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Dear Minister Ritz

Re: Potential loss of valuable long term scientific experiments to make way for a hospital in Ottawa

I have recently been made aware of plans to use land used for long term field experiments by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada land in Ottawa, to accommodate the expansion of the local hospital. While I understand the need to local hospital services, the choice of site is extremely unfortunate. The site houses irreplaceable experimental plots which are of international significance, and these will be lost if the hospital development occurs here. I understand that there are alternative locations on the Central Experimental Farm which do not have long-term experiments on them, which could be used instead for the hospital expansion. I would therefore ask you to consider whether it is possible to use an alternative block of land on the Farm for the planned hospital development.

The particular block of land identified for this development has been used for many various long-term agricultural experiments, including those on soil processes, tillage management, nutrient cycling and soil carbon dynamics which have been ongoing now for several decades. The experiments are part of international experimental networks, such as the Soil Organic Matter Network (SOMNET) which I chaired for a number of years, and the Long Term Soils Experiments network now hosted by the International Soil Carbon Network. The soil processes monitored and tested in these experiments are slow, operating over the decadal timescale, and as such are of major scientific importance and provide data that would have taken many millions of Canadian Dollars to collect. These plots would, by definition, take decades to replace and the data become less valuable when a site is lost (as no follow up measurements are possible). As the Professor of Soils & Global change at the University of Aberdeen, I feel obliged to emphasise the international importance of these experimental plots at a time when the world's scientific community needs to learn from the insights provided by such long-term experiments.

These experiments help us understand carbon dynamics in soils and provide information to inform governmental policies in the context of global carbon balances and environmental change, thereby helping countries to fulfil their international commitments. The importance of the research being undertaken at the Central Experimental Farm can be judged from the fact that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada soil scientists working on these sites were amongst the joint recipients, as members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. Further, the UN has recognized the importance of soils in the global ecosystem by designating

2015 as the International Year of Soils. This would be an incredibly unfortunate time to lose such an international treasure. History would judge this a very short-sighted decision. Thank you very much for considering this plea seriously, and please do not hesitate to contact me using the details above should you require any more information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete Smith".

Professor Pete Smith, FSB, FRSE
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Science Director of Scotland's ClimateXChange
Director-Food Systems of Scottish Food Security Alliance-Crops
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