



February 10, 2026

Honourable Heath MacDonald
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
Government of Canada
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Research Reductions

Dear Minister MacDonald:

Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) works on behalf of 18,000 beef producers in Alberta, encompassing the entire production system from cow-calf herds to large feedlots. Our role is to ensure the competitiveness and sustainability of the beef industry in Alberta, the largest beef producing province in Canada, with 48% of the nation's cowherd and over 70% of the country's feeding and processing sectors.

We are writing to urge immediate action to prevent the irreversible loss of critical research capacity following the announcement of AAFC's reductions to key cattle, beef and forage research programs.

We are extraordinarily disappointed that industry wasn't meaningfully consulted prior to the decision to close seven research stations and farms across the country. We would have welcomed the opportunity to find strategic solutions to maintain important programs while still recognizing the economic pressures faced by the federal government.

Over the past decade, beef producers have increased their contributions to research funding by over 600% nationally. In recent years, ABP has tripled its research budget and has made significant investments in capacity at the University of Alberta and Western Crop Innovations (WCI). Both institutions work very closely with AAFC Lacombe, and notably, WCI relies heavily on AAFC pathology expertise. ABP currently has close to \$1 million invested in AAFC projects that may be affected, a massive commitment from a provincial organization. Industry contributions to research are made strategically, and we are concerned about loss of producer dollars allocated to these on-going initiatives if results are unable to be achieved.

Research is an investment in the competitiveness, consumer assurance, and resilience of our sector, and the elimination of AAFC infrastructure and expertise will have far-reaching and long-term consequences on forage breeding and management, beef quality and carcass grading, food safety, integrated cropping and agro-ecosystems, and production practices that sustain beef producers and maintain food security in Alberta and beyond.

For over 100 years, the Lacombe research station has supported beef producers in Alberta. The work done at Lacombe has resulted in measurable advances in production practices, scientific knowledge, and economic gains for beef producers. The loss of the station means that there is no longer any beef and forage specific research occurring in the black soil zone, and we do not see how this could be replicated at either Lethbridge or Saskatoon. Not only are the environmental conditions different, but neither has the land base or facilities to support expansion. Universities have also experienced budget reductions, and it appears unlikely that they will be able to fill this gap.

The federally inspected abattoir at Lacombe was home to important carcass grading, food safety, and applied meat science programming which enabled grading system improvements and provided an evidence-based pathway to support the development, validation, and adoption of emerging technologies consistent with legislative



requirements. Additionally, that facility allowed for in-depth investigation of disease pathology and carcass quality that could not be performed elsewhere. The Lacombe closure means that there is no longer a viable meat science program in western Canada, a decision that seems incongruent with the percentage of cattle processed in Alberta.

Research scientists and support staff at Lacombe are integral to the completion of the activities associated with the final year of the Alberta AgriSystems Living Lab, an \$8.5M investment by AAFC. The loss of human resource capacity will negatively impact our ability to deliver on our obligations to producers involved in the Living Lab, complete sampling and data analysis, and report results from this project.

While our local concerns primarily revolve around the lost infrastructure, capacity, and expertise at Lacombe, the closure of other facilities, particularly Quebec City and Indian Head, will also impact producers in Alberta. While we have been assured that the seed increase unit at Indian Head, critical for the commercialization of new crop and forage varieties that support beef producers will not be closed, it remains unclear where this work will now take place. The loss of the forage breeding program at Quebec City is a major blow to a research area that requires continuous, incremental improvements over many years before benefits are realized.

We would highlight that with the closure of Lacombe, Alberta is the only major agricultural producing region in Canada to be reduced to a single AAFC research centre location. This will undoubtedly have downstream consequences to our competitiveness, economic viability, market access requirements, and ability to retain consumer confidence.

The cattle, meat quality, food safety, and forage research programs have been disproportionately targeted – areas where the beef sector has invested heavily, and where public sector research is critical to support public good outcomes. While we understand that relocation opportunities have been extended to some researchers, others leading high priority programs were not offered similar opportunities, despite the lack of alternative institutional capacity. We would also point out that even if relocations are offered, there is no guarantee they will be accepted, and that it is unclear whether adequate facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and support staff to support robust research programs are sufficient at the locations offered.

Assuming the decision to close these locations stands and there is no opportunity to discuss reconsideration, we require further clarity on several items:

- The continuation of on-going projects. If these projects are to be cancelled mid-stream, we request that industry investments be refunded.
- How AAFC intends to maintain key research programming that was undertaken by the centres and farms slated for closure by shifting personnel to other locations that may not have adequate facilities to manage increased workload or the capacity to undertake more research activities (lab space, land base, access to cattle, availability of support staff, etc.). We would welcome a collaborative discussion to explore potential solutions, including but not limited to, potential co-location opportunities or extending affected personnel end dates to facilitate natural conclusions of projects.
- Maintenance of critical food safety and carcass quality/grading expertise in Alberta, where the bulk of cattle are processed in Canada.
- Ability to perform regionally specific research critical to support our sector, given traditionally limited travel approvals and reduced human resources.
- How AAFC intends to collaborate with other institutions given the apparent reluctance to maintain long-standing co-location agreements with Universities.



- How long-term data sets such as those developed over decades in the meat grading/quality/food safety, cattle genetic/phenotypic, and beef/forage research programs at Lacombe will be transferred and managed. These have extraordinary value and we want to ensure that the data are available for future work and not lost.
- The disposition of assets and equipment located at research centres and farms to be closed. We would assert that assets currently located at Lacombe should remain in Alberta rather than shifting them to other provinces.

We appreciate that this is a difficult time for AAFC staff and that there are significant logistical considerations associated with these decisions. We also understand that some of these impacts on our sector may not have been readily apparent.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss our concerns and potential solutions for transitioning key programming and research capacity in a sustainable fashion that will continue to produce meaningful results for beef producers in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Roxburgh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Doug Roxburgh, Chair of Alberta Beef Producers

cc:

Mr. Lawrence Hanson, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Honourable RJ Sigurdson, Alberta Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Mr. Jason Hale, Alberta Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Tyler Fulton, President of Canadian Cattle Association