Annual Management Report of Fund Performance

# AGF Canadian Strategic Balanced Fund

September 30, 2024



## Management Discussion of Fund Performance

This management discussion of fund performance represents the portfolio management team's view of the significant factors and developments affecting the fund's performance and outlook.

#### **Investment Objective and Strategies**

Pursuant to the Declaration of Trust, the investment objective of AGF Canadian Strategic Balanced Fund (the "Fund") is to provide investors with long-term capital appreciation along with the potential for monthly income through exposure to high dividend yielding shares trading on Canadian stock exchanges and fixed income securities. To achieve this objective, AGF Investments Inc. ("AGFI"), as portfolio manager, generally allocates the Fund's assets among underlying mutual funds (the "Underlying Funds") and exchange traded funds ("ETFs") managed by third parties or AGFI (or an AGFI affiliate). AGFI has set, and reviews quarterly, target dynamic allocations between Canadian equity and fixed income for the Fund, consistent with the Fund's investment objective. During periods of market downturn or for other reasons, a significant portion of the Fund's assets may be held in cash or cash equivalents.

#### Risk

The risks of investing in the Fund remain as disclosed in the current prospectus. Any changes to the Fund over the period have not affected the overall level of risk of the Fund.

The Fund continues to be suitable for investors who want a balanced portfolio of Canadian equity and fixed income securities in a single fund, investing for the medium to longterm with a low to medium tolerance for risk. The suitability of the Fund has not changed from what has been disclosed in the prospectus.

#### **Results of Operations**

For the year ended September 30, 2024, the Fund returned 20.2% (net of expenses) while the Blended Benchmark returned 20.8%. The Blended Benchmark is composed of 60% S&P/TSX Composite Dividend Index/40% Bloomberg Canada Aggregate Index.

The Fund holds Series O Units of the Underlying Funds. The discussion below references performance figures for Mutual Fund Units of the Underlying Funds. The performance of Series O Units is substantially similar to that of Mutual Fund Units, save for differences in expense structure.

The Fund under-performed the Blended Benchmark during the reporting period as the Underlying Funds' holdings in fixed income securities detracted, while equity holdings contributed. Within the fixed income portion, curve positioning and tactical adjustments to duration have been a negative contributor over the reporting period. Duration is a measure of the sensitivity of the portfolio to changes in interest rates. On the other hand, the Fund's largest positive contribution came from an overweight allocation to corporate bonds, as economic resilience and tight credit spreads over the reporting period provided momentum to corporate credit and other higher beta assets. Beta measures the relative volatility of the value of a security compared with that of a market index. Furthermore, security selection within the category provided an additional boost to performance. The Fund focuses on corporate bonds with attractive valuations (i.e. wide credit spreads versus underlying government bonds) and solid financials. The Fund was able to generate additional alpha through its out-of-benchmark component made up of high yield and convertible bonds, which benefitted from strong economic data and are less sensitive to moves in treasury yields. Alpha is the excess return of the portfolio over the benchmark. The Fund's overall exposure to Canadian government bonds also contributed to performance on a relative basis, despite being significantly underweight the benchmark exposure, aided primarily by security selection in the government guaranteed and local authority categories. The Fund's security selection in Canadian treasuries positively contributed to overall performance, as the Fund had exposure to longer duration treasuries which out-performed shorter duration on a relative basis. On the other hand, the Fund's largest detractor from overall performance came from an out-ofbenchmark positioning in foreign exchange and credit derivatives.

Within Canadian equities, security selection in the Industrials and Utilities sectors contributed the most to overall performance. On the other hand, the Financials sector was the biggest detractor due to negative security selection. The Materials sector also detracted owing to negative security selection and an underweight allocation to the sector.

The Fund's major portfolio categories, as a percentage of Net Asset Value as at September 30, 2024, include approximately 61.0% in Canadian equity and 35.0% in fixed income via its holdings in the Underlying Funds, 5.0% in cash and cash equivalents and 1.0% in other net liabilities. During the reporting period, the Fund's allocation to Canadian equity increased, while allocation to fixed income and cash and cash equivalents remained fairly consistent.

The Fund had net subscriptions of approximately \$13 million for the current period, as compared to net subscriptions of approximately \$17 million in the prior period. The portfolio

This annual management report of fund performance contains financial highlights, but does not contain the complete annual financial statements of the investment fund. You can get a copy of the annual financial statements at your request, and at no cost, by calling 1 888 226-2024, by writing to us at AGF Investments Inc., CIBC SQUARE, Tower One, 81 Bay Street, Suite 4000, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5J 0G1, or by visiting our website at www.AGF.com or SEDAR+ at www.sedarplus.ca.

Securityholders may also contact us using one of these methods to request a copy of the investment fund's proxy voting policies and procedures, proxy voting disclosure record, or quarterly portfolio disclosure.

manager does not believe that subscription activity had a meaningful impact on the Fund's performance or the ability to implement its investment strategy.

#### **Recent Developments**

Global equities performed well during the reporting period driven by a resilient U.S. economy. Investors continued to be focused on economic conditions and their ramifications on monetary policy. Though "higher for longer" expectations had increasingly become consensus, expectations stabilized throughout 2024 as the economy showed signs of making slow progress on stubborn and persistent inflation.

Markets felt some relief during the latter half of the reporting period as central banks in the developed world took a more accommodative stance to their monetary policy. The U.S. Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of Canada ("BoC") initiated rate cuts midway through 2024 as inflationary pressures on their respective economies began to ease. Meanwhile, the Bank of Japan tightened its key policy rate at the end of July 2024, which resulted in a resurgent Japanese Yen unwinding global carry trades. China's economic slowdown and continuing property sector crisis compounded the macroeconomic obstacles. The People's Bank of China implemented multi-pronged stimulus measures to alleviate the deflationary trend of the Chinese economy. Over the reporting period, the conflict in the Middle East continued to be a source of major concern, adding to the existing market volatility, especially impacting the energy sector.

Canada's economy recorded two consecutive calendar quarters of growth in 2024, after a difficult close to 2023. The unemployment rate in the country gradually climbed, reaching 6.6% in August 2024, while inflation remained largely stable, decreasing to a three-year low of 2.0%. As these trends developed, the BoC implemented three successive interest rate cuts of 0.25% each in June, July, and September 2024, aimed at stimulating economic activity. As a result of these cuts, consumer confidence surged, peaking in August. The manufacturing sector also recorded increased activity in September 2024, the first month of expansion since April 2023, owing to improved domestic demand and new orders.

Global investment grade and high yield bonds saw positive returns over the reporting period amid a declining inflation profile and stronger-than-anticipated growth in select markets. Meanwhile, the Canada 10-year bond yield declined from 4.03% to 2.96% and the yield on the 2-year bond dropped from 4.87% to 2.91% over the reporting period, also returning to a positive slope. Credit spreads tightened considerably during the reporting period and most credit categories out-performed government bonds on higher yields versus their safer counterparts.

The S&P/TSX Composite Index gained over 26.0% during the reporting period and crossed the 24,000 mark for the first time at the end of September 2024. Information Technology and Financials were the top performing sectors in the index,

while Communication Services lagged. Large capitalization stocks out-performed small capitalization stocks and value stocks slightly out-performed growth stocks.

The portfolio manager continues to maintain a positive outlook for Canada's equity market and believes the investment narrative should continue to improve, with inflation declining to desired levels, which provides a better backdrop for equities. The BoC is anticipated to ease rates further, driven by anemic economic growth and a weak labour market. The portfolio manager believes lower mortgage rates could likely raise housing demand and domestic consumption.

Moreover, it is the portfolio manager's belief that some of the substantial cash balances accumulated on the sidelines in 2022 and 2023 will eventually find its way back into equities, as central banks continue on the path to reducing rates. The portfolio manager believes that rate cuts will favour certain sectors in the market and drive market leadership in the foreseeable future. These events underscore the importance of maintaining objectivity throughout the changing macroeconomic environment and recognizing that they can drive leadership over the shorter term.

For fixed income markets, as of the end of the reporting period, the Canadian yield curve is currently flat to slightly positive as a result of short-term rates having come down significantly during the last two quarters. Recent economic growth data has come below the BoC's forecast, while the unemployment rate has continued its upward slope, even in the absence of significant job losses. This puts the BoC in a position to continue cutting rates into the end of the calendar year, as inflation is forecasted to remain benign. The portfolio manager remains selective from a credit perspective, emphasizing quality corporate bonds whose business models appear highly capable of supporting debt payments.

#### **Related Party Transactions**

AGFI is the manager ("Manager") and trustee of the Fund. Pursuant to the management agreement between the Fund and AGFI, AGFI is responsible for the day-to-day business of the Fund. AGFI also acts as the investment (portfolio) manager of the Fund, providing analysis and making decisions as to which Underlying Funds the Fund invests in and the target weighting of the Fund's assets. Fees payable to AGFI for such services are payable directly by unitholders and are not expenses of the Fund.

AGFI pays for all of the operating expenses relating to the operation of the Fund, except for certain costs as disclosed in the current prospectus, in exchange for a fixed rate administration fee. The administration fee is calculated based on the Net Asset Value of the Fund at a fixed annual rate of 0.32%. Administration fees of approximately \$93,000 were incurred by the Fund during the period ended September 30, 2024.

AGFI is an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of AGF Management Limited.

#### **Caution Regarding Forward-looking Statements**

This report may contain forward-looking statements about the Fund, including its strategy, expected performance and condition. Forward looking statements include statements that are predictive in nature, that depend upon or refer to future events or conditions, or that include words such as "expects", "anticipates", "intends", "plans", "believes", "estimates" or negative versions thereof and similar expressions.

In addition, any statement that may be made concerning future performance, strategies or prospects, and possible future Fund action, is also a forward-looking statement. Forward-looking statements are based on current expectations and projections about future events and are inherently subject to, among other things, risks, uncertainties and assumptions about the Fund and economic factors.

The forward-looking statements are by their nature based on numerous assumptions, which include, amongst other things, that (i) the Fund can attract and maintain investors and has sufficient capital under management to effect its investment strategies, (ii) the investment strategies will produce the results intended by the portfolio manager, and (iii) the markets will react and perform in a manner consistent with the investment strategies. Although the forward-looking statements contained herein are based upon what the portfolio manager believes to be reasonable assumptions, the portfolio manager cannot assure that actual results will be consistent with these forward-looking statements.

Forward-looking statements are not guarantees of future performance, and actual events and results could differ materially from those expressed or implied in any forwardlooking statements made by the Fund. Any number of important factors could contribute to these digressions, including, but not limited to, general economic, political and market factors in North America and internationally, interest and foreign exchange rates, global equity and capital markets, business competition, taxation, changes in government regulations, unexpected judicial or regulatory proceedings, technological changes, cybersecurity, the possible effects of war or terrorist activities, outbreaks of disease or illness that affect local, national or international economies (such as COVID-19), natural disasters and disruptions to public infrastructure, such as transportation, communications, power or water supply or other catastrophic events.

It should be stressed that the above-mentioned list of factors is not exhaustive. You are encouraged to consider these and other factors carefully before making any investment decisions and you are urged to avoid placing undue reliance on forward-looking statements. Further, you should be aware of the fact that the Fund has no specific intention of updating any forward-looking statements whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise, prior to the release of the next Management Report of Fund Performance.

# **Financial Highlights**

The following tables show selected key financial information about the Fund and are intended to help you understand the Fund's financial performance for the past five years as applicable.

#### Net Assets per Unit<sup>(1)</sup>

| For the periods ended                                    | Sept 30,<br>2024 (\$) | Sept 30,<br>2023 (\$) | Sept 30,<br>2022 (\$) | Sept 30,<br>2021 (\$) | Sept 30<br>2020 (\$) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Net Assets, beginning of period <sup>(1)</sup>           | 24.21                 | 24.75                 | 25.00*                | -                     | -                    |
| Increase (decrease) from operations:                     |                       |                       |                       |                       |                      |
| Total revenue  | 1.39                  | 1.59                  | 0.25                  | -                     | -                    |
| Total expenses   | (0.09)                | (0.09)                | (0.02)                | -                     | -                    |
| Realized gains (losses)                                  | 0.10                  | (0.01)                | -                     | -                     | -                    |
| Unrealized gains (losses)                                | 3.35                  | (1.42)                | (1.70)                | -                     | -                    |
| Total increase (decrease) from operations <sup>(2)</sup> | 4.75                  | 0.07                  | (1.47)                | -                     | -                    |
| Distributions:   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                      |
| From income (excluding dividends)                        | (0.22)                | (0.19)                | (0.00)                | -                     | -                    |
| From dividends   | (0.33)                | (0.31)                | (0.01)                | -                     | -                    |
| From capital gains                                       | (0.73)                | (1.17)                | (0.12)                | -                     | -                    |
| Return of capital  | -                     | -                     | -                     | -                     | -                    |
| Total annual distributions <sup>(3)</sup>                | (1.28)                | (1.67)                | (0.13)                | -                     | -                    |
| Net Assets, end of period <sup>(4)</sup>                 | 27.68                 | 24.21                 | 24.75                 | -                     | -                    |

#### Ratios/Supplemental Data<sup>(1)</sup>

|   | Sept 30, |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| For the periods ended   | 2024     | 2023     | 2022     | 2021     | 2020     |
| Total Net Asset Value (\$000's)                                       | 37,935   | 20,802   | 4,690    | -        | -        |
| Number of units outstanding (000's)                                   | 1,370    | 859      | 189      | -        | -        |
| Management expense ratio <sup>(5)</sup>                               | 0.36%    | 0.35%    | 0.36%    | -        | -        |
| Management expense ratio before waivers or absorptions <sup>(6)</sup> | 0.36%    | 0.35%    | 0.36%    | -        | -        |
| Trading expense ratio <sup>(7)</sup>                                  | 0.05%    | 0.05%    | 0.04%    | -        | -        |
| Portfolio turnover rate <sup>(8)</sup>                                | 12.99%   | 11.19%   | 0.00%    | -        | -        |
| Net Asset Value per unit  | 27.68    | 24.21    | 24.75    | -        | -        |

#### Explanatory Notes

- (1) a) This information is derived from the Fund's audited annual financial statements. Under International Financial Reporting Standards ("IFRS"), investments that are traded in an active market are generally valued at closing price, which is determined to be within the bid-ask spread and most representative of fair value. As a result, there is no difference between the net assets per unit presented in the financial statements ("Net Assets") and the net asset value per unit calculated for fund pricing purposes ("Net Asset Value").
  - b) The Fund commenced operations in July 2022, which represents the date upon which securities were first made available for purchase by investors.
- (2) Net Assets and distributions are based on the actual number of units outstanding at the relevant time. The increase/decrease from operations is based on the weighted average number of units outstanding over the financial period.

\* represents initial Net Assets (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7) and (8) see Explanatory Notes

All rates of return are calculated based on the Net Asset Value.

#### Year-By-Year Returns

The following bar chart shows the Fund's annual performance for each of the past 10 years to September 30, 2024 as applicable, and illustrates how the Fund's performance has changed from year to year. The chart shows, in percentage terms, how much an investment made on the first day of each financial period would have grown or decreased by the last day of each financial period.



Performance for 2022 represents returns for the period from July 6, 2022 to September 30, 2022.

#### Annual Compound Returns

The following table compares the historical annual compound returns for the Fund with the index, for each of the periods ended September 30, 2024.

| Percentage Return: | 1 Year | 3 Years | 5 Years | 10 Years | Since<br>Inception |
|--------------------|--------|---------|---------|----------|--------------------|
| Fund               | 20.2   | N/A     | N/A     | N/A      | 10.5               |
| Blended Benchmark  | 20.8   | N/A     | N/A     | N/A      | 10.4               |

The S&P/TSX Composite Dividend Index aims to provide a broad-based benchmark of Canadian dividend-paying stocks and includes all stocks in the S&P/TSX Composite Index with positive annual dividend yields as of the latest rebalancing.

The Bloomberg Canada Aggregate Index provides a broadbased measure of the Canadian investment grade fixed income market.

For a discussion of the relative performance of the Fund as compared to the index, see Results of Operations in the Management Discussion of Fund Performance.

## Summary of Investment Portfolio

As at September 30, 2024

The major portfolio categories and top holdings (up to 25) of the Fund at the end of the period are indicated in the following tables. The Summary of Investment Portfolio may change due to ongoing portfolio transactions of the Fund and the next quarterly update will be in the Quarterly Portfolio Disclosure as at December 31, 2024.

\* The indicated rates of return shown here are the historical annual compounded total returns including changes in security value and reinvestment of all distributions and do not take into account sales, redemption, distribution or other optional charges by any securityholder that would have reduced returns or performance. Mutual funds are not guaranteed, their values change frequently and past performance may not be repeated.

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- (3) Distributions were paid in cash/reinvested in additional units of the Fund, or both. The characterization of the distributions is based on management's estimate of the actual income for the year.
- (4) This is not a reconciliation of the beginning and ending Net Assets per unit.
- (5) The management expense ratio ("MER") is calculated in accordance with National Instrument 81-106, based on all the expenses of the Fund (including Harmonized Sales Tax, Goods and Services Tax and interest, but excluding foreign withholding taxes, commissions and other portfolio transaction costs) and the Fund's proportionate share of the MER, if applicable, of the underlying funds and exchange traded funds ("ETFs") in which the Fund has invested, expressed as an annualized percentage of average daily Net Asset Value during the period.
- (6) AGFI waived certain fees or absorbed certain expenses otherwise payable by the Fund. The amount of expenses waived or absorbed is determined annually at the discretion of AGFI and AGFI can terminate the waiver or absorption at any time.
- (7) The trading expense ratio represents total commissions and other portfolio transaction costs, including the Fund's proportionate share of the commissions, if applicable, of the underlying funds and ETFs in which the Fund has invested, expressed as an annualized percentage of average daily Net Asset Value during the period.
- (8) The Fund's portfolio turnover rate ("PTR") indicates how actively the Fund's portfolio advisor manages its portfolio investments. A PTR of 100% is equivalent to the Fund buying and selling all of the securities in its portfolio once in the course of the year. The higher a fund's PTR in a year, the greater the trading costs payable by the fund in the year, and the greater the chance of an investor receiving taxable capital gains in the year. There is not necessarily a relationship between a high turnover rate and the performance of a fund.

PTR is calculated based on the lesser of the cumulative cost of purchases or cumulative proceeds of sales divided by the average market value of the portfolio, excluding shortterm investments.

### Management Fees

The Fund is managed by AGFI. AGFI is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Fund, which include providing investment and management services as well as other administrative services required by the Fund. The management fees for such services are payable directly by the unitholders, not by the Fund.

## Past Performance\*

The performance information shown assumes that all distributions made by the Fund in the periods shown were reinvested in additional securities of the Fund. Note that the performance information does not take into account sales, redemption, distribution or other optional charges that would have reduced returns or performance. How the Fund has performed in the past does not necessarily indicate how it will perform in the future. The prospectus and other information about the underlying investment funds are available on the internet at www.sedarplus.ca.

| Portfolio by Sector            | Percentage @<br>Net Asset Value (% |  |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Equity Funds                   | 60.8                               |  |
| Fixed Income Funds             | 34.8                               |  |
| Cash & Cash Equivalents        | 5.2                                |  |
| Other Net Assets (Liabilities) | (0.8)                              |  |

| Top Holdings                                 | Percentage of<br>Net Asset Value (%) |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| AGF Canadian Dividend Income Fund            | 60.8                                 |
| AGF Fixed Income Plus Fund                   | 34.8                                 |
| Cash & Cash Equivalents                      | 5.2                                  |
| Total Net Asset Value (thousands of dollars) | \$ 37,935                            |



For more information contact your investment advisor or:

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