

An Open Letter on Science to the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

April 19, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
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Dear Prime Minister:

As former members of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's leadership team that has guided agricultural research at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, we urge you and your cabinet to protect this valuable scientific resource and National Historic Site for the sake of all Canadians. Meeting today's complex environmental, public health, and innovation challenges requires that we strengthen our research capacity as we strive to adapt to these pressing global issues. The proposed transfer of critical research land from the Central Experimental Farm to the Ottawa Hospital will impede Canada's ability to meet these challenges.

Land on the Central Experimental Farm has been used for research for over 125 years. The fields slated for transfer to the Ottawa Hospital today support more than 20 studies on a wide range of crops and agricultural practices. Long-term studies over the past three decades at this site, have drawn collaborators from around the world and generated knowledge and farming methods to combat plant disease, boost crop yields, and promote soil health. They also contribute to international climate-change research through studies that examine greenhouse gas emissions and soil carbon sequestration under different agricultural practices. To be clear: we are talking about an outdoor laboratory in which the slowly-responding soil itself is the subject, and re-locating this laboratory to another soil site would reset the long-term research clock back to zero and disrupt or displace other important studies, costing millions of dollars and jeopardize decades of public-good research.

Destroying any part of this active research land seems hard to justify in simple economic terms. Canada's agriculture and food sector is a sustainable driver of our national economy, but keeping it sustainable pivots on productive research. For example, short-season soybeans were developed from over 25 years of research in these fields. Thanks to that work, today this crop is grown from Prince Edward Island to Alberta and contributes \$2 billion each year to Canada's economy, the cost of a new Ottawa Hospital every year. In the course of its long history, several hundred varieties and cultivars have been developed on the Central Experimental farm, generating vast returns on investment for the agriculture and food sector and for Canada.

We would all like to see a new state-of-the-art health care facility built in Ottawa, but we do not believe that valuable research fields of the Central Experimental Farm need to be sacrificed to achieve this. This land is far more valuable for its contribution to Canada's agricultural economy, innovation, food security, and environmental sustainability than as a hospital site. There are other viable sites for a hospital in Ottawa. We therefore respectfully urge you and your cabinet members to re-consider the transfer of Central Experimental Farm research land to the Ottawa Hospital and to preserve it for ongoing and future research.

Sincerely,

Gaetan Lussier, former Deputy Minister of Agriculture and AgriFood Canada

Dr. Brian Morrissey, former Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Arthur Olson, former Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Gordon Neish, former Director General, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Wayne Lindwall, former Director General, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Gilles L. Rousselle, former Director General, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Ian de la Roche, former Director General, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Dr. Lianne Dwyer, former Director Eastern Cereal and Oilseed Research Center

Dr. Norman Tape, former Director Food Research Center, and former member of Ottawa Hospital Board of Governors

Dr. Barry Grace, former Science Director, Biodiversity

Dr. Jean-Marc Deschênes, former Director Eastern Cereal and Oilseed Research Center

Dr. Richard Asselin, former Director Center for Land and Biological Resource Research

Dr. Wilf Keller, former AAFC Scientist, current president and CEO of AgWest Bio.

c.c. Hon. Catherine McKenna, P.C., Minister of Environment and Climate Change

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Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, P.C., Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

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Hon. Mélanie Joly, P.C., Minister of Canadian Heritage hon.melanie.joly@canada.ca

Coalition to Protect the Central Experimental Farm National Historic Site of Canada

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