

Agriculture minister will meet with foothills residents

By Tanya Kostiw

Staff Reporter

A foothills councillor is encouraging residents to meet with the provincial agriculture minister and hear an update on current issues in the industry.

Alberta's Minister of Agriculture Evan Berger will give a presentation to residents at the Priddis Hall Feb. 4 and he will also field questions.

"The intention is to get people engaged in their political opportunity to have a say and get a chance to get to meet somebody who's doing a lot on behalf of our community and help continue to keep him in touch with what we're thinking," said MD of Foothills Coun. Suzanne Oel, who helped organize the event.

She said Berger is trying to bring attention to the rural perspective. Topics up for discussion at the event will include youth in agriculture, trade, opportunities in agriculture, Internet initiatives, updates on projects affecting the area and balancing competing interests.

She said Berger has good ideas on how to keep the younger generation involved in agriculture and he might discuss interna-



EVAN BERGER

Alberta's Minister of Agriculture

tional trade as well as internal.

Oel said there have been issues throughout the MD of Foothills regarding competing interests such as landowners upset with people accessing public lands for off-roading and also people behaving badly on road allowances. Some people abuse the land, cause damage and cut through peoples' private fences, she added.

Oel said Berger could also discuss planning for the future under the Land Use Framework.

"That's a real interesting one for me in particular because we're really trying to figure out ways of giving incentives to our land owners to compensate them in some way for being stew-

ards of the land," Oel explained.

Gloria Wilkinson is one of the directors at large for the southern Alberta group Action for Agriculture and owns a ranch in the MD of Foothills.

Action for Agriculture has raised \$100,000 for a study to demonstrate the market value for services emerging from land stewardship, which Berger has been following, she said.

Wilkinson explained how instead of developing their land, people who live along headwaters could transfer and sell density credits to others, allowing them to develop at a greater density.

"We've been watching other people do studies just talking about these ecological values but nobody has put money to them and so we thought well, how can we help ourselves and the rest of the farmers and ranchers to actually have this cash flow?" she explained.

Wilkinson said she encouraged people to take part in the meeting with the minister.

Meet your Ag Minister will take place Saturday, Feb. 4 at the Priddis Hall at 1 p.m.