



# **Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget**

*Canadian Wheat Research Coalition*

April 23, 2026



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### **List of Recommendations**

- **Recommendation 1:** That the Government work directly with funders and research partners to develop a long-term strategy for AAFC research and public breeding programs.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the Government realign research programs and funding decisions with industry priorities.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the Government commit to further consultation with funding and research partners to explore alternative funding/operational models before disposing of any research assets.



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## About the Canadian Wheat Research Coalition (CWRC)

The CWRC is a collaboration between Alberta Grains, Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission and Manitoba Crop Alliance aimed at increasing the long-term profitability and sustainability of wheat for Canadian producers through leadership in identifying, co-ordinating and supporting innovative research. The CWRC facilitates a collaborative approach to producer funding of regional and national research projects in variety development and agronomy, including core wheat breeding agreements with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and universities, and the Canadian National Wheat Cluster under AAFC's Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Canada is a world leader in high-quality wheat production and exports. In 2025, Canada produced just short of 40 million metric tonnes of wheat, with the Prairie provinces producing over 36 million metric tonnes alone<sup>1</sup>. Wheat production in Canada is vital to the economic success of farmers, rural communities and Canada as a whole. The Canadian cereals sector leads the country's agriculture exports with annual exports to over 80 countries with an estimated value of \$11.5 billion<sup>2</sup>.

A large portion of Canada's wheat production and export success is due to strong investments into public breeding institutions. AAFC's wheat breeding program has produced elite, widely adopted varieties that dominate western Canadian acres. On average, 80 per cent of all wheat fields in Canada are planted with an AAFC variety every year<sup>3</sup>. Farmers recognize this success, and continue to support public plant breeding, investing \$70.5 million since 2020 alone into AAFC and university wheat breeding programs<sup>4</sup>. Public plant breeding provides significant benefits to the public as well, with a recent study from the University of Saskatchewan finding that for every dollar invested in wheat breeding, farmers and taxpayers receive over \$30 in benefits<sup>5</sup>. However, this success story has been put at risk by the recently announced Comprehensive Expenditure Review (CER) cuts, which threaten the long-term effectiveness of farmer investments in public research.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, 2026. Table 32-10-0359-01 Estimated areas, yield, production, average farm price and total farm value of principal field crops, in metric and imperial units.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210035901>

<sup>2</sup> Cereals Canada, 2025. Production. <https://cerealscanada.ca/production/>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Wheat Research Coalition (CWRC), 2026. Securing the Future of Wheat in Canada. <https://wheatresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CWRC-Wheat-Breeding-Report-Feb-26-2026.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CWRC, 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Bolek-Callbeck and Gray, 2022. The Benefits and Costs of Producer and Public Investments: Wheat Varietal R&D in Western Canada 1995 to 2020. [FinalBenefitsandCostsWheat2022.pdf \(saskwheat.ca\)](https://www.saskwheat.ca/FinalBenefitsandCostsWheat2022.pdf).



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Despite the high rates of return on public investments in agricultural research, Canada's public investment in agricultural knowledge and innovation has declined in real terms over the last decade. Canada's total public agricultural R&D spending fell from \$860 million in 2013 to \$680 million in 2022, placing Canada last among the top seven OECD countries<sup>6</sup>. This reduction in public R&D spending had directly impacted Canada's agricultural productivity growth, which has fallen to roughly 1 per cent per year from 2 per cent in previous decades<sup>7</sup>.

AAFC plays a foundational role in Canada's agricultural research network, linking together producers, universities and the private sector. AAFC's network of research centres spread across diverse agroecological zones is a tremendous asset to the development of elite, widely adapted varieties and agronomic best management practices. However, the recently announced staffing cuts and research station closures at Lacombe, AB; Scott, SK; Indian Head, SK; and Portage la Prairie, MB, threaten Canadian agricultural research capacity and the long-term effectiveness of farmer investments in public research.

The CWRC and other stakeholders were not consulted by AAFC prior to the CER cuts being announced. We recognize that difficult funding decisions had to be made to meet the Government's spending reduction goals, but a thorough review of the research and plant breeding space with stakeholders should have been conducted prior to the cuts being announced to prioritize investment areas and develop other solutions to maintain research capacity. The short window from when the cuts were announced in January to when spring field work needs to begin has left farmers and research funders scrambling to ensure critical research projects can continue and that breeding programs have the required testing capacity.

Canadian farmers need a research and innovation system that is globally competitive and prevents technology gaps from occurring. With that goal in mind, the CWRC makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** *That the Government work directly with funders and research partners to develop a long-term strategy for AAFC research and public breeding programs.*

Many research funders, including the CWRC, have raised concerns that AAFC's evolving science strategy is eroding Canada's plant breeding capacity, particularly for crops such as

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<sup>6</sup> Gulab and Lhermie, 2025. A Case for Reinforcing Agri-food Research and Development Spending: Where Does Canada Stand Internationally? <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/JSC44-ReinforcingAgrifood-Final.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> FCC, 2025. Propelling agricultural productivity in Canada: Sustainable growth to feed the world. <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/knowledge/economics/agricultural-productivity-canada-sustainable-growth>



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wheat where private investment is limited or uneconomical. As noted above, the recently announced CER cuts were made without consultation with stakeholders and without a long-term strategy to provide clarity on the role of AAFC moving forward. The CWRC is incredibly concerned about AAFC's ability to meet their current commitments in core breeding agreements and research activities following the CER cuts. While federal officials have noted there is "no reduction in breeding capacity," as no breeding scientist positions have been cut, this ignores the fact that the cuts will impact the integrated suite of agronomists, pathologists and support staff that enable breeding programs to function. A breeder can develop a new variety, but without regionally representative sites to test it across environments, screen for diseases and carry out quality assessments, the variety cannot be properly validated to meet requirements for registration.

As research funders, we are working diligently with our partners, including AAFC, to ensure critical research can continue for 2026. However, these are stop-gap measures, and not part of a long-term vision to grow agricultural research capacity. We acknowledge AAFC has committed to relocating certain activities from research stations that are closing. However, stakeholders have many concerns about the feasibility of these plans due to specific environmental conditions that cannot be replicated at other sites, availability of sufficient and appropriate land base and infrastructure, and the loss of expertise/high-quality personnel to operate relocated activities. AAFC needs to work directly with funders and research partners to develop a long-term strategy for AAFC research and public breeding programs, so we can confidently plan and invest in the future. While the development of a long-term strategy will be related to discussions on the Next Policy Framework, this needs to be considered as a separate discussion and addressed more urgently.

**Recommendation 2:** *That the Government realign research programs and funding decisions with industry priorities.*

Government needs to work with farmers to realign program design and funding decisions with industry priorities. AAFC's current research funding priorities do not align with the needs of Canadian grain farmers and place too much emphasis on previous government priorities, such as climate-related outcomes. Previous funding programs have not recognized the vital role that variety development plays in increasing the sustainability of agricultural production.

In previous pre-budget consultation submissions, the CWRC recommended that the Government prioritize agricultural research investments that benefit all producers, including investments in variety development, infrastructure and high-quality personnel, to drive productivity, resilience and economic growth. However, the CER cuts directly targeted these



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priority areas, reducing overall research capacity and threatening the innovation pipeline that keeps the industry competitive and profitable.

The Canadian cereals industry can continue to be an economic driver for the Canadian economy, but we need continued investment in research and capacity to drive economic growth.

**Recommendation 3:** *That the Government commit to further consultation with funding and research partners to explore alternative funding/operational models before disposing of any research assets.*

AAFC's network of research stations spread across diverse agroecological zones is a tremendous asset to the development of widely adapted varieties. While there are other public (university and producer-directed) and private research sites across Western Canada, no one else has the same footprint, capacity or interconnectivity as AAFC. Many other researchers and institutions rely on extensive collaboration with AAFC to carry out the breeding and agronomy science they undertake. AAFC applied research sites fill a unique role that no other institution provides at scale, bridging fundamental science and on-farm implementation.

The closure of the Lacombe, Scott, Indian Head and Portage la Prairie research stations will create critical testing gaps across Western Canada. For example, closing Indian Head creates a 650-kilometre void from Swift Current to Brandon with no testing capacity – a void that encompasses two major soil zones with vastly different pest resistance requirements, moisture availability and temperature regimes, referred to as agroecological zones. These are vital public research sites that underpin the entire research ecosystem in Western Canada. Therefore, as part of developing a long-term strategy for AAFC research and public breeding programs, the Government must consult with funding and research partners to explore alternative funding/operational models that could preserve this critical public research infrastructure.

## Conclusion

A recent report from the CWRC concluded the current wheat breeding system is at risk from recent and historic budget cuts<sup>8</sup>. Research and plant breeding is a long-term game, and without a course correction, we are at risk of creating significant technology gaps in the future that will impact the competitiveness and resiliency of Canadian farmers. The report also noted that maintaining the current wheat breeding innovation system is not an option, a finding that has only been magnified by the recent CER cuts. The CWRC is committed to finding ways to

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<sup>8</sup> CWRC, 2026



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preserve a wheat innovation system that delivers elite, field-ready varieties that are competitive globally and adapted to Canadian growing conditions.

Canadian farmers have been significant funding partners with AAFC for over 30 years, and the CWRC is ready to engage in any discussions regarding research funding and priorities to ensure programs will continue to provide valuable results for farmers and the Canadian economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P de Rocquigny", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pam de Rocquigny  
President, CWRC



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