wide services to improve service delivery H. Work with university-wide services to ensure onboarding and support for staff, faculty and students (particularly graduate students in partnership with Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies) I. Foster cross-department and cross-faculty relationships through structured and informal engagement



Growing Alberta's economy

Experts and research in ALES cover Alberta's important resources, like canola and wheat, as well as policy and economics. Advancing technology and educating the next generation in these areas boosts the province's sustainability and profitability.

Next Steps

Implementation of the ALES Strategic Plan will begin in Fall 2025 and unfold progressively through 2028, following the academic cycle.

In the **2025–26 academic year**, the faculty will focus on foundational actions that establish direction and enable early progress. These include:

- Establishing an accountability framework including of roles and responsibilities for implementing the strategic plan.
- Setting up regular communication back to the ALES internal and external community on progress against this plan.
- Creating internal and external advisory structures for the faculty through the Dean's Advisory Board and Departmental Advisory Committees
- Launching the identity task force which will explore a renewed faculty name and seek to improve definition and communication of focus areas for the coming years.
- Exploring realigned department sizes and influence, including engagement with external stakeholders to steer this.
- Key reviews — such as infrastructure utilization, renewal plans and identifying opportunities to enable more experiential learning opportunities — will also be initiated during this period to inform future planning and partnerships.
- The faculty is committed to ensuring our approach, programs and curriculum integrate Indigenous knowledge and experiences.



In **2026–27**, ALES will move into targeted execution of high-priority initiatives.

- Program relevance and curriculum flexibility will be addressed through program reviews and external consultations.
- Enhanced experiential learning opportunities will be piloted across undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Interdisciplinary research will be supported through internal seed funding and strategic partnership development.
- Planning and early action on a long-term infrastructure strategy, covering teaching labs, research farms, ranches, collaboration spaces and many more.
- Steps will be taken to improve support and onboarding processes, particularly for graduate students.

By **2027–28**, successful initiatives will be scaled across departments and units:

- Key focus areas for ALES will be well defined across all departments and embedded in internal and external communications to support the faculty's long-term goals.
- Updated curricula and enhanced student supports and opportunities will be implemented across all areas.
- Deeper research-industry partnership opportunities will have been identified and will be underway.
- A clear route forward will be mapped and underway for infrastructure upgrades and faculty renewal.
- Organization wide initiatives will be underway to improve transparency, deliver effective decision-making and support processes, and improve relationships between members of the ALES community and beyond.

Through this staged and academic-year-aligned approach, ALES will ensure that its strategy leads to lasting, measurable improvements in relevance, impact, and student experience.



Boosting our current and future applied research projects will have direct community impact, from improving the food we eat to the clothes we wear, and benefitting the animals, people and world around us.

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