

March 26, 2003

Alberta Agriculture's Research and Innovation Strategic Framework

Why is research important to Alberta agriculture?

An organized and aggressive approach to agricultural research will mean new business, new manufacturing and new jobs in Alberta, especially in rural Alberta.

There's opportunity for major growth in value-added bioproducts, food products, health products and farm industries. Capitalizing on this opportunity can contribute to the agriculture industry's potential goal of reaching \$20 billion in value-added production and \$10 billion in primary production by the year 2010. Continued research to develop these industries could mean significant new diversified markets and profits for farmers.

A coordinated and supported approach to research could also result in more opportunities for the creation of new small and medium Alberta businesses, as spin offs from research and the commercialization of research. An increased ability to attract major national/international companies to locate in Alberta is another likely result.

A clear commitment to research also means an increased ability to attract, retain and train the highly skilled workforce needed to sustain and expand research and innovation capacity.

How has the framework been developed?

In 2001, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) and Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) led a review of Alberta's research and innovation effectiveness. They found that:

- Research and innovation needed to be better aligned with growth opportunities,
- Research funding and performing organizations needed to be more collaborative,
- Gaps in research and innovation capacity needed to be filled, and
- Public/private sector partnerships needed to be improved and expanded upon.

Throughout the development of the strategic framework, consultations were held, research networks were formed, and discussions were held with other provincial government ministries, including AFRD, Innovation and Science, Environment, Health and Wellness, Sustainable Resource Development, and Economic Development. Each of these departments has a role to play in the development of the Life Sciences in Alberta.

A stakeholder working group drawn from industry, research organizations, funders, and government developed the strategic framework.

The Agriculture Research and Innovation Strategic Framework is part of the Life Sciences Strategy. Agriculture is a fundamental element to the emergence of Alberta's Life Sciences sector. Success in developing the agriculture research and innovation system will enhance the success of individual sectors and allow for growth in areas such as nutrition and health, bio-products, and biomaterials – areas that engage all life sciences sectors.

What does the government hope to achieve?

These are the big picture results of implementing the Strategic Framework.

- Significant economic growth that is profitable, environmentally sustainable and socially acceptable to Albertans.

Research and innovation are key drivers of economic development. However, development cannot come at the expense of Albertans' quality of life. A significant portion of future growth will come from agriculture working jointly with health, energy, forestry, environment, manufacturing, and information technology industries.

- Strategic investments in research and innovation aligned to economic opportunity.

Economic opportunities exist in bioproducts, value-added processing in food and health industries, and sustainable production. Research resources need to be committed to those areas, in order to fully take advantage of the opportunity.

- From Research to Consumer Needs

Mechanisms will be put in place to make sure research and innovation investment decisions are made with a consumer need and end product in mind, so that they will have the greatest economic impact. Research and innovation decisions need to be made in close partnership among industry, researchers, funders and government.

- Common Strategic Focus

This strategic framework enables the various research and innovation partners to 'work as one' to develop expertise and capacity in key strategic areas. This will allow Alberta to attract significant federal government and private investment in research and innovation, leveraging Alberta's investments.

Agriculture research is currently 80 per cent public funding and 20 per cent private funding. Our goal is to have that funding split 50/50 by 2010 on an even larger research fund.

- Accountability

The only way to successfully implement the framework is to have research results that can be defined and measured. Research, innovation and funding organizations will then work collaboratively with each other and with industry to achieve those goals. Financial investments will be aligned to strategic priorities and will be large enough to get the job done.

AARI will carry the responsibility for overall leadership and facilitation for Alberta's research and innovation system for agriculture and will ensure it works as a high performing system.

For further information, contact:

Alan Hall
Acting Managing Director,
Agriculture Research
Alberta Innovation and Science
(780) 427-0367
Dial 310-0000 for toll free access outside Edmonton