

July 28, 2025

John Barlow
Member of Parliament for Foothills
Shadow Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
Room 310, Justice Building
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6
Via email: John.Barlow@parl.gc.ca

Dear Shadow Minister Barlow,

Re: Request for Municipal Data on Gopher Damage and Agricultural Impacts

The Agricultural Service Boards of the municipalities of Special Area No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4 conducted a producer survey in July 2025 to capture the concerns of our farmers and ranchers on the impact of Richardson's ground squirrels (commonly referred to as gophers) on agricultural lands in the east-central region of Alberta.

Richardson's ground squirrel populations have exploded since the de-registration of 2% Liquid Strychnine (PCP#30433) in 2021 by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) and the impact is weighing heavily on the pocketbooks of our producers. While declared an *agricultural nuisance* under Alberta's *Agricultural Pests Act*, control of the invasive species is left entirely up to producers, currently with little to no effective, efficient, or sustainable methods of control.

If after years of severe drought, exploding grasshopper populations and skyrocketing agricultural input prices were not enough, our farmers and ranchers are now experiencing devastating crop losses, reduced carrying capacities on pastures and destroyed winter forage stockpiles, on top of increased equipment and livestock maintenance costs due to gophers. As you will read in the attached survey summary, our producers are faced with an exponentially growing pest population whose economic impact goes much further than lost commodity production, but extends into increased operating costs, animal welfare concerns, producer mental health impacts, decreased food security and natural resource losses, to name a few.

As an Agricultural Service Board (ASB) under the *Alberta Agricultural Service Board Act*, it is our duty to advise and assist policy makers, direct weed and pest control and soil conservation programs, and promote, enhance, and protect viable and sustainable agriculture. The current gopher populations are threatening the viability of our food producers, and in turn, our food security. The massive amounts of forage these pests consume leave large tracts of land vulnerable to nuisance and noxious weeds which thrive in disturbed areas. The farmer is then left



with no crops to sell, and yet, still must control the invasive plants left behind, often from a deficit bank account.

In an area of the province that was formed as a result of the depths of the 1930's depression and massive topsoil degradation due to prolonged droughts and ill-advised farming practices, we are once again seeing soil erosion issues. As the gophers consume both native and planted vegetation, our sensitive soils are once more subjected to wind and water erosion events, causing continual topsoil loss that we fought so hard to accumulate over the last 90+ years. Furthermore, as we suspected, our survey confirmed that desperate land stewards are creating their own concoctions, often from old wives' tales from generations past, in attempts to control the plaguing pests. Our ASB's fear what, although well-intentioned, harmful contaminants could be introduced into our soils, leach into our water systems and affect our sensitive ecosystems.

Under appropriate labelled use, 2% Liquid Strychnine as a single feed bait, is an efficient and effective tool in the toolbox for producers to control Richardson's ground squirrels in agricultural lands. While the PMRA has offered alternative rodenticides for control of Richardson's ground squirrels, you will see our survey of 110 producers indicates they are not nearly as practical or efficacious as suggested. As part of an integrated pest management approach, the re-registration of 2% Liquid Strychnine would be an integral step to managing these devastating pests and allow Canadian farmers and ranchers to do what they do best- feed the world safely and sustainably.

Please review the attached survey results and producer-provided photos to demonstrate the impact of the Richardson's ground squirrel pest population on the agricultural sector, which contributed over \$149 billion of the country's GDP and directly employed over 2.3 million people in 2024, and who proudly puts food on the tables of Canadians.

Given the above, we strongly request your support for an emergency re-registration of 2% Liquid Strychnine and to review all other possible programs to minimize the population growth and economic impact of Richardson's ground squirrels on agricultural producers.

Respectfully,

Nathan Berg, Chair

Special Area No. 2 ASB

On behalf of the Agricultural Service Boards of:

Special Area No. 2

Lee Quaschnick
Derek Christensen
Neal Roes
Brad Osadzuk
Nathan Berg

Special Area No. 3

John Kimber
Kevin Wilson
Scott Woods
Walter Scarff
Jerry Logan

Special Area No. 4

Laurie FERENCE
Gordon Long
Todd Murphy
Corinne Kelts
Alex Coulton
Jason Bishell

Attached: *What We Heard: Impact of Richardson's Ground Squirrels on Agricultural Lands in Special Areas*

Cc: Honorable Nate Horner, MLA Drumheller- Stettler