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MLA Ty Lund co-chairs ag research institute

Farmer and politician says adding value is key to prosperity

Edmonton . . . Rocky Mountain House MLA Ty Lund brings 20 years of political smarts – and a lifetime of farming experience – to his role as co-chair of the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute (AARI).

He joins industry co-chair Art Froehlich in leading a board tasked with enhancing the economic contributions of Alberta's agricultural and food industry through support for research, development and technology transfer, with a strategic emphasis on life sciences. Specific areas of focus currently include bioproducts, sustainable production and agri-health-value added.

Lund's farming roots go back to 1906 when his grandfather homesteaded near Rocky Mountain House, where the six-term MLA was born. He and his family still farm beef, grains and timber in the area. His political leadership has included stints as minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and Alberta Environmental Protection, giving him a solid background in government's role in resource management and sustainability.

MLA Lund says he has seen a fundamental shift take place within the Alberta agriculture sector over the past few decades.

Since the mid 1970s, the profit margin per unit of production has been narrowing. "Prior to that, we could often set the price of our products. Someone else then marketed and sold our product. Now, we are no longer the price-setters, so we must use new technology, new genetics, new breeds of plant and animal to maintain our margins. Farmers have to get into marketing their own goods. We have to be very educated as to what the market is asking for."

And what the market is asking for, according to Lund, is value-added goods that can compete against raw commodities from elsewhere

"We're in an extremely competitive market," explains Lund. "Alberta's agricultural products have to compete globally against those from heavily-subsidized nations, so we need to be smarter and do a better job of finding niche markets where we can be successful."

Also high on Lund's agenda for AARI is the potential role farmers could play in the ever-expanding market of biofuels. "Cellulose can be used to produce ethanol, so we need to examine what non-food residues and deciduous tree hybrids we could be developing to make this product. A lot of the land currently being farmed in Alberta could quite profitably be planted with energy crops such as fast-growing trees."

For more information, click on <http://www.aari.ab.ca>, or contact Executive Director Stan Blade at stan.blade@gov.ab.ca, (780) 427-0367.