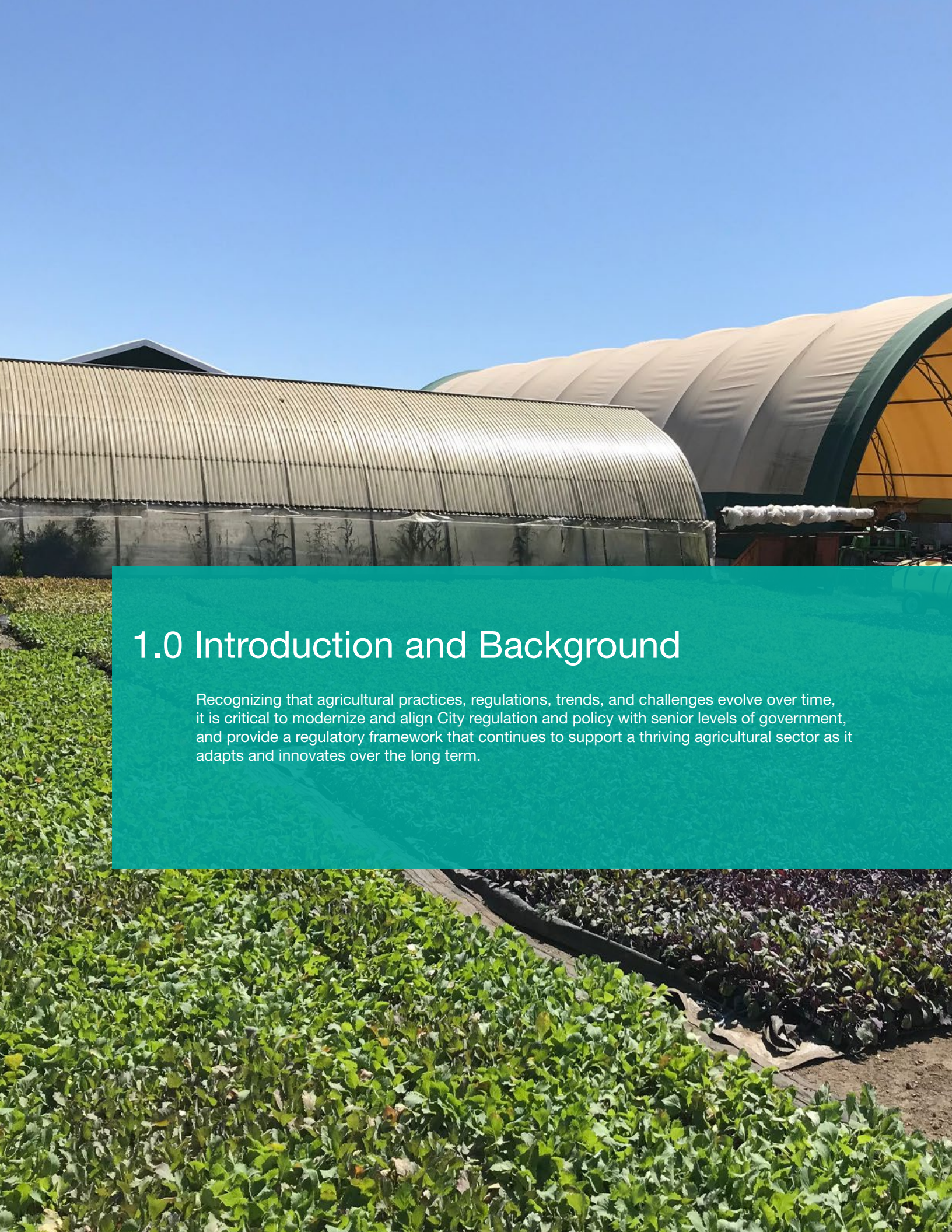


# AgRefresh

**STAGE 3 REPORT | EXCERPT**  
**INTRODUCTION**  
**& BACKGROUND**



## 1.0 Introduction and Background

Recognizing that agricultural practices, regulations, trends, and challenges evolve over time, it is critical to modernize and align City regulation and policy with senior levels of government, and provide a regulatory framework that continues to support a thriving agricultural sector as it adapts and innovates over the long term.

~72%

of the City is in the ALR <sup>A</sup>

~4,600

parcels in the ALR <sup>A</sup>

1,300+

farms in Abbotsford in 2015 <sup>B</sup>

1 in 5

Abbotsford jobs are related to the agriculture industry (2008)

\$853M

gross farm receipts in 2015 <sup>B</sup>

55%

of table eggs produced in BC come from Abbotsford <sup>B</sup>

45%

of chicken produced in BC comes from Abbotsford <sup>B</sup>

<sup>A</sup> City GIS 2020

<sup>B</sup> 2016 Census of Agriculture

## 1.1 Agriculture in Abbotsford

As one of the most intensively and diversely farmed areas of Canada, Abbotsford's agricultural sector is an important contributor locally, provincially, and nationally. With approximately 72% of the City's land base in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), agriculture has deep ties to the local economy and community identity. In 2015, Abbotsford farmers generated over \$850 million in gross farm receipts, translating to nearly 23% of total farm gate revenue for all of British Columbia (2016 Census of Agriculture).

## 1.2 What is AgRefresh?

Acknowledging the important strategic role the agriculture industry and land base play in Abbotsford, the City initiated a comprehensive planning process called AgRefresh in 2016. This initiative is reviewing and updating Abbotsford's agricultural policies, bylaws, and regulations, and establishing a framework for on-going bylaw compliance for lands within the ALR.

Importantly, the AgRefresh process is closely coordinating with the 'Provincial ALC and ALR Revitalization' initiative launched by the Ministry of Agriculture in early 2018. This on-going province-wide agricultural review overlaps with several topics being considered through AgRefresh, and has arguably introduced some of the most significant regulatory shifts brought forward since establishment of the Agricultural Land Commission in 1973.

### AgRefresh Project Deliverables

AgRefresh will deliver the following:

- Part 1: New and updated **Official Community Plan (OCP)** policies to reflect agriculture's important role in Abbotsford.
- Part 2: New and updated **Zoning Bylaw (ZB)** regulations for agricultural land uses, in coordination with OCP policies.
- Part 3: A **Bylaw Compliance Approach** tailored to the ALR to ensure farming areas are being used for agriculture.

### AgRefresh Objectives

- Create clarity and predictability for agricultural stakeholders, the broader community, and the City in regulating agricultural land uses in the ALR.
- Update key planning documents with improved agricultural land regulations and land use guidance, in coordination with senior levels of government.

## 1.3 AgRefresh Guiding Principles

The AgRefresh process is guided by five key principles:

1. Use an understandable and transparent process inclusive of the City's agricultural community and citizens.
2. Ensure Abbotsford is surrounded and sustained by a thriving and diverse agricultural sector in the future.
3. Clarify and define the City's role with respect to agriculture.
4. Enhance agricultural integrity by preserving, protecting, and sustaining agriculture and food within the context of broader City objectives.
5. Develop clear and concise bylaws and policies that are practical, workable, and consistent.

## 1.4 A Complex Regulatory Framework

Agriculture in Abbotsford operates in a complex, layered, and dynamic environment of municipal and provincial policies, programs, and regulatory influences. Section 2.0 of the AgRefresh Stage 2 New Directions Report provides a detailed overview the important, unique, and coordinated roles played by municipal and provincial levels of government.

As a brief recap, the following section highlights the key provincial and municipal partners involved in regulating and supporting the long-term vitality of Abbotsford's agricultural lands, the agriculture industry, and a secure food supply.

### **Agricultural Land Commission (ALC)**

The preservation of BC's Agricultural Land Reserve is overseen by the Agricultural Land Commission, an independent tribunal of appointed decision-making Commissioners. The ALC administers the following:

**Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR):** Land that is designated and protected by the Province for farming and specific non-farming uses.

**Agricultural Land Commission Act:** A provincial statute that sets the rules for the protection and use of land within the ALR.

**ALR General Regulation:** This provincial regulation supplements the ALC Act, outlining rules related to collection of application fees, procedures, land subdivision, compliance enforcement, and the duties and protocols for ALC Commissioners.

**ALR Use Regulation:** Used in tandem with the ALR General Regulation, this regulation identifies specific farm uses, non-farm uses, residential uses, and soil or fill uses that are permitted in the ALR. Importantly, it outlines conditions that must be met to conduct the uses, outlines activities that must be permitted by a local government, and identifies activities a local government has the discretion to prohibit.

The *ALC Act* and its Regulations are supported with ALC Policies and Information Bulletins to clarify the regulations, outline positions on various aspects of a farm use or permitted non-farm use. These documents outline actions or views consistently taken or adopted by the Commission.

### Ministry of Agriculture

The Ministry of Agriculture supports the ALC’s work by helping ensure the ALR is being used in a manner that supports agriculture and remains compatible with surrounding urban uses, and between farms. The following responsibilities are particularly relevant to AgRefresh:

**Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act:** This legislation ensures that a farmer following normal farm practices is not liable to any person and cannot be prevented by an injunction or court order from any nuisance related to the operation of the farm. For farm operations conducted in the ALR, the farmer also does not contravene local government bylaws related to animal control, noise and nuisance related to the farm operation.

**Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas:** This document outlines the Minister of Agriculture’s Standards for guiding local government development of bylaws for farming areas. This document is particularly relevant for AgRefresh, as Abbotsford is a community regulated under section 553 of the *Local Government Act*. Abbotsford must obtain Minister of Agriculture approval for any changes to the Zoning Bylaw that impact a farming area.

### City of Abbotsford

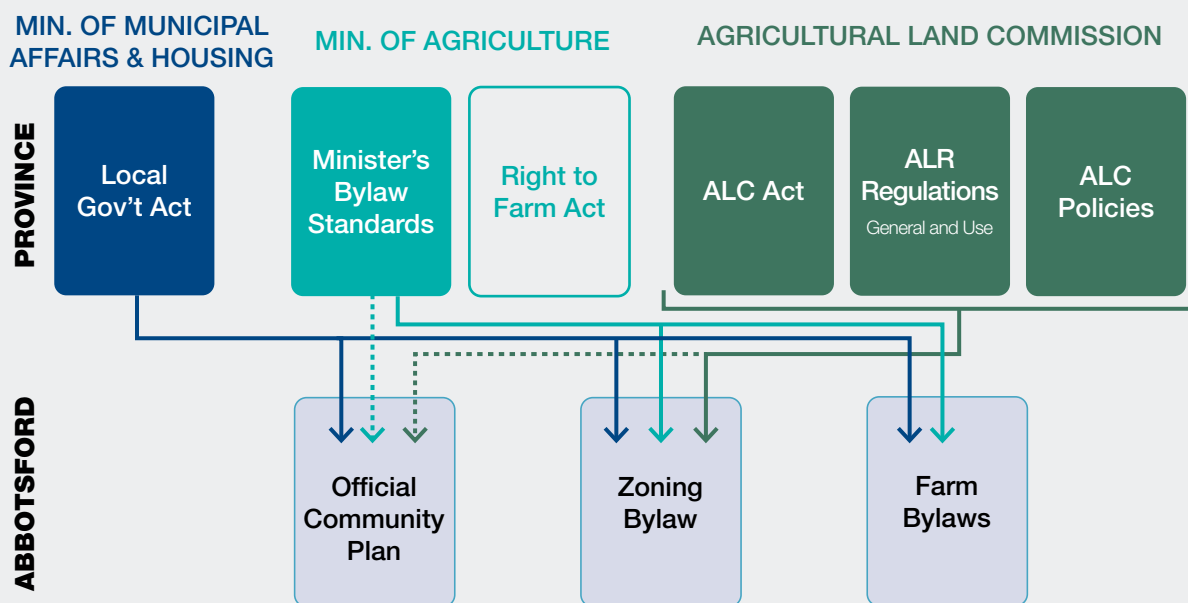
The City of Abbotsford regulates agricultural land through its OCP, Zoning Bylaw and Farm Bylaw powers.

**Official Community Plan (OCP):** Outlines objectives, policies and guidelines for community planning and development.

**Zoning Bylaw:** Describes permitted uses of land and development regulations for buildings and uses.

**Farm Bylaw:** Enables the City to regulate or prohibit certain farm operations, and also regulate the types of buildings, structures, equipment, and siting of stored materials.

Fig. 1: A Complex Regulatory Framework



## 1.5 A Three Stage Planning Process

AgRefresh is following a three stage planning process, with each building on the findings and stakeholder input of the previous stage.

Fig. 2: AgRefresh Process Timeline



## Provincial ALR and ALC Revitalization

As illustrated in the project timeline, the AgRefresh planning process was impacted by the 2018 Provincial initiative to ‘Revitalize the Agricultural Land Reserve and Agricultural Land Commission’, which notably overlapped with the topics under review through AgRefresh.

AgRefresh was paused at the 75% mark to ensure recommendations could be coordinated with Provincial legislation changes.

The Provincial review is presently on-going, however, by mid-2020 several legislative changes were complete and the Province had released its ‘Residential Flexibility in the ALR’ policy intentions paper outlining new accessory dwelling options under consideration for the ALR. Given this progress, it was determined that the Provincial initiative had sufficiently progressed to complete a modified version of AgRefresh.

The modified AgRefresh process addresses all topics, except for residential siting, which is deferred pending further Provincial review.

## 1.6 Project Stages Recap

### Stage 1: Background Research

Stage 1 focused on understanding the current state of Abbotsford’s agriculture industry. Work was organized around the following tasks:

- Understanding the legislative and regulatory framework governing the use of agricultural land;
- Reviewing the City’s existing regulations, plans, and strategies;
- Developing a deeper understanding of the local agricultural sector;
- Identifying key compliance issues; and
- Identifying opportunities and challenges associated with agriculture in Abbotsford.

Workshops with government agencies, industry representatives, and City committees, and a public open house provided valuable insight on the state of agriculture and opportunities for Abbotsford.

Stage 1 outlined three overarching themes to guide AgRefresh:

**Theme 1:** Support a thriving agricultural sector

**Theme 2:** Respond to a changing agricultural industry

**Theme 3:** Manage non-agricultural uses in the ALR

These themes were explored in greater detail through Stage 2: New Directions.

## Stage 2: New Directions

Building on the three themes identified in Stage 1, the Stage 2 New Directions work outlined specific topics for further consideration and provided the foundation for preparing detailed policies and regulations.

Through a series of stakeholder workshops, an online survey, and an open house, the City received confirmation on the overarching themes and critical input to develop the New Directions. The local perspectives gathered in this stage helped chart the course for improved City regulation that will better support the future of agriculture in Abbotsford.

Stage 2 set the groundwork for Stage 3, which is now outlining policies and regulations to address the New Direction topics.



Fig. 3: Key AgRefresh Themes and Topics



### Stage 3: Prepare and Adopt New Policy

Stage 3 further reviewed the New Direction topics, distilling the ideas into more tangible ‘early ideas’ for discussion and ultimately recommended OCP policies and Zoning Bylaw regulations.

Workshops with industry stakeholders, multiple public open houses, and an online questionnaire helped the City gauge support and strengthen approaches for the specific ideas being explored. This input provided confirmation of policy and regulatory ideas that are aligned with public and stakeholder perspectives, and those which required further work and consideration.

This Stage 3 report builds on all the feedback received to-date, and presents draft OCP policies and Zoning Bylaw regulations.



Fig. 4: Stage 3 Open House | Bradner Hall | November 27 2017

# AgRefresh Engagement by the numbers

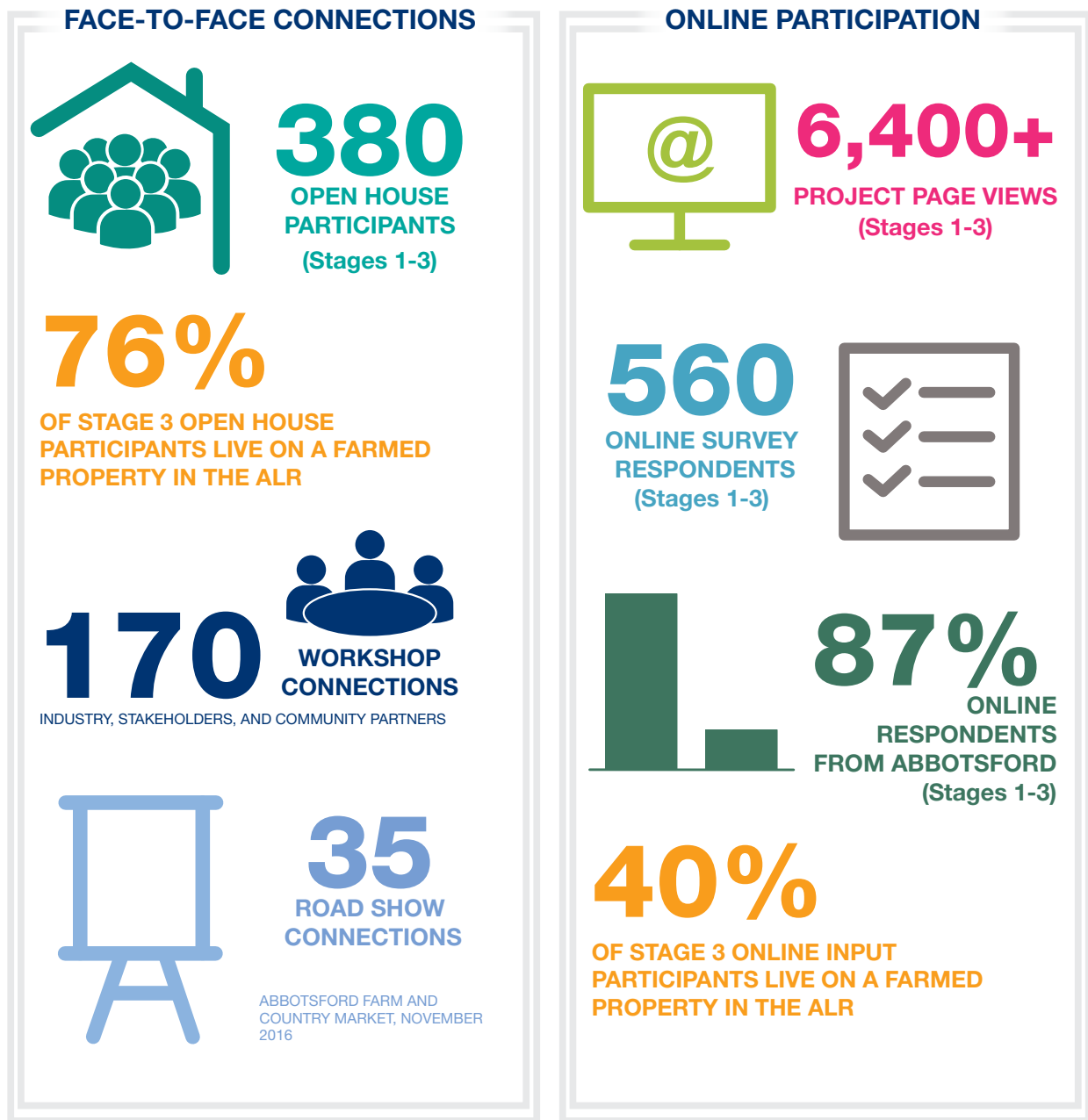


Fig. 5: Key AgRefresh Engagement Metrics