

June 9, 2023

Minister Lisa Thompson
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
77 Grenville Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1B3
Via email: minister.omafra@ontario.ca

RE: The Agri-Food Innovation Alliance Agreement

Dear Minister Thompson,

We are writing to thank you for your continued support of the University of Guelph's (UofG) significant research and innovation activities by renewing the Agri-Food Innovation Alliance (the Alliance), and to request a meeting to discuss our shared vision of success for the next 5 years of the agreement.

The renewal of the Alliance is an important milestone. This transfer agreement provides critical support for a sustainable future for agri-food production in Ontario by enabling many critical activities that help the government, the UofG, and the agricultural sector. This investment has a proven track-record of success, increasing Ontario's GDP by \$1.4 billion and generating countless workers that help grow Ontario's vibrant agriculture and agri-food industry.

Although the renewal of the Alliance Agreement is extremely positive, the lack of adjustment in the Agreement for inflation is of significant concern. Proper funding ensures the long-term integrity of the research and innovation ecosystem. The reality is that an inflation-adjusted investment in 2023 would be a total of \$95 million annually, roughly \$24 million per year more than the latest commitment.

Beyond this realized reduction in funding due to inflation, we are very concerned that the reduced funding identified for the last three years of the new agreement will not support the innovation needed to meet a bold vision for agriculture. The shortfall across all years will affect the delivery of programs and implementation of research by UofG. It is imperative that we work together to ensure available resources are maximized so that research and innovation activities continue uninterrupted.

The sector recognizes there are budgetary constraints faced by the province. However, it is critical that the Alliance Agreement is sufficiently funded to match the aspirations and potential of Ontario's agriculture sector. As we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, food security and the economic contribution of Ontario's agri-food sector are paramount for all Ontarians.

The province's recently released Grow Ontario strategy is key element in achieving the shared goals and harnessing the power of Ontario's agricultural sector. All three of the objectives of the Grow Ontario¹ strategy (i.e., 1. Strengthen Agri-food Supply Chain, 2. Increase Innovation and Adoption, and 3. Attract and Grow Agri-Food Talent) need the Alliance Agreement to be at its optimal to achieve the desired results.

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/grow-ontario-provincial-agri-food-strategy>

Last year, our industry shared a vision of success arising from successful implementation of Alliance-related investments. We believe that a vision and priority roadmap shared between industry, OMAFRA, and the UofG is critical for future success to leverage the substantial investments made by the sector and the Ontario government.

To ensure that the strategic priorities for Ontario farmers are addressed and limited resources are used effectively, we respectfully request a meeting to develop this shared vision for success and solidify a roadmap that ensures the Alliance is funded appropriately to support a prosperous and innovative sector.

Sincerely,

Murray Opsteen, Chair, Chicken Farmers of Ontario
Jack Chaffe, President, Beef Farmers of Ontario
Scott Helps, Chair, Egg Farmers of Ontario
Brendan Byrne, Chair, Grain Farmers of Ontario
RJ Taylor, Managing Director, Ontario Aquaculture Association
David Woods, Chair, Ontario Bean Growers
William Bearss, Chair, Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission
Will Runnalls, Chair, Ontario Canola Growers
Shawn Brenn, Chair, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
John de Bruyn, Chair, Ontario Pork
John Hemsted, Chair, Ontario Sheep Farmers
Brian Ricker, Chair, Turkey Farmers of Ontario
Phil Kroesbergen, Chair, Veal Farmers of Ontario



CC: Dr. John Kelly, Deputy Minister, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Dr. Charlotte Yates, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Guelph
Dr. Malcolm Campbell, Vice-President (Research), University of Guelph