February 23, 2026

The Hon. Heath MacDonald, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister MacDonald,

On behalf of leaders and stakeholders across Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector, we are writing to express our shared concern regarding the recently announced Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) research station closures and related reductions in departmental research capacity. Our organizations represent producers, commodity groups, food processors, value chain partners, and research collaborators who depend on a strong, coordinated public research system to support innovation, competitiveness, and long-term food security.

Canada's public agricultural research network plays a foundational role in advancing productivity, resiliency, and sustainability across the sector. Many of the research functions affected, including long-term trials, regional adaptation work, disease screening, seed and variety development support, meat quality and food safety research, and systems agronomy, are not easily replicated by the private sector alone, particularly for smaller acreage crops and regionally specific production systems. This also includes applied meat science and grading system research that supports carcass evaluation, yield measurement, and market assurance frameworks. These activities underpin the innovation pipeline that enables the sector to remain competitive while supporting national priorities such as food affordability, domestic production, and export growth. Reductions in public research capacity also risk weakening Canada's food sovereignty and trade competitiveness by slowing the development of regionally adapted varieties, production practices, and risk management tools that enable Canadian producers to compete effectively in global markets.

The impacts of these research station closures are being felt across the country, affecting multiple research functions that are critical to innovation and productivity. Active breeding and seed increase pipelines face potential multi-year delays where alternative sites lack sufficient land base, appropriate rotation cycles, isolation capacity, and readiness to meet near-term planting timelines. Long-term agronomic and environmental trials are also at risk of discontinuation when suitable replacement sites and specialized instrumentation are not available. In addition, livestock and meat research functions are particularly vulnerable when specialized facilities, processing and food safety infrastructure, and long-term datasets are involved, as these assets and knowledge depend on continuity of operation. Closures therefore risk the loss of specialized infrastructure, scientific expertise, and institutional knowledge supporting animal health, product quality, and food safety outcomes across the value chain.

Strong research outcomes depend on coordinated work across breeding, agronomy, animal science, pathology, food safety, and environmental testing systems. Changes that fragment or wind down these integrated functions risk disrupting multi-year trials, delaying variety and seed development pipelines, and compromising regionally relevant data that producers rely on for decision-making. Agricultural research operates on biological and seasonal timelines, and transition decisions that do not align can create multi-year impacts across the research and innovation pipeline.

We also note that many sector partners, including agriculture and agri-food organizations, research foundations, universities, and private collaborators, were not directly engaged prior to these decisions being implemented. Given the scale and potential long-term implications of these changes, we believe there is an opportunity to strengthen outcomes through structured industry engagement and a clear transition framework.

In that spirit, we respectfully offer the following recommendations:

- **Provide a reprieve or targeted delay in implementation timelines** where necessary to allow for an orderly and biologically aligned transition of research functions, including the completion or secure transfer of active multi-year trials, breeding materials, seed increase activities, and livestock and meat research programs.

- **Establish and communicate a clear transition framework focused first on preserving critical research functions, assets, and scientific capacity**, whether through AAFC-led research, formal public-private partnerships, or qualified third-party arrangements.

- **Strike a formal industry advisory committee** composed of sector representatives and research partners to advise AAFC on transition decisions, priority functions and sites, and continuity measures, helping ensure that essential national and regional research capabilities are maintained.

Our sector is ready to work constructively with AAFC and the Government of Canada to support a practical path forward that protects core research capacity while recognizing fiscal realities. A collaborative, transparent, and function-focused transition process will help safeguard the innovation system that Canadian farmers and agri-food businesses depend on.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your officials to discuss these recommendations in detail.

Sincerely,

Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance
Canadian Beef Grading Agency
Canadian Canola Growers Association
Canadian Cattle Association
Canadian Federation of Agriculture
Canadian Meat Council
Canadian Organic Growers
Canadian Ornamental Horticulture Alliance
Canadian Produce Marketing Association
Canadian Seed Growers' Association
Canadian Sheep Federation
Canadian Sugar Beet Producers Association
Canola Council of Canada
Cereals Canada
Crop Life Canada
Dairy Farmers of Canada

Fertilizer Canada
Food, Health and Consumer Products of Canada
Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada
Grain Growers of Canada
National Cattle Feeders' Association
National Circle for Indigenous Agriculture & Food
National Farmers Union
National Sheep Network
Seeds Canada