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SCIENCE IN CANADIAN AGRICULTURE AND THE CLOSURE OF RESEARCH CENTRES

Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and
Agri-Food

Michael Coteau, Chair

MAY 2026
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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Agriculture and Agri-Food**

**Michael Coteau
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

has the honour to present its

FOURTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied science in Canadian agriculture and the closure of research centres and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

Given that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is discontinuing its analytical activities at the Longueuil laboratory, the Committee recommends that the CFIA reconsider its decision, given that the facilities at this laboratory possess expertise in nutritional analysis to verify the compliance of nutritional information with Canadian food labeling regulations and serve as the national reference and research center for food allergens. If this is not possible, the CFIA's expertise should be maintained in Quebec.

9

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada table site-specific cost-benefit analysis, which includes a trial continuity map and genetic asset inventory, to justify the proposed closures and assess the irreversibility profile of the closures. It also recommends that the Government of Canada research whether the closures will have a disproportionate negative impact on remote, northern and indigenous areas placing a further strain on food systems and contributing to food insecurity.

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Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada explore other expenditure reductions that do not impact front-line scientists to meet its Comprehensive Expenditure Review commitments.

10

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize the contribution of the agriculture sector and food and beverage manufacturing to Canada's economy, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's lower public sector employee growth compared to that of the entire government, and the value of front-line scientists and researchers when making spending reductions under the current and future Comprehensive Expenditure Review.

12

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize the agriculture and agri-food industry as a strategic sector on par with energy in terms of national security and food security as a national security issue. 12

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada undertake a review of its research and innovation programs to identify redundancies in collaboration with the various agricultural partners in Quebec and Canada. 15

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada explore new collaborative models (such as the beef and forage research cluster and the Australian model and all other collaborative models) and enhance incentives for the private sector to partner with public institutions, Universities and Colleges to increase total funding for agricultural and agri-food research in Canada. 15

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada reconsider its decision to cancel the organic and regenerative program at the Swift Current Research and Development Centre. 17

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, academia, the private sector, and investors, develops and implements a strategy to strengthen collaboration across the agriculture and agri-food innovation ecosystem. This strategy should bring together producers, universities, industry, and investors from coast to coast to coast, promote a genuine culture of collaboration, break down existing silos in science, research, and development, and remove rules and barriers that have discouraged cooperation. It should support research excellence, strengthen partnerships across the innovation system, and ensure that emerging technologies and scientific advancements are effectively developed, scaled, and adopted throughout the sector. 19

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada deem science and innovation a central priority in the next agricultural policy framework. 20

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada undertake a comprehensive analysis of the importance of research on soil types, soil health, and forage crop systems in Canadian agriculture. This analysis should evaluate how regionally specific soil and forage research contributes to agricultural productivity, climate resilience, and sustainable land management across Canada, and should inform future and current federal decisions related to agricultural science priorities, research infrastructure, and program design. 23

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada maintain and strengthen research activities on forage crops, given their importance for agricultural productivity, farm resilience, and the sustainability of agri-food systems, particularly by maintaining the research centres dedicated for that purpose. 23

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada understand and preserve the unique and critical research programs that cannot be replicated elsewhere at the 7 agriculture Research Development Centres and experimental farm sites. 27

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that research projects conducted in actual agricultural conditions and leveraging partnerships between universities and colleges and agricultural producers be prioritized. 27

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada ensure a strategic geographic distribution of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres, in order to provide representative access to the diversity of agricultural soils across the country, as well as to latitude zones aligned with the potential for agricultural development, including in northern regions. 27

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada table an action plan setting out how research conducted by the research centres and experimental farms affected by proposed closures or cuts will be continued and how much funding will go toward its research projects. 29

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada table an action plan and a specific budget to provide stable, predictable public funding geared toward the agroecological transition in research in colleges and universities while providing adequate funding to recruit and retain technical staff to work in laboratories. 31

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada strengthen communication and engagement with provincial governments, local communities, and affected stakeholders regarding the proposed changes to the operations, mandate, and status of federal agriculture and agri-food research and development centres, including closures or restructuring. The Committee further recommends that the Government ensure that valuable scientific expertise, research capacity, and ongoing research are preserved and not lost, and that decisions be accompanied by greater transparency and the timely sharing of information. 33

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada pause and reverse the decision to close agricultural research centres and experimental farm sites and begin immediate consultations with the Office of the Chief Science Advisor, public sector unions, impacted stakeholders, employees, research partners, local, regional and provincial representatives to better understand the scientific and economic impact of the proposed closures. 33

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that, in keeping with the confidentiality agreements signed with the employer, the employees affected by the closures be able to raise concerns about situations that they deem to be detrimental to the public interest. 33



SCIENCE IN CANADIAN AGRICULTURE AND THE CLOSURE OF RESEARCH CENTRES

BACKGROUND

On 10 February 2026, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (the Committee) adopted the following [motion](#):

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to examine the importance of science, technology, and innovation in the agriculture and agri-food sector, including the impact of the federal government's decision to close multiple Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres and experimental farms, including the Lacombe Research and Development Centre in Alberta, the Quebec Research and Development Centre located in Sainte-Foy, Quebec, and the Nappan Experimental Farm in Nova Scotia; that the study include at least four meetings and commence as soon as possible and that the committee report its findings to the House.

The Committee held four meetings from 10 February to 10 March 2026, heard 27 witnesses and received 15 written briefs on the issue of science in Canadian agriculture and the closure of research centres, including the Lacombe Research and Development Centre in Alberta, the Quebec Research and Development Centre in Sainte-Foy, Quebec, the Guelph Research Centre in Ontario, and the experimental farms in Nappan, in Nova Scotia, Portage la Prairie, in Manitoba, and Indian Head and Scott, in Saskatchewan. Budget cuts to the research programs at the Swift Current Research and Development Centre in Saskatchewan were also discussed during the hearings and in the briefs submitted. The Committee would like to thank all witnesses for their contributions, and it is pleased to present its report and recommendations to the Government of Canada.

The report begins with an overview of the announced closures of various research centres in Canada and the current needs in the agricultural research sector. The report then outlines the importance and benefits of agricultural research in Canada. Lastly, it addresses the anticipated impacts of the closures of these research centres.



Budget Constraints and the Closure of Research Centres and Satellite Farms

During his appearance before the Committee, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), [Lawrence Hanson](#), told the Committee that AAFC funds the activities of 20 research development centres and 25 satellite centres across Canada. As part of its Comprehensive Expenditure Review, included in the 2025 budget, AAFC plans to close three research centres, “those in Quebec City, Guelph and Lacombe, [as well as] four ... satellite farms—those in Scott, Indian Head, Portage la Prairie and Nappan.” When asked in the House of Commons about the impacts of the closure of research centres, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Honourable [Heath MacDonald](#), cited the decline in investment in agricultural research and development in Canada:

Let me quote some of the numbers over the past few years. The research and development system is becoming less diverse. Public investment in agriculture knowledge generation, which includes R and D, has declined by 15%. Private sector outsourced R and D to universities is down 77%. The number of enterprises conducting research and development has shrunk by 30%.

[Lawrence Hanson](#) told the Committee that AAFC spends approximately \$300 million annually on research and development. Of this amount, \$90 million goes toward corporate support, such as maintenance and utilities. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that the announced closures will serve to reduce maintenance costs while maintaining research development capabilities by consolidating research activities into other centres. He estimated that roughly 27 researchers would be directly affected by the closures, through job losses or relocation to another research centre. According to [Patrick St-Georges](#), First National Executive Vice-President of the Agriculture Union for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, 494 members of his unions holding “positions as laboratory and greenhouse technicians, grounds and facility maintenance workers, and administrators, and ... other roles” will be affected by the closures.

Deputy Minister [Hanson](#) also confirmed to the Committee that the Agricultural Climate Solutions program, or Living Labs, which includes 14 research projects, will not be included in the closures announced. This program is based on collaboration between researchers and producers to gather data on carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas mitigation. The program is expected to conclude in its current phase, with no new projects being added and the budget envelopes for existing projects not being renewed once the original funding period ends.

When asked by the Committee about the possibility of obtaining an analysis from AAFC regarding the impact of the closures on the development of agricultural research,

[Lawrence Hanson](#) promised to provide the Committee with “the financial information on costs associated with the centres” as well as “information about how [AAFC] intends to address any limitations resulting from the reductions.” A written response was provided to the Committee on 13 April 2026. It states that the department expects savings of approximately \$86 million in research and development for 2026–2027, approximately \$41 million in 2027–2028, \$111 million in 2028–2029 and \$115 million in 2029–2030 for a total of approximately \$394 million. It also states that

AAFC will wind down some programs outside its core mandate and reduce certain science activities where a more streamlined approach can be taken, or where capacity exists elsewhere, for example in academia and industry.

More specifically, regarding the proposed closures of the research centres in Lacombe, Quebec City and Guelph, as well as the satellite farms in Indian Head, Nappan, Scott and Portage La Prairie, AAFC projects operating savings of \$233 million over 10 years and \$87 million in deferred maintenance costs. However, AAFC notes that this amount includes neither the costs of relocation, divestiture and decommissioning, nor potential site remediation costs.

During his appearance before the Committee, the Honourable [Richard J. Sigurdson](#), Alberta’s Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, called on the federal government to conduct an impact assessment of the closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre and to engage with the Alberta government to discuss options for preserving and continuing the research conducted at the centre.

In a [brief](#) to the Committee, Gilles Saindon, Former Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Scientist at AAFC, and Yvon Martel, Former Chief Scientist – International for AAFC, also urge the federal government to conduct a “thorough analysis of scientific, economic and regional impacts” of the announced closures of the research centres.

In addition to the closures of AAFC research centres, the Committee also learned of the upcoming closure of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s (CFIA) laboratory in Longueuil, whose responsibilities include analyzing food allergens and marine biotoxins. When asked about this, [Patrick St-Georges](#) was unable to say how the analyses conducted by this laboratory will be carried out, since the other laboratories are already working full time. He added that, in his view, this closure does not result in savings in terms of building maintenance, as the building continues to be leased by Health Canada.

Recommendation 1

Given that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is discontinuing its analytical activities at the Longueuil laboratory, the Committee recommends that the CFIA reconsider its



decision, given that the facilities at this laboratory possess expertise in nutritional analysis to verify the compliance of nutritional information with Canadian food labeling regulations and serve as the national reference and research centre for food allergens. If this is not possible, the CFIA's expertise should be maintained in Quebec.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada table site-specific cost-benefit analysis, which includes a trial continuity map and genetic asset inventory, to justify the proposed closures and assess the irreversibility profile of the closures. It also recommends that the Government of Canada research whether the closures will have a disproportionate negative impact on remote, northern and indigenous areas placing a further strain on food systems and contributing to food insecurity.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada explore other expenditure reductions that do not impact front-line scientists to meet its Comprehensive Expenditure Review commitments.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH IN CANADA

During his appearance before the Committee, [Rickey Yada](#), Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Alberta and member of the Deans Council of Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine, went over the importance of the agriculture and agri-food sector in Canada:

[T]he agriculture and agri-food sector is an economic powerhouse. In 2024, it generated nearly \$150 billion, or approximately 7% of Canada's total GDP. This industry supports 2.3 million jobs, meaning that one in every nine Canadians goes to work every day because of our food system. We are not just feeding ourselves. We are also a global leader, exporting over \$100.3 billion in products to more than 200 countries. The agriculture and agri-food sector's success is built on an innovation chain whose links include our hard-working farmers and ranchers, industry partners, and government and post-secondary institutions.

Regarding the economic impacts of the proposed cuts, witnesses told the committee about the significant economic benefits of investing in agricultural science and innovation. This was the point raised by [John Ireland](#), Reeve of Lacombe County:

We know that every dollar invested in agriculture research returns up to \$63. In what other sector would you consider cutting a program with a 6,000% return on investment? To forgo research and development in a sector that contributes so significantly to Canada's GDP is not finding efficiencies; it is being short-sighted.

During his appearance before the Committee, [Tyler Groeneveld](#), Chief Executive Officer of Protein Industries Canada, also cited the share of GDP generated by the agricultural sector and the 2.3 million jobs that depend on it. He illustrated how important this economic sector is, adding “[t]hat’s more than auto and aerospace combined.”

The Albertan Minister [Sigurdson](#) told the Committee about the importance of funding agricultural research in Canada. He said that research funding has significant economic benefits for the country:

It is strategic investment that aligns with the need for Canada to strengthen its economy and grow the national GDP, which is more important now than ever.

Investment in agriculture research delivers strong economic returns. Closing [the Lacombe research centre] to achieve short-term goals risks losing long-term economic gains that far outweigh immediate fiscal savings.

[Justine Hendricks](#), President and Chief Executive Officer of Farm Credit Canada (FCC), was asked during her appearance before the Committee, in the context of its study on Bill C-15, about the importance of research and innovation in agriculture to FCC and what FCC was doing to support the sector. She said:

As for how Farm Credit Canada is able to support innovation, I’d like to share a statistic with you. If we compare ourselves to our neighbours to the south in terms of investment in technology and innovation in agriculture, the ratio is 23 to 1. There are several components to Farm Credit Canada. We’re establishing many partnerships with learning farms to support farmers, so they can come together or so we can test new technologies.

We also sometimes work with research organizations to try to advance and accelerate research and technologies. We really see ourselves as a catalyst in this respect, by being able to balance that innovation and how our organization can support innovation, which is directly related to an increase in productivity, and that’s what we’re trying to achieve.

[Justine Hendricks](#) also pointed to specific FCC spending on agricultural innovation, which is expected to reach \$7 billion by 2030:

Last year, we pledged to invest \$2 billion by 2030 to propel innovation and productivity growth. Earlier this week, FCC convened private investors who jointly pledged \$5 billion of new investment in this sector by 2030. That's \$7 billion by 2030. It is the biggest dollar commitment to Canada's agriculture and food sector—certainly in my lifetime.



According to [Rickey Yada](#), the network of federal agricultural research centres “provided the specialized infrastructure and long-term scientific expertise needed to solve complex challenges.” He also told the Committee about the importance of the soil health research conducted at these centres, which is “the literal foundation of agriculture.”

As an example, [Rickey Yada](#) told the Committee about the importance of Canadian canola research, whose new cultivars have led to increased production, now accounting for nearly 15% of Canadian agricultural exports. He added that agricultural science also impacts much broader sectors of the economy:

It’s innovation and value-added production in not only raw commodities but also fortified foods, the new products consumers demand and other innovations that lead to safer, more secure food chains. It’s climate change, nutrition and health research. It’s biodiversity, animal welfare, water management, textiles and building materials.

[Vincent Poirier](#), Professor and Scientific Director of the Institut de recherche en agriculture et en agroalimentaire at the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, quoting his colleague Jean Caron, pointed to the critical importance of soil surveys for Canadian agriculture:

Political circles and civil society rarely realize that people around the world are 30 centimetres away from famine. What does that mean? It means that all of our food depends on the top 30 centimetres of soil on the earth’s surface.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize the contribution of the agriculture sector and food and beverage manufacturing to Canada’s economy, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s lower public sector employee growth compared to that of the entire government, and the value of front-line scientists and researchers when making spending reductions under the current and future Comprehensive Expenditure Review.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize the agriculture and agri-food industry as a strategic sector on par with energy in terms of national security and food security as a national security issue.

Collaboration Across Sectors in Agricultural Research

[Lori Oatway](#), a research scientist with Western Crop Innovation, told the Committee about the importance of collaboration between the private and public sectors. Commenting on the announced closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre, she told the Committee about the importance of AAFC research centres within the agricultural research ecosystem. The witness highlighted the interdependence that exists between the private sector in which she works, the academic sector, and AAFC research centres. Ms. Oatway summarized the situation this way: “When centres are removed, we lose not just the scientists but also the research, connectivity and trust that sustain innovation across agriculture value chains.” The witness said that this weakens the national research network, in part because research functions as an integrated network.

Funding programs based on collaborative investment between the private and public sectors have indeed enjoyed some success across the country. This is particularly true of Results-Driven Agricultural Research (RDAR), as noted by the Honourable [Richard J. Sigurdson](#) during his appearance before the Committee. RDAR is the Alberta government’s agricultural research program. It operates on a collaborative model between the private and public sectors. The Alberta government has invested roughly \$41.5 million annually in the program since it was introduced in 2019. Minister Sigurdson estimates that for every dollar invested, the program has generated returns of three to five dollars.

Regarding possible models for research co-funding, research funding in Australia’s grain sector was also cited by [Tyler McCann](#), Managing Director of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute:

If you look at the grain sector in Australia and the way their model works, you’ll see that the sector invests check-off dollars and royalty dollars that are matched by government. In the grain sector in Australia, several years ago they unveiled a 2023–28 research plan that will invest \$1 billion in grains research. That’s not just government money. That’s government money, producer money and the ecosystem working together to deliver better results. We don’t have that model of collaboration in Canada. For too long, we’ve kind of made efforts at it. We take the time to say we’re working together.

The Australian model raised by witness Tyler McCann refers to Australia’s research and development corporations (RDCs). This model is based on collaborative co-investment by the Australian government and the agricultural industry in research and innovation. The Australian government collects taxes and levies on various commodities to fund agricultural research, matching industry spending on research and development up



to 0.5% of its gross value of production. The RDCs are accountable to both the Australian government and industry.¹

In Canada, AAFC, through the Agri-Science Program’s “clusters” component, funds collaborative research and development initiatives involving multiple research and development stakeholders. These research clusters are described as “projects intended to mobilize industry, government and academia through partnerships, and address priority national themes and horizontal issues.” The beef and forage research cluster, raised by certain witnesses during this study, refers to this type of partnership.²

Witnesses pointed to research clusters as an interesting example of a collaborative research model in Canada. During his appearance before the Committee, [Tyler McCann](#) described them as “promotion and research [agencies] that [collect] some of the levies, [look] at the continuum from research and development to market development, and [have] a more coherent plan.” However, he did note that the research cluster system is currently underfunded. By way of comparison, he cited Australian investments in the wheat research cluster, which total nearly \$1 billion, compared to \$20 million in Canada for the same sector.

Specifically regarding the beef cluster, [Andrea Brocklebank](#), Executive Director of the Beef Cattle Research Council, an organization financed by beef producers, provided the Committee with a few clarifications during her appearance:

Previous to the cluster, we would fund a project, or Agriculture Canada or a province would. It would be small. It would have a few researchers and limited collaboration. The cluster allowed us to create networks. We did it around antimicrobial surveillance. We did it around forage production, where we had researchers from across the country working together on forage breeding and collaborating. It created a model wherein we could work with Agriculture Canada and universities together. Industry could invest, and so could Agriculture Canada. Yes, there were hurdles with the cluster—we could talk about them for days—but overall it built that network.

The witness added that the model was interesting because it allowed the government and industry to invest, and that investment had increased as a result. However, she did note, as did Tyler McCann, that the system is underfunded, limiting its potential.

1 Australia, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, [Research and Development Corporations](#).

2 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, [AgriScience Program: Beef and Forage Cluster](#).

When asked about the importance of funding university agricultural research centres, Minister [Sigurdson](#), raising the significant economic benefits of research funding, called for broader and more inclusive funding across all affected sectors:

[I]t's essential that we take a look at the models with colleges, universities, crop development centres and our applied research centres across individual provinces and industry, as well as farmers. This is the key, not really focusing on one but on all as an essential piece to make sure that we have the most impact with the dollar spent.

The interdependence between AAFC research centres, academia and the private sector was also highlighted in other evidence received by the Committee. [Serge Buy](#), Chief Executive Officer of the Agri-Food Innovation Council, also highlighted the strong ties between these sectors. In his view, consultations with the research sector and an impact assessment of the research centre closures should have been conducted before the government made its decision. According to the [witness](#), a more thorough assessment and consultation could have identified potential duplication in research that could have been targeted for specific cuts, rather than the across-the-board cuts that were announced.

During his appearance before the Committee, [Tyler Groeneveld](#), Chief Executive Officer of Protein Industries Canada, cautioned members about the consequences of failing to participate in research and innovation across all sectors involved in this industry:

However, without a sustained focus on research and innovation among all players— including industry, government and academia, and across the entire value chain— Canada risks falling further behind. Already, in a recent ranking of countries in terms of global food innovation, Canada ranks number five behind countries like the U.K., the U.S., Germany and Australia.

According to the witness, research and innovation are essential to the global competitiveness of Canada's agricultural sector.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada undertake a review of its research and innovation programs to identify redundancies in collaboration with the various agricultural partners in Quebec and Canada.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada explore new collaborative models (such as the beef and forage research cluster and the Australian model and all other collaborative models) and enhance incentives for the private sector to partner with



public institutions, Universities and Colleges to increase total funding for agricultural and agri-food research in Canada.

Importance of Maintaining Public Funding in Certain Research Areas

However, while certain industrial sectors lend themselves well to increased collaboration between private research and the public sector, other research areas are particularly dependent on the research data produced and funded in AAFC research centres. This is particularly true for organic and local agriculture. [Sophie Martel](#), General Manager of the *Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité*, at the Cégep of Victoriaville, shared her concerns with the Committee regarding the closures and, more broadly, the role that basic research should play in the public sector. One of the aims of this research is to address the impact of climate change and new pests on agriculture by considering the nature of different soils and minimizing the use of inputs. The witness also recommended reinvesting the funds saved through cuts to basic research.

The need to maintain public funding for a certain portion of agricultural research was also addressed by [Steven Cole](#), Mayor of the Village of Indian Head, in Saskatchewan, home to one of the experimental farms slated for closure. This research farm produces seeds adapted to the region's climate and soil, benefiting local farmers. He said that it would be a mistake to assume that the reduction in public-sector agricultural research can be taken over by the private sector. He believes that if this were the case, the cost of research would then be passed on to the farmers who purchase the seeds produced at this site. He also notes that "research that provides a broad public benefit, such as environmental sustainability, soil health or long-term economic resilience, may receive less attention."

When asked about how the government could support innovation and science in the organic field, [Sophie Martel](#) first mentioned the need for "stable and predictable" funding. She also added that since this type of agriculture involves studying a system, a medium- and long-term perspective is also needed.

The importance of funding for organic agriculture was also addressed in a [brief](#) submitted jointly by seven organic agriculture organizations.³ These organizations are calling for the decision to close the Swift Current Research and Development Centre to be reversed:

3 The organizations that submitted the brief are the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network, the Canada Organic Trade Association, Canadian Organic Growers, the National Farmers Union, the Organic Federation of Canada, SaksOrganics and SeedChange.

This program should be understood as part of Canada’s core public agricultural research infrastructure. Long-term organically managed field trials and regionally adapted systems research are national scientific assets that cannot be recreated once lost.

For nearly two decades, this program—led by Dr. Myriam Fernandez—has been the only dedicated organic systems research program within AAFC.

The National Farmers Union also shared this view in another [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, calling for the closure of the Swift Current Research and Development Centre to be cancelled. The brief describes the impacts of this closure as follows:

The Organic and Regenerative program at Swift Current is Canada’s only site for registration trials for cereal crop varieties developed for organic and low-input production systems. These trials require organically managed sites to obtain valid results. Shutting down the program will likely result in destruction of these plots. Eliminating testing under organic conditions will deprive organic farmers of data needed to choose the best variety for their farms, and will likely result in less breeding for organic production. The loss of this research could have much further-reaching consequences. If economic conditions and/or supply chains restrict access to fertilizer and chemicals for manufacturing pesticides, or certain weeds become multi-resistant to pesticides, non-organic farmers will also benefit from varieties developed for organic production.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada reconsider its decision to cancel the organic and regenerative program at the Swift Current Research and Development Centre.

Renewal of Agricultural Research

[Tyler McCann](#) shared with the Committee his findings about agricultural research in Canada. He told the Committee that, according to the innovation system professionals he surveyed, the system is on the verge of a crisis. This is the result of budget constraints over several years, which have forced AAFC to choose between “[spreading] scarce dollars thinly or [consolidating] and [renewing].” The announced closures and the concentration of research in the remaining centres tell the witness that AAFC has chosen the second option.

When asked about the importance of strategic partnerships with the provinces on research and innovation, [Tyler McCann](#) also addressed the issue of research concentration:



We often talk about the need for one Canadian economy. That’s as much a cultural issue in agriculture as it is in other things. We live in a world where producers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba all want the same research done in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, rather than asking how we can lean into a more national approach, recognizing that, yes, there are some differences, but often similarities are there.

We need to do a better job of thinking about our research investment not from a provincial perspective but rather from a national perspective. There are too many examples where we haven’t had provincial producer groups willing to invest in national initiatives either.

During her appearance before the Committee, [Alison Sunstrum](#), founding entrepreneur of the agricultural technology company NYA Ventures Inc., echoed Tyler McCann’s remarks. She pointed to chronic underfunding, citing “decades of underinvestment in infrastructure and people, aging labs, deferred maintenance and constrained hiring.” She also noted that the announced closures threaten the continuity of research, which depends on years of expertise and continuous data collection in a specific area. Ms. Sunstrum concluded by addressing the need to revitalize the field of research in Canada:

We are in the midst of an unprecedented biological and digital transformation that will redefine how food is bred, grown, processed and brought to market. Artificial intelligence is accelerating discovery. Genomics is compressing breeding cycles. Advanced phenotyping and robotics are increasing precision and productivity. Precision fermentation and biomanufacturing are creating entirely new industrial categories in proteins, materials, enzymes and low-carbon inputs.

...

Without modern infrastructure, opportunity becomes aspiration. Public research builds the foundation. Private capital scales it. If public investment weakens, private capital moves elsewhere, and it rarely returns.

During her appearance, [Nancy Tout](#), Interim Chief Executive Officer of Global Institute for Food Security at the University of Saskatchewan, shared with the Committee her vision for the future of innovation in Canada’s agri-food sector. She began by saying that Canada must improve its commercialization capabilities and productivity. She made two recommendations to the Committee: first, Canada must approach research as a data ecosystem, better coordinated across the country, particularly through the use of artificial intelligence. Then, Canada “must strengthen [its] partnership model and approach to innovation to be inclusive of public, private and producers.”

Based on the idea that agricultural research in Canada needs renewal, [Tyler McCann](#) also made three recommendations to the Committee: first, enhance transparency and accountability, particularly by explaining the rationale behind government decisions and

the department's research plans. Second, the need for AAFC to build partnerships in the field of science and to make it its priority. Lastly, AAFC needs to develop a strategic plan to build an agricultural innovation system that responds to current realities, making it a priority for the department. He concluded his recommendations with this general comment:

The impact of these cuts will be worse if they are not a starting point for more meaningful change. AAFC needs to renew its approach to science. It needs to consolidate its footprint. It is unfortunate that public investments have been cut, but governments, like farmers, can do more with less. AAFC should not be making these changes in isolation. It is a leader and a partner. The future of Canadian agriculture R and D and science needs it to embrace its role as one.

National Agricultural Research and Innovation Strategy

The idea of a strategic plan for agricultural research and innovation in Canada was raised by a number of witnesses. During his appearance, [Serge Buy](#) expressed the view that cuts to research spending are necessary, but they should not necessarily target regional research centres. With this in mind, [the witness](#) recommended developing a national strategy for agri-food research. In the immediate term, he called for financial support for the research sectors that will be affected by the announced closures. Chief Scientific Advisor [Mona Nemer](#) was not consulted prior to the decision to close the research centres and experimental farms.

[Sophie Martel](#) also recommended developing such a strategy during her appearance. She also called for agricultural research to be viewed more broadly as strategic infrastructure that contributes to Canada's sovereignty.

In a [brief](#) to the Committee, Doug Miller, Executive Director of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, also called for a strategy regarding the announced closures. He recommended the following:

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.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, academia, the private sector, and investors, develops and implements a strategy to strengthen collaboration across the agriculture



and agri-food innovation ecosystem. This strategy should bring together producers, universities, industry, and investors from coast to coast to coast, promote a genuine culture of collaboration, break down existing silos in science, research, and development, and remove rules and barriers that have discouraged cooperation. It should support research excellence, strengthen partnerships across the innovation system, and ensure that emerging technologies and scientific advancements are effectively developed, scaled, and adopted throughout the sector.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada deem science and innovation a central priority in the next agricultural policy framework.

IMPACTS OF PLANNED RESEARCH CENTRE CLOSURES ON AGRICULTURE SCIENCE IN CANADA

During their appearances and in the briefs submitted to the Committee, the witnesses outlined several anticipated impacts of the announced research centre closures. There are various impacts and they affect advances in research areas, the importance of distributing research across the country's various regions, the necessary continuity of research, the work of other research centres across the country, and the affected workers and communities. According to the testimony of Deputy Minister [Lawrence Hanson](#), the department

determined that it would be a much more efficient use of funds to consolidate science efforts into fewer facilities and prioritize the science efforts that are most core to the department's mandate, rather than diverting more and more resources to operational costs and upkeep over time.

He also added that "at least half of the reductions in the department, overall, are operational efficiencies, not program or science reductions."

Impacts on Research Areas

Witnesses identified several research areas that are particularly impacted by the announced research centre closures. Soil health, forage crops, cattle breeding and seeds were specifically highlighted, sometimes in an interconnected way, as these areas are often interdependent. Illustrating this interdependence among research sectors, [Andrea Brocklebank](#), speaking about the cattle industry, highlighted the importance of forage crop development for this industry through research centres across Canada:

Researchers at Lacombe and Quebec are developing higher-yielding, winter-hardy alfalfa varieties. Nappan's researchers develop pasture and grazing management programs suited to Atlantic Canada and breed improved trefoil, red clover and alfalfa varieties that have been adopted across Canada. This is what a functioning national network looks like and is only one example of that—regional strengths connected to national outcomes. It aligns well with a one Canadian economy approach.

In addition to the areas mentioned, others will also be affected by the closures. This is particularly true of the research group studying flies. In a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, Art Borkent, an independent insect taxonomist, shared his concerns about the elimination of this group following the announced closures. According to him, this announcement has caused shock and serious concern within his research community in Canada, as well as internationally.

[Andrea Brocklebank](#), on the impact of the closures, claimed that:

universities and private industry cannot fill the gaps these cuts have created. Public-good research is essential where market incentives are limited and where independent, unbiased expertise is required to support regulatory decisions, market access and consumer trust. Furthermore, universities are facing significant fiscal pressures themselves and cannot mobilize the capacity to fill those gaps right now.

Research on Soil Health

Regarding soil health, which affects both forage production and grain and corn production, Professors Vincent Poirier, Alison Munson, and Jean Caron, in a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, describe a situation they consider alarming. Their analyses confirm that 90% of agricultural soils in Quebec have degraded, which has adverse effects on the agricultural yield of these areas. In their view, the ongoing research on soil health and forage crops at the Quebec Research and Development Centre is essential, and ending it not only harms the interests of farms themselves but also threatens Canada's food sovereignty. They therefore recommend suspending plans to close them.

During his appearance, Professor [Vincent Poirier](#) also raised the importance of the research area for agricultural science:

Perennial forage plants help enrich soils, so healthy forage production and healthy soils go hand in hand.

Soils and forage plants provide a number of other ecological services to society. They can sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support biodiversity, and regulate water and nutrient cycles. Despite this, the science is clear: Our soils continue to degrade, especially in Quebec and eastern Canada, and their ability to produce food is declining.



Research on soils and forage plants is vital, particularly at the Quebec City research centre, to counter this degradation. The announced closure of research centres is a true scientific disaster that will set us back by several decades.

Research conducted at the Indian Head Research Farm has actually contributed to a major breakthrough in soil health. It was there that no-till farming was developed. According to [Tyler Groeneveld](#), this breakthrough is one of the most important inventions in Canadian agriculture. According to [David Gehl](#), a retired officer in charge of the seed increase unit at Indian Head, this technique has even been adopted around the world, particularly in regions where agriculture relies on rain for its water supply.

Research on Forage Crops

According to [Patrick St-Georges](#), the closure of the Quebec Research and Development Centre will also have an impact on the forage crop sector. He told the Committee that the loss of local expertise in forage production in cold, humid climates will also hinder innovation in the cattle sector.

The *Conseil québécois des plantes fourragères* also submitted a [brief](#) on the importance of this area of research. The brief highlights the importance of forage crops in crop rotations, soil health, and resilience to climate change. Regarding the announced closures, particularly at the Quebec Research and Development Centre, and the idea of transferring research to other sectors, the brief states:

It is unrealistic to think that other institutions will be able to fully compensate for the void left by their departure. A federal mandate ensures stability, continuity and a long-term intervention capacity that neither universities nor provincial centres can provide alone. These institutions do not replace the Centre; they collaborate with it and rely on its expertise.

When asked about the economic impact of closing research centres working on forage crops, retired agricultural professor [Carole Lafrenière](#) of the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) cited the effects of the closure of the Kapuskasing Research Farm, in Ontario, on the cattle industry in Abitibi-Témiscamingue:

Our beef production, both in the 1990s and the early 2000s, was in the neighbourhood of \$45 million worth of revenue or \$50 million worth of GDP. However, the revenues then dropped to \$35 million in terms of GDP. At the time, the financial impact was greater on beef production than on dairy production.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada undertake a comprehensive analysis of the importance of research on soil types, soil health, and forage crop systems in Canadian agriculture. This analysis should evaluate how regionally specific soil and forage research contributes to agricultural productivity, climate resilience, and sustainable land management across Canada, and should inform future and current federal decisions related to agricultural science priorities, research infrastructure, and program design.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada maintain and strengthen research activities on forage crops, given their importance for agricultural productivity, farm resilience, and the sustainability of agri-food systems, particularly by maintaining the research centres dedicated for that purpose.

Research on Cattle Farming

With regard to the cattle industry in particular, [Andrea Brocklebank](#) believes that closing the research centres in Nappan, Quebec City and Lacombe will have significant negative impacts on cattle farming in Canada, particularly due to the loss of expertise in research data. This expertise includes the development of forages suited to the various soils and climates of Canada's regions. She also noted the loss of specific expertise in impartial beef grading, which is particularly important for the competitiveness of Canadian beef in international markets. The Lacombe Research and Development Centre also conducts food safety research aimed at reducing risks associated with E. coli O157:H7 in Canada. Closing this research centre reduces Canada's research capacity in this area.

If the closures go ahead, the [witness](#) recommended that "critical programs and expertise should be transferred in a way that preserves their function, continuity, access to essential infrastructure, breeding lines and data." This transfer should particularly focus on "forage breeding, food safety and carcass quality and data."

During his appearance, the Albertan Minister [Sigurdson](#) agreed, adding that closing the Lacombe Research and Development Centre would result in:

Alberta no longer having a federal research abattoir, in turn affecting capacity for carcass evaluation, food safety improvements and value chain studies. The facility's advanced grading technologies, including near-infrared, NIR, scanners and DEXA imaging, will also be lost.



[Andrea Brocklebank](#) also believes that investing in innovation is essential, particularly in the cattle industry. She pointed out that every dollar invested in cattle research generates a return of \$63 for producers. She also believes that the research gaps resulting from the announced cuts cannot be filled by universities, which are also “facing significant fiscal pressures.” This was corroborated by [Rickey Yada](#) during his appearance:

Innovation is foundational through universities, but we’ve worked very closely with AAFC researchers, and I think we’re all facing similar situations of constrained finances and resources.

Research on Seeds

[Steven Cole](#) told the Committee about the impact that closing the Indian Head Research Farm would have on seed production in the region:

A major concern with the closure of the Indian Head facility is the loss of the seed increase unit associated with the research farm. Experts estimate that moving the unit would delay research progress by three to five years due to the time required to prepare new land. Those delays could cost the agriculture sector as much as \$400 million in lost progress and innovation.

Regarding the \$400 million loss in innovation, [David Gehl](#) explained to the Committee that this figure is based on the loss of efficiency among producers who will not have access to the new seed varieties developed by the research farm.

In a [brief](#) to the Committee, Doug Miller, Executive Director of the Canadian Seed Growers’ Association, also addressed the impact of the announced closures on seed research. He described these impacts as follows:

Plant breeding is not a switch that can be turned on and off. Developing a new variety takes roughly 10 years. Once expertise, facilities, and regionally adapted programs are lost, they are extremely difficult to rebuild. Seed growers rely on a stable and predictable pipeline of new varieties developed through close collaboration among breeders, pathologists, agronomists, quality specialists, and the broader value chain. Public research programs are also essential for training the next generation of plant scientists and for advancing technologies that are later adopted by the private sector.

...

The government’s proposed closures of research stations will disrupt public plant breeding and have long-term and irreparable impacts on Canadian farmers and food security.

In light of that, Doug Miller recommended postponing the closures, at least until a transition plan is in place. This would also help coordinate with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requirements for new seed varieties produced by AAFC at its research centres and satellite farms.

Impacts on the Distribution of Agricultural Research Across Canada's Regions

Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin, Member of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly representing Cumberland North, shared her concerns with the Committee regarding the closure of the Nappan Research Farm in Nova Scotia. According to Ms. Smith-McCrossin, the closure of this research farm will have an impact not only on the Cumberland community, but also more broadly on the entire beef industry in Atlantic Canada. According to the witness, this production accounts for approximately 10% of Canada's beef consumption, and the closure of the Nappan Research Farm could reduce it even further. Not only that, but since the soil conditions in Nappan are unique to the Bay of Fundy, she believes that the research conducted in this region cannot simply be replicated elsewhere, such as in Swift Current or Lethbridge.

Several witnesses told the Committee that they were concerned about the closure of AAFC research centres, citing the loss of data on soils and climates specific to certain regions. This was particularly the case for John Ireland, Reeve of Lacombe County, who mentioned this to the Committee in the broader context of the challenges facing agriculture due to climate change:

These shifts require real-time, region-specific research. You cannot manage a farm in Lacombe using data gathered anywhere else in the country, even from southern Alberta. Despite being in the same province, our climates, soil profiles and moisture levels are vastly different. Relying on a single southern station to serve the entire province is like asking a doctor to diagnose a patient he has never met based on a chart from someone four hours away.

Discussing the consequences of closing the Indian Head Research Farm, Steven Cole made similar remarks during his appearance:

Canada is a vast country with highly variable soils, climates and production systems. Research conducted in Indian Head, because of its unique location in the transition area between the parkland and the grassland, reflects conditions across the prairie region and strengthens the overall quality of Canada's agriculture science.

Patrick St-Georges also addressed the issue, particularly with regard to the Quebec Research and Development Centre:



Among the proposed closures, the closure of the Quebec Research and Development Centre, as well as a sub-centre in Saint-Augustin, stands out as a decision with profoundly and deeply troubling consequences. This centre is one of the few federal research hubs explicitly dedicated to understanding agricultural systems in cold and humid climates. Research conducted at the Quebec centre directly supports agriculture in these environments by focusing on productivity, sustainability and environmental performance.

Professor [Vincent Poirier](#) told the Committee how important it is to conduct research on specific soils and climates. Rejecting the idea that research can be conducted in greenhouses under isolated and controlled conditions, he explained the situation as follows:

Soil can't be moved. It's unthinkable to do that. It's also impossible to move climate conditions. We can try our very best, but there's so much complexity involved in the natural environment that I would say it's unrealistic to think that we can recreate everything under controlled conditions.

However, it's necessary if we want to see what's going to happen in 50 years, because we don't have the luxury of waiting. We need modelling tools and artificial intelligence to help us refine our models, set better parameters and better understand the mechanisms. Ultimately, all of this has to translate into the field to validate these models.

The importance of research in specific climates was also addressed by Scott Keller, an agronomist who submitted a [brief](#) to the Committee. He believes that scientific research needs to be carried out "across a wide range of environments and climatic conditions, not inside a laboratory."

[Vincent Poirier](#), Professor and Scientific Director of the Institut de recherche en agriculture et en agroalimentaire at the University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, provided a compelling example of collaborative research with farmers, as well as the positive impact of having facilities where they can come and observe the on-farm research firsthand:

I would say that what we did with the system at the Lafontaine-Noël farm in Abitibi-Ouest was create an experiment that doesn't exist anywhere else in the world, on 20 hectares and with livestock, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions produced by livestock.

Since the soil there is clayey, and good-quality perennial plants grow there, the bar was high, so tree hedgerows had to be planted. We conducted a big experiment to try to manage grazing livestock and sequester carbon in the soil, in the trees and in the plants to create a new farming model. It's also important to mention that we did this under real-world farming conditions. Farmers come to visit the farm and can see how things

are run, how the livestock moves and where they have access to water to get a sense of what it could represent.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada understand and preserve the unique and critical research programs that cannot be replicated elsewhere at the 7 agriculture Research Development Centres and experimental farm sites.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that research projects conducted in actual agricultural conditions and leveraging partnerships between universities and colleges and agricultural producers be prioritized.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada ensure a strategic geographic distribution of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada research centres, in order to provide representative access to the diversity of agricultural soils across the country, as well as to latitude zones aligned with the potential for agricultural development, including in northern regions.

Impacts on Agricultural Research Continuity

Several witnesses stressed the importance of continuity in agricultural research in Canada. The closure of research centres not only risks the loss of expertise among the researchers working there, but also threatens to disrupt the continuity of the data collected at each site. During his appearance, Deputy Minister [Lawrence Hanson](#) expressed AAFC's commitment to consolidate agricultural research and preserve a portion of that research by transferring certain areas of expertise to other research centres:

I want to emphasize that the work that's done in Lacombe, we're looking at moving some of that—and I know you're going to talk about the region and I understand that—south to Lethbridge and to Swift Current. Swine research is being consolidated in Sherbrooke. There is, of course, the abattoir that's also in Lacombe. We do believe there are other people we can partner with at other universities to move some of this work elsewhere.

When asked about the impact of closing a research centre, as was the case in Kapuskasing in 2015, [Sophie Martel](#) told the Committee about the importance and value



of the historical research data from a given site. If research cannot continue, she believes it is important to at least preserve this history.

Sharing his concerns about the closure of the Indian Head Research Farm, Steven Cole also told the Committee about the importance of continuity in research:

Agriculture research cannot simply pause. Pests evolve, diseases adapt and environmental pressures change. This closure undermines Canada's long-term research capacity and weakens our ability to respond to emerging challenges in agriculture. Continuous research is necessary to develop new varieties and management practices that allow Canadian farmers to remain productive, competitive and sustainable in the global market.

In addition to the loss of this continuity in the data collected, some witnesses told the Committee about recent investments in equipment, some of it even currently being installed, in the centres slated for closure. This is particularly the case for the Quebec Research and Development Centre, according to [Sébastien Paquette](#), Regional Executive Vice-President – Quebec of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. The witness told the Committee that “[w]hen employees were informed of the unfortunate news [of the closure of the Quebec Research Centre], renovations were underway in adjacent rooms.” The witness believes that these investments should be put to effective use rather than proceeding with the closure of the research centre.

A similar situation is described by Cindy Gampe, a programs biologist at the Scott Research Farm, in Saskatchewan, in a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee. According to the brief, this farm was also upgraded, with the addition of a new chemical facility at a final cost of \$6 million. The brief also argues that the loss of data and expertise from researchers working at this site cannot be replicated by the private sector. When asked about the loss of the \$4 million investment in the Lacombe facility to build a biosecure cold storage, [Alison Sunstrum](#) told the Committee that it represented a loss of “generational investment in research”

In his [brief](#) to the Committee, Doug Miller made a recommendation about preserving research produced by research centres slated for closure:

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.

In another [brief](#) to the Committee, the Canadian Pork Council also made recommendations regarding the preservation of research data, particularly as part of a potential transition that would be necessary following the closure of research centres:

Given these realities, [the Canadian Pork Council] encourages the Government of Canada to ensure that any transition related to AAFC research stations prioritizes the preservation of critical research capacity. Allowing sufficient time for the orderly transition of ongoing research programs and strengthening engagement with industry partners will help safeguard the innovation system that Canadian pork producers rely on.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada table an action plan setting out how research conducted by the research centres and experimental farms affected by proposed closures or cuts will be continued and how much funding will go toward its research projects.

Impacts of the Planned Closures on Other Agricultural Research Centres in Canada

During his appearance, [Jean-Pierre Charuest](#), Chair of the *Centre d'innovation agricole*, discussed the importance of cooperation between federal research centres and academia. He cited as an example the research collaboration taking place in Estrie:

We operate within an exceptional regional ecosystem characterized by the presence of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Dairy and Swine Research and Development Centre in Sherbrooke, and a number of university faculties at the Université de Sherbrooke and Bishop's University, which offer valuable expertise in agriculture; the Productique Québec college centre for technology transfer, which specializes in digitization, automation and robotics; as well as two post-secondary agricultural training institutions: the Cégep de Sherbrooke and the Centre de formation professionnelle de Coaticook-CRIFA.

This regional ecosystem is distinguished by its focus on sustainable and resilient agriculture, which includes livestock production and perennial forage crops. This integrated approach positions the Eastern Townships as a true living laboratory for agri-food innovation capable of supporting the competitiveness of industries while addressing environmental and socio-economic challenges.

During his appearance, Deputy Minister [Lawrence Hanson](#) told the committee that the department remains committed to supporting agriculture research and innovation:

The decisions taken, difficult as they have been, do not diminish the department's commitment to supporting a growing agriculture sector through science and innovation. Rather, they ensure that resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact in that mission. In every province across Canada, we will maintain and grow our collaborations with industry, academia and international networks.



The closure of an AAFC research centre can have a significant impact on other research centres that collaborate with it. This was particularly the case with the closure of the Kapuskasing Research Farm mentioned earlier. [Carole Lafrenière](#), retired professor of agriculture at UQAT, told the Committee about the consequences of this closure for her university:

The first budget cuts at the Kapuskasing Research Farm were made in 1995, with the elimination of the horticulture and grain programs, leading to its closure in 2013.

Given past successes, the agricultural community knew that research was essential for the development of its businesses. As a result, as early as 1996, there was a major mobilization in the community to encourage UQAT to form a partnership with the Kapuskasing Research Farm. This started research on grass-fed beef, but the farm's closure in 2013 wiped out these efforts.

It took a little over 10 years to assemble a team of five professors with the expertise the region needs.

The witness added that the announced closures of the Quebec City and Nappan research centres will also have a direct impact on research conducted at UQAT, and that these closures come on top of a difficult period of budget cuts at the universities themselves.

Regarding university research funding, Professor [Vincent Poirier](#) told the Committee about the importance of funding in this sector specifically, calling for increased investment:

We have facilities with equipment, a state-of-the-art analytical park and incredible potential to provide services to the community. Those services aren't linked to any official organizations, either, because we maintain scientific neutrality.

However, we're limited by the lack of research support and the lack of technical support. We need investments that would enable us to support this team and unleash our full potential to provide businesses, the public and academic colleagues with the best we have to offer.

[Sébastien Paquette](#) told the Committee about how the closure of the Quebec Research and Development Centre would affect its partnerships with Laval and McGill universities. According to the witness, "[t]his closure will negatively impact the training of many students in the agricultural sector."

According to Minister [Richard J. Sigurdson](#), the closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre will have a direct impact on the research programs funded by the RDAR program mentioned earlier. He told the Committee that the closure of this research centre will result in losses:

Totalling over \$2.5 million across livestock genetics, crop disease monitoring, barley agronomy, meat quality, food safety and weed management. The closure of this centre would result in multiple RDAR projects requiring adjustments, reallocations of field plots, operational challenges or termination of research.

He told the committee that these losses will have an impact on research elsewhere in Alberta:

The closure of this facility will have a ripple effect on the agriculture industry at large in western Canada. A large, multi-site weed-resistance project valued at over \$3.2 million, which will require the relocation of research plots, is an example.

The loss of staff—such as losing a senior cereal pathologist, a leader in barley disease registration—will result in certain projects losing the ability to proceed.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada table an action plan and a specific budget to provide stable, predictable public funding geared toward the agroecological transition in research in colleges and universities while providing adequate funding to recruit and retain technical staff to work in laboratories.

Impacts of the Closures on Communities and Workers

According to [Blaine Calkins](#), Member for Ponoka—Didsbury, the Lacombe Research and Development Centre is a pillar of the Lacombe community. The centre employs more than 120 and is currently working on 19 projects that benefit Alberta producers as well as other research sectors. These sectors include the private sector, with the witness citing Western Crop Innovation, previously mentioned in Lori Oatway’s testimony, as well as academia, with the collaboration between the Lacombe Research and Development Centre and Lakeland College’s agricultural sciences program. According to Deputy Minister [Lawrence Hanson](#), approximately 27 researchers will not remain in their current positions or will be offered equivalent positions elsewhere.

[Thalia Hibbs](#), Mayor of the City of Lacombe, made similar remarks to the Committee. She described the impact on her community, which has a population of 15,000:

Lacombe will lose families that bring worth to the community, scientists will leave, tech teams and operational and seasonal field positions will cease, and critical science-based employment opportunities for local students will evaporate. Gone, too, will be the international visiting scientists, industry collaborators and trade missions to our world-class facility and our community. This loss of training and collaboration will cascade negatively throughout national research networks.



Ms. Hibbs also cited the partnerships “with Western Crop Innovations, Lakeland College, the University of Alberta and producer groups across western Canada,” which will be terminated with the Lacombe Research and Development Centre’s closure.

Minister [Sigurdson](#) also informed the Committee of the job losses resulting from the closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre. The Minister said that 112 people will lose their jobs as a result of the closure. At the time of his appearance, of that number, he was aware of only six employees who had been offered relocation opportunities.

[Steven Cole](#) made similar remarks during his appearance. He told the Committee that the closure of the Indian Head Research Farm will also have very tangible impacts on his community:

For the community, the research farm employs approximately 30 full-time staff, with significantly higher employment during the summer research and field season. In a small, rural community like ours, those jobs are significant. The impact of those job losses will not be limited to the employees themselves; it will ripple outward to spouses, families and many local businesses that depend on its presence in our community.

Given the very real and expected impacts on her community, the [Mayor](#) of Lacombe called for a 12- to 18-month phased closure of the Lacombe Research and Development Centre, without additional funding. She also called for this period to be used to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the early closure. Thalia Hibbs also reiterated this recommendation in a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee. Another [brief](#), submitted jointly by the City of Lacombe and Lacombe County, reiterates this recommendation. The [Mayor](#) of Indian Head also asked that the closure of the research farm in his community be reconsidered.

Labour Relations

Canadian public servants have a duty of loyalty to their employer. For federal employees, this duty of loyalty includes refraining from publicly criticizing the Government of Canada. However, this duty is not absolute, and some criticism may be justified in certain circumstances. This is particularly the case when criticism concerns issues that may endanger the life, health and safety of public servants or the public, involves illegal acts or has no impact on “[the public servant’s] ability to perform effectively the duties of a public servant or on the public perception of that ability.” When the issue pertains to the freedom of employees to speak out on a matter relating to their employer

without fear of disciplinary action, “the duty of loyalty must be balanced with other interests such as the public servant’s freedom of expression.”⁴

Regarding these freedoms, witnesses told the Committee that workers at the Lacombe Research and Development Centre and other centres slated for closure were instructed by their employer not to discuss the situation with the media or their local elected officials. When asked about this ban, [Thalia Hibbs](#) confirmed that after attempting to contact the centre’s management, she was told that they were not able to discuss the centre’s closure with her. When he was then asked about the communication ban imposed on research centre employees, [Patrick St-Georges](#) told the Committee that “it wasn’t only in Lacombe that [his union’s] members received emails telling them not to talk to anyone and not to let anyone enter the research centre for visits.”

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada strengthen communication and engagement with provincial governments, local communities, and affected stakeholders regarding the proposed changes to the operations, mandate, and status of federal agriculture and agri-food research and development centres, including closures or restructuring. The Committee further recommends that the Government ensure that valuable scientific expertise, research capacity, and ongoing research are preserved and not lost, and that decisions be accompanied by greater transparency and the timely sharing of information.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada pause and reverse the decision to close agricultural research centres and experimental farm sites and begin immediate consultations with the Office of the Chief Science Advisor, public sector unions, impacted stakeholders, employees, research partners, local, regional and provincial representatives to better understand the scientific and economic impact of the proposed closures.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that, in keeping with the confidentiality agreements signed with the employer, the employees affected by the closures be able to raise concerns about situations that they deem to be detrimental to the public interest.

4 Government of Canada, [Duty of Loyalty](#).

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

| Organizations and Individuals | Date | Meeting |
|---|------------|---------|
| Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Andrew Goldstein, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister Lawrence Hanson, Deputy Minister Alain Lagacé, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management Branch & Chief Financial Officer | 2026/02/10 | 22 |
| Agri-Food Innovation Council Serge Buy, Chief Executive Officer | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| As an individual Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin, Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly—Cumberland North | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| Centre d'expertise et de transfert en agriculture biologique et de proximité Sophie Martel, General Manager | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| Blaine Calkins, M.P., Ponoka—Didsbury | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| Deans Council - Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Medicine Heather L. Bruce, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Campus Principal, Dalhousie University Rickey Y. Yada, Dean, Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Alberta | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| Western Crop Innovations Lori Oatway, Research Scientist | 2026/02/24 | 24 |
| As an individual Alison Sunstrum, Entrepreneur, NYA Ventures Inc. | 2026/02/26 | 25 |

| Organizations and Individuals | Date | Meeting |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| Beef Cattle Research Council Reynold Bergen, Science Director Andrea Brocklebank, Executive Director | 2026/02/26 | 25 |
| Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute Tyler McCann, Managing Director | 2026/02/26 | 25 |
| City of Lacombe Thalia Hibbs, Mayor | 2026/02/26 | 25 |
| Lacombe County John Ireland, Reeve | 2026/02/26 | 25 |
| Public Service Alliance of Canada Sébastien Paquette, Regional Executive Vice-President – Quebec Patrick St-Georges, First National Executive Vice-President, Agriculture Union | 2026/02/26 | 25 |
| As an individual Carole Lafrenière, Retired Professor in the agricultural field, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue Vincent Poirier, Professor of Soil Science, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue | 2026/03/10 | 26 |
| Centre d'innovation agricole Jean-Pierre Charuest, Chair Anthony Laroche, General Manager | 2026/03/10 | 26 |
| Global Institute for Food Security Nancy Tout, Interim Chief Executive Officer | 2026/03/10 | 26 |
| Government of Alberta Hon. Richard J. Sigurdson, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation | 2026/03/10 | 26 |
| Protein Industries Canada Tyler Groeneveld, Chief Executive Officer | 2026/03/10 | 26 |
| Town of Indian Head Steven Cole, Mayor David Gehl, Retired Officer in Charge - Seed Increase Unit | 2026/03/10 | 26 |

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network

Borkent, Art

Canada Organic Trade Association

Canadian Organic Growers

Canadian Pork Council

Canadian Seed Growers Association

City of Lacombe

Conseil québécois des plantes fourragères

Gampe, Cindy

Global Institute for Food Security

Keller, Scott

Lacombe County

Martel, Yvon

National Farmers Union

Organic Federation of Canada

Poirier, Vincent

Saindon, Gilles

SasksOrganics

SeedChange

TELUS Agriculture & Consumer Goods

Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 22, 24 to 27, 29 and 31](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Coteau
Chair

