

Central Okanagan Regional Agricultural Strategy

Project Update, March 2025



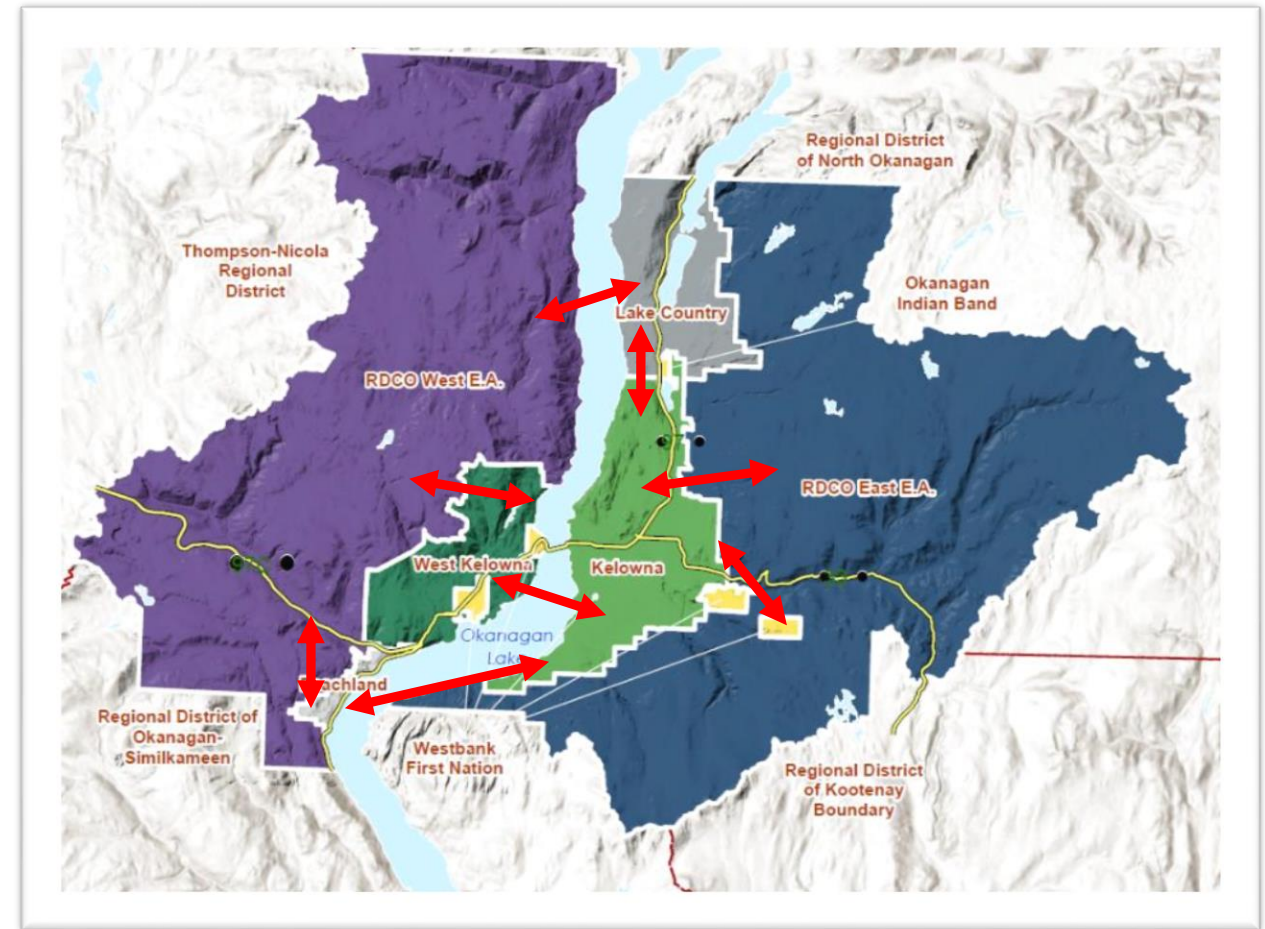
Regional Agricultural Strategy (RAS)

- Agriculture is an important part of the heritage and cultural identity of the Central Okanagan.
- However, several challenges are facing agriculture in the region, such as pressures from population growth, a changing climate, and an evolving economy.
- In response, the RDCO is updating the Regional Agricultural Strategy (RAS)

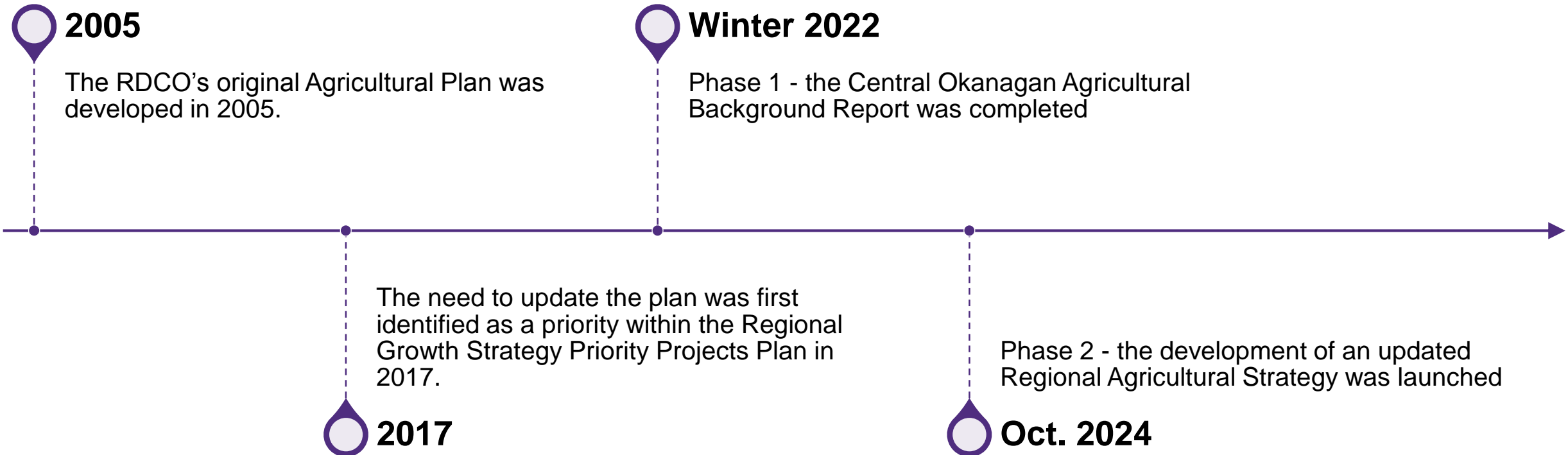


Background

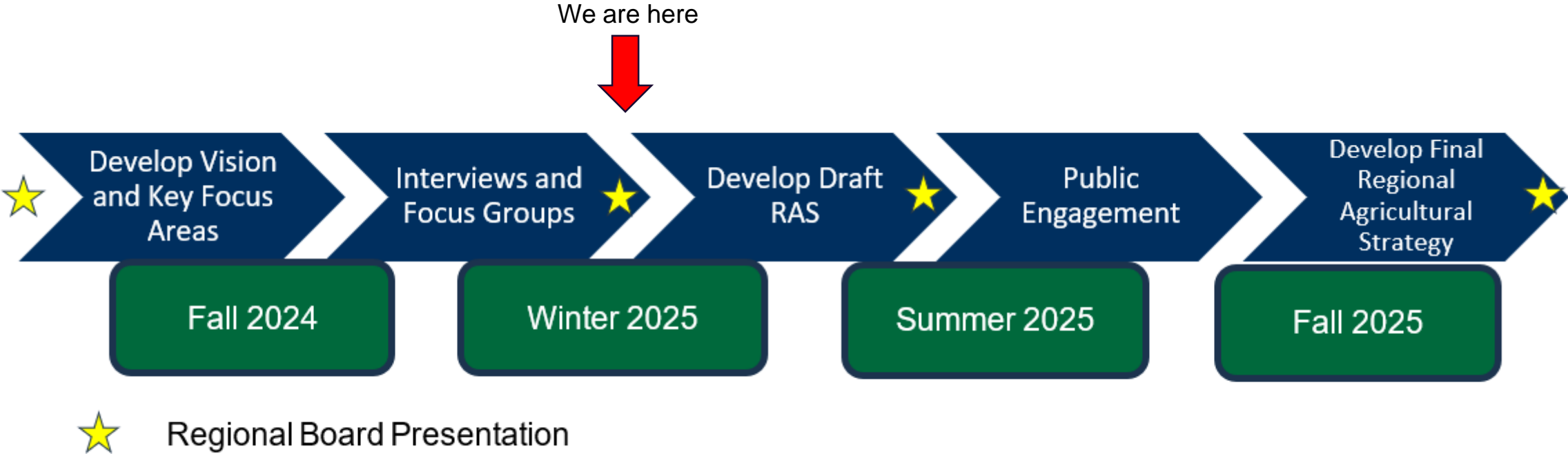
- Updating the Regional Agricultural Strategy (RAS) is part of implementing the Regional Growth Strategy and tackling regional planning initiatives on topics that cross jurisdictional boundaries
- The RAS will develop a coordinated regional approach to supporting a thriving agricultural sector in the Central Okanagan.



Regional Agricultural Strategy Process



Phase 2 Project Timeline

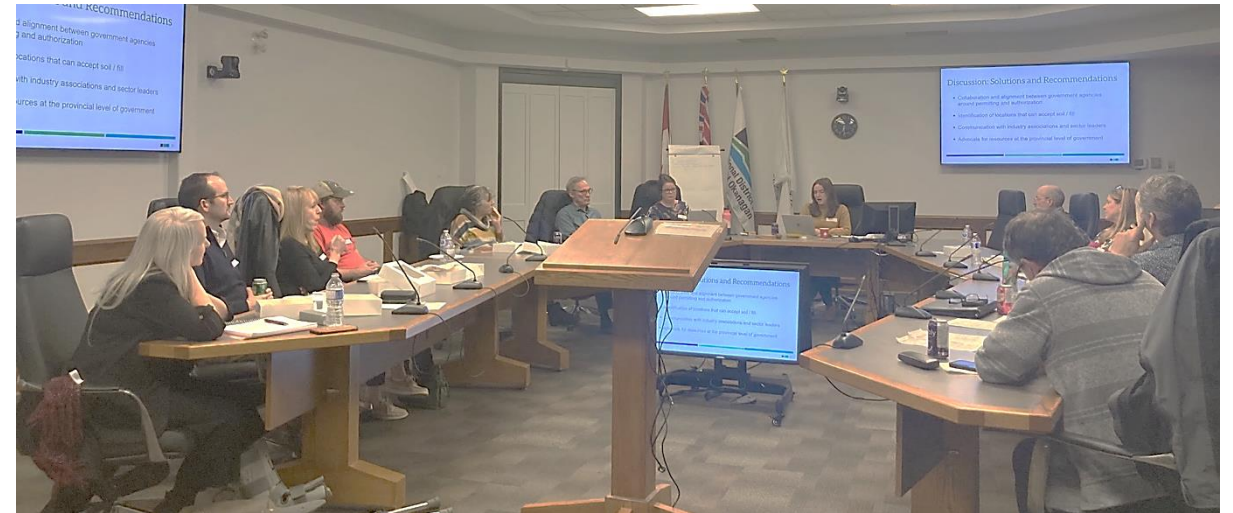


Regional Agricultural Strategy (Phase 2) Engagement Update



Forms of Engagement

- 3 Working Group meetings
- 3 Focus Group sessions:
 - Agricultural Industry
 - Development Industry
 - Government partners
- 12 Interviews



Focus group session with members of the agricultural community.

What We Heard: Key Themes

1. The Importance of the Agricultural Land Base

- Inconsistencies across communities (e.g. residential use)
- Densification barriers in urban areas (e.g. fire response restrictions)
- Farmland outside the ALR is less protected
- Noxious weeds are being spread through illegal soil movement
- Lack of extension services leads to a lack of crop diversification

What We Heard: Key Themes

2. Opportunities to work with WFN and ONA

- WFN is developing an updated invasive plants list
- Monitoring of soil movement from developments is being tracked by WFN
- WFN does not have a Soil Bylaw yet but is interested to see RDCO strategy
- ONA highlighted the need to prioritize water resources

What We Heard: Key Themes

3. Soil Deposition is a Growing Concern

- Soil deposition volumes are increasing, due to accelerated housing development
- Lack of authorized (legal) soil deposit locations is leading to farms being dumping grounds
- Municipalities have soil bylaws, electoral areas do not – much of the soil is deposited in the electoral areas.
- The development industry has concerns with existing permitting processes and timelines, but agrees that soil deposit solutions are needed
- There have been dozens of soil deposition complaints received by RDCO compliance & enforcement over the past few years & they are increasing

What We Heard: Key Themes

4. Need to Plan for Climate Change and Emergency Preparedness with Agriculture in Mind

- Farmland and beneficial practices play a role in mitigating emergency events
- Crop diversification could assist with community food system resilience
- Some areas and/or farm types are more vulnerable than others to fires/floods
- Planning resources may need to include livestock relocation plans

What We Heard: Key Themes

5. Water Security is Critical for Successful Farming and Processing

- Interest in seeing a framework for prioritizing ag water use during droughts
- Preferential water pricing for agriculture is inconsistent across region
- Potential for additional conservation measures – more motivation if water is priced according to use
- ONA is interested in seeing more discussion on water prioritization

What We Heard: Key Themes

6. Farm Worker Housing Policies are Inconsistent

- Regional consistency is needed to provide clarity for farmers and an equal playing field
- Would like to see zoning aligned across jurisdictions so that it works for farmers and local governments
- Barriers: e.g. public hearings for farmworker housing but not for processing

What We Heard: Key Themes

7. Central Okanagan's Agricultural Sector would benefit from a Champion

- Support for a local-government shared Agricultural Coordinator or compliance officer position in Central Okanagan
- RDCO can act as an advocate to the province on key issues
- Messaging needs to be consistent across the region
- Note that language barriers exist in the agricultural community

Vision Statement

Central Okanagan agriculture feeds our community, our economy, and our future.

Agriculture in the Central Okanagan is based on strong relationships between the farming community, all levels of government, and Indigenous communities.

Farmland is protected, farms are thriving, and the community supports a regional food system that sustains present and future generations through a strong local business environment, water security, climate resilience, and the responsible adoption of technological innovation.



Early Draft Recommended Actions



Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 1: Increase Water Security for the Agri-Food Industry



Meet with OBWB to discuss potential water conservation incentives related to pricing models for agricultural water



Explore options such as large-scale, on-farm, water storage options, community-level irrigation systems



Partner with ONA, WFN, and other interested groups on a Water Sustainability Plan for the region

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 2: Preserve and Protect the Agricultural Land Base



Continue to work collaboratively to respect urban growth boundaries



Consider applying an Agricultural designation to farmland within/outside the ALR



Advocate to the province for greater extension services

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 3: Prepare for Climate Change and Emergencies with Agriculture in Mind



Develop an Agricultural Emergency Plan, including livestock relocation (e.g. IAFBC)



Meet with members of the agricultural community to discuss experiences with past emergencies, how to learn from those events.



Include agricultural resources in mapping and forecasting related to climate change and emergencies.

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 4: Collaborate with WFN and ONA



Work with WFN to learn from their monitoring / tracking of soil movement from developments.



Leverage areas of shared concern such as water resource management, emergency planning, and control of noxious weeds.

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 5: Address Soil and Fill Deposit & Removal



Explore outcomes in other regions (e.g. Fraser Valley) to be proactive.



Work to develop a simple and transparent regulatory framework for soil movement throughout the region, including closing bylaw gaps so the region is protected from unauthorized soil deposits on farmland.



Work with industry and the Province to identify locations where soil can be deposited quickly and effectively



Continue to explore tools and option to address complaints received by compliance and enforcement.

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 6: Create Certainty for Farm Worker Housing (FWH)



Convene a regional working group to develop a more consistent land use planning framework for farmworker housing



Focus on siting, location, temporary vs. permanent structures, etc.



Avoid focusing on urban areas for farmworker housing (not practical)

Early Draft Recommended Actions

Goal 7: Create Capacity to Educate, Advocate, and Implement



Meet with local government counterparts to discuss resourcing a shared Agricultural Coordinator or compliance officer position in the Central Okanagan

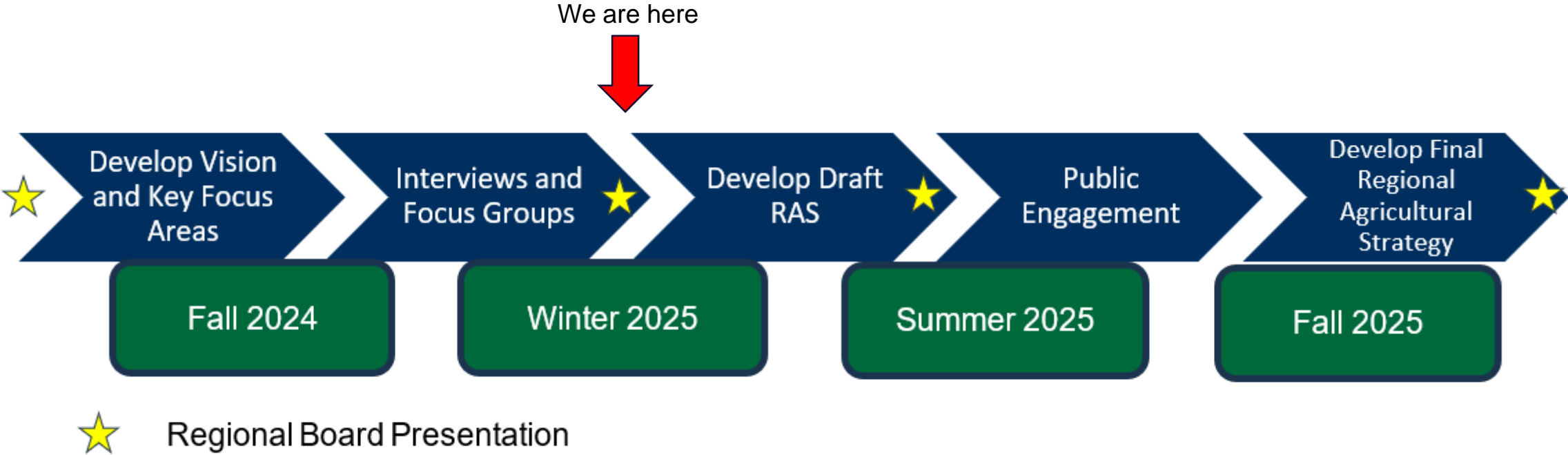


Look to the City of Kelowna's agricultural education initiative (e.g. signage) and build on that work



Work with the AAC to develop advocacy positions/strategies that have been identified in the RAS that are outside the jurisdiction of local government (regional and municipal)

Next Steps



Recommendation

All Directors - Unweighted Corporate Vote - Simple Majority (LGA s.208)

THAT the Regional Board receive the Regional Agricultural Strategy (Phase 2) update, for information;

AND THAT the Regional Board direct staff to proceed with developing the Draft Regional Agricultural Strategy based on the report from the Director of Development and Engineering Services dated March 20, 2025.