BEEF CATTLE RESEARCH COUNCIL

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"Hello. My name is Andrea Brocklebank. I am the Executive Director of the Beef Cattle Research Council, which is Canada's national industry beef research funding agency. It is responsible for the successful delivery of the first and second Beef Science Cluster. I am pleased to be here to speak about the integral role of innovation in Canada's beef industry.

In 2012 the Canadian cattle industry contributed approximately $26 billion to Canada's GDP. The industry has tremendous opportunities due to continued growth in global beef demand and record high beef and cattle prices. At the same time, our industry faces increased production costs and increased competition for land, water and labour resources from other expanding agriculture sectors. These opportunities and challenges are expected to remain for the foreseeable future.

Innovation is crucial to ensure that Canada's beef industry successfully addresses these challenges. Innovation allows us to use limited resources more efficiently, while continuing to be a global leader in beef quality and safety.

The benefits of research go far beyond simple productivity improvements. Research also supports the development of science-based regulations and trade agreements. It is critical to maintaining consumers' confidence in our beef production system and the safety, quality and nutritional attributes of the beef we produce. These additional benefits of research - sound policy and regulation, consumer confidence, and international trade - provide broad benefits for industry and Canadian society as a whole. Consequently research funding is viewed to be an essential industry and government investment that contributes to industry resiliency and reduced dependence on government ad-hoc and business risk management programs.

AAFC has made considerable efforts to streamline and focus its research programs over the past several decades. Over the same time period, the beef industry has implemented a National Check-off to support research and technology transfer programs. The industry has also developed and implemented a comprehensive National Beef Research Strategy. The strategy informed the priority research outcomes targeted under the second Beef Science Cluster and is working to guide and influence the funding decisions of other major research funding agencies across Canada. Significant industry effort has been placed on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of applied forage, cattle and beef research funding allocations by reducing duplication and facilitating cooperation among Canada's beef research funding community.

The industry has accepted the responsibility to develop and lead the Beef Science Cluster and the National Beef Research Strategy. This has and will continue to encourage greater industry investment in and adoption of research.

By bringing together Canada's largest industry and public research funders, the Science Clusters program is significantly improving government-industry cooperation in research. The second Beef Science Cluster is a $20 million investment - $15 million in government funding and $5 million industry. Investments under the second Cluster have increased substantially and not only include national check-off but additional funding from five provincial organizations. We are convinced that the Beef Cluster is a very coordinated, efficient research model.

However, the system can be refined further, beyond administrative details that can be addressed elsewhere. Allocating research funding in discrete five-year blocks creates challenges for long term projects. Research in animal breeding, perennial forages, and environmental field studies require a much longer timeframe in order to achieve meaningful results.

Enhanced industry: government collaboration could also help make research programming even more effective. More direct engagement of industry in the federal government's planning processes would ensure that AAFC's internal research infrastructure, staffing and other programming decisions are aligned with the outcomes identified in the National Beef Research Strategy.

Industry engagement is particularly important to ensuring AAFC research staffing decisions are aligned with both industry and government priorities and cuts are not just made by attrition. Cuts through attrition gradually erode research programs. There is also benefit in working to transition new replacement scientists prior to retiring scientist's departure; providing an opportunity for mentorship and ensuring research momentum is not lost.

To take full advantage of the potential that research promises, we need to emphasize a few additional points. Firstly, stable and ideally increased funding for federal research facilities, staff and programs is essential to maintain the integrity of Canada's internationally-renowned agricultural research system. Secondly, the federal government has a clear responsibility to continue supporting long-term, basic, high-risk research. This is the knowledge pipeline that ultimately leads to applied research that benefits industry and broader society. The "fire station" analogy is apt here. Fostering innovation and maintaining core research programs ensures that we have the physical and scientific capacity to respond to issues as they emerge, not after they become emergencies.

Industry has made considerable investments in "public good" areas of research. Research supported by the Beef Science Clusters is providing science-based information to inform the Beef Cattle Code of Practice, work underway at the Global and Canadian Roundtables for Sustainable Beef, and confidently and factually address ongoing questions regarding antimicrobial resistance and food safety. However this does not diminish the federal government role in these areas.

Social license issues, which pertain to the public's perception of industry, are increasingly important. In many cases research generates the facts that can effectively address social license issues. Environment, antimicrobial resistance, and animal welfare are prime examples. However, in order to be viewed as credible, relevant research data must be collected and evaluated by an independent, impartial body.

In closing I would like to summarize our three main recommendations:

1. Continued federal government support of both basic and applied research programming is critical to supporting industry advancement in a sustainable manner.

2. Further enhancing engagement of industry in AAFC's decision-making regarding critical research infrastructure, staffing and programming will help to ensure the most efficient use of resources.

3. Meaningful progress in both basic and applied research streams is contingent on long-term, predictable, meaningful funding commitments that are preferably ten years in length.

I would be pleased to elaborate further on any of these points, or to answer any questions that you may have."

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