



TEAMALBERTA

COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH INNOVATION



Team Alberta looks forward to working with a government that is dedicated to supporting Alberta's crop sector.

Agriculture is the second largest resource-based industry in Alberta, with over 20.3 million hectares of farm area. Alberta is renowned for its high-quality grains. It is the advantage upon which we compete globally. The ability of Alberta farmers to retain this competitiveness requires continued investment in innovative, agronomic and genetic research as a means of developing varieties to help farmers improve their operational efficiencies, by increasing yield, improving disease resistance and enhancing agronomic performance as well as end-use quality.

Through the commissions, farmers fund a significant level of research. Currently, between the four major crop commissions in Alberta, there is approximately \$14.7M of farmers levy dollars directed to co-funding various ongoing and new research projects in collaboration with the Alberta Government. Research is a top-priority of the commissions.

Investment in research directly impacts farmers by delivering innovations such as high-performing varieties and advanced agronomic practices which result in a higher return on investment and profits for producers which in turn benefits the rural, provincial and national economy while allowing for continued crop diversification.

Farmers value the history of collaboration with government in research projects and capacity but are concerned with diminishing levels of funding available to match their investment.

Farmers need long-term commitments from government partners to enable strategic investment in production-based research and support for training of researchers and agronomists to unlock the further potential of the crop sector and retain competitiveness within the global landscape.

Innovation is the key driver to competitiveness and sustainability.

Provincial Research Concerns

Strategic Research and Development Framework

Over the past two years, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (AF) has been undertaking a strategic review of the science and innovation framework. The objective of this review is to,

"...refocus its research capacity and funding to be more targeted and intentional in meeting AF/GOA priorities." This framework establishes the priorities for research investment from the province through the **Strategic Research and Development Program (SRDP)** and the **Agricultural Funding Consortium** (comprised of 12 organizations including ABC and AWC and receiving money from SRDP). The SRDP replaced the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA) and the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund (ACIDF).

A draft framework was released mid-year 2018 subtitled, *"Policy Driven Research – Science Based Policy"*. Livestock and crop producers raised many concerns and aligned in stating that they did not support the Framework document as it was presented. It was pointed out to AF officials that the words farmer or producer did not appear anywhere in the document.

The framework signaled the government's intention to move away from productivity-based research (improved yield, disease resistance, quality) to improve producers' competitiveness, and move toward broader government policy objectives including sustainability, public trust and value added.

Specific concerns were openly expressed to the Ministry through various mechanisms without any direct response. The final framework release date of November 1, 2018 has since passed without a release occurring or any indication of a new timeline or next steps. Throughout this time, many programs have been effectively been put on hold or are in a state of uncertainty. This has left industry in a state of flux, creating speculations and perpetuation of conflicting views of stakeholders or what the future will hold for publicly funded crop research in the province.

Major concerns with the framework are as follows:



- **Absence of Industry Collaboration** – imperative to setting any such priorities; however, industry was not engaged in the drafting of the framework. When industry was asked for input and expressed the concerns, here listed, we were assured that our concerns have been heard but told that there would be no substantive changes to the Framework document.
- **Policy-Driven Research** – The suggestion that future research-science based policy must be *policy-driven* to support AF's and GOA's internal policies implies that research priorities will be determined by government policy direction, not to support industry/producer needs to achieve economic development and competitiveness for the sector – as a major contributor to the AB economy.
- **Lack of Alignment with Industry Research and Extension Priorities** – the Framework suggests refocusing its research capacity from growth and productivity activities to public good activities including environmental stewardship, assurance, public safety and economic diversification (through value-added processing alone); leaving the priorities of the sector (productivity, agronomic and genetic research) to the private sector. The redirection of funds will have an impact on the growth of the sector (*see below*).
- **No Strategic Forward Vision for Existing Activities** – the indication that AF intends to exit productivity-based research without mention of a strategic forward vision for existing major programs or centers such as the Field Crop Development Centre (FCDC) in Lacombe, is concerning. This is of particular concern to Alberta Barley which has historical, producer funding invested into capacity and programming without certainty of its' future. Further, the lack of direction within the Framework with regards to variety development, technology transfer/extension and commercialization is also concerning.
- **Audience** – the Framework indicates a focus on the demands of 'consumers of agricultural products' and responding to their needs with the absence of any reference to the end-user (e.g. producer) leaving us confused as to whom the Framework is intended to support.
- **Productivity/Innovation Equals Sustainability** – The Framework undermines the fact that the crop and livestock sectors have voluntarily continued to adopt best management practices that support a sustainability agenda. Also, investments made into productivity-based research most often has positive implications on the environment and climate change and public good, while supporting the economic and competitiveness goals of the industry.

Research Funding

In 2018 the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund (ACIDF) was replaced at the Agriculture Funding Consortium (AFC) by the Strategic Research and Development Program (SRDP) within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. ABC and AWC alone were receiving on average \$1.3 million a year in co-funding from

ACIDF, this doesn't include other industry co-funded projects or sole funded projects from ACIDF. Last year, AWC received co-funding of \$700,000 from AF while ABC did not receive any funding and it is unclear if other organizations have received funding. While the funding allocation is expected to be similar for 2019, given an overall lack of transparency this is unclear.

Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), which provided roughly \$8 million per year to the livestock industry was also dissolved and its efforts were absorbed by SRDP. It is not clear what the current funding model is but it has been suggested that is still at \$ 8 million per year, but now split through the crop and livestock sector; however, how that envelope is further divided is unclear.

Through the arms-length ACIDF/ALMA models the funding process was conducted in a transparent manner, with forward planning and the involvement of industry stakeholders (producers).

The funding process with AFC is no longer as collaborative nor transparent. It is not clear what the funding envelope is or how decisions are being made being and a request for the composition of the technical review committee was recently denied. The priorities of the SRDP process reflect GOA policies and they are unable to fund "programs" or projects beyond 3 years. Funding cannot flow to provincial staff and, if the project is felt to be better suited to a Canadian Agricultural Partnership program, regardless of eligibility or timelines, it is not considered.

What the industry needs.

1. **A consistent funding mechanism** – with appropriate levels of funding that are revealed in a transparent and anticipatory manner.
2. **Collaboration** – the strategic plan and priorities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry should be developed in collaboration with industry and be responsive to the needs of agricultural stakeholders as appropriate.
3. **A transparent and accountable decision process** – the review committee should be made public and have industry involvement. Amounts funded and all projects funded should be made public immediately after contracting is complete
4. **Flexibility** – to respond outside of typical timelines built in to accommodate industry "emergencies" i.e. disease/pest outbreaks.
5. **A mechanism to support** research performed by AF scientists if the industry requires so as to make the best use of this capacity.
6. **A clear vision** for the Field Crop Development Centre (FCDC) in Lacombe. Alberta Barley has provided core funding to FCDC for a number of years to support its barley breeding program. We fear a significant investment of public and producer dollars may be at risk given the government's stated intention to move away from productivity-based research.



TEAMALBERTA



Alberta
Barley



ALBERTA CANOLA
ALBERTACANOLA.COM



ALBERTA PULSE
GROWERS



Alberta Wheat
COMMISSION

Team Alberta represents a working collaboration between four of Alberta's crop commissions: Alberta Barley, Alberta Canola, Alberta Pulse Growers and the Alberta Wheat Commission. We work together with the aim to provide input to policy makers, ensure long-term access to markets, promote the sustainability of the crop sector, and advocate on behalf of farmers while enabling grass-roots advocacy by our farmer members themselves.