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May 2, 2016

The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay,
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
1341 Baseline Road
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5

Dear Minister MacAulay:

As a former research soil scientist on the Central Experimental Farm, I am writing to urge you and the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to protect the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa. This Historical Site has been a key platform for innovative research science and discovery that has been ongoing for over a century. The gift-lease of 24 ha of the CEF by the previous government in 2014 to The Ottawa Hospital as a site on which to build a new Civic campus was extremely flawed and should be reversed unquestionably.

Mitigation of the impact of climate change on agricultural production has been a major focus of the twenty research studies on the proposed land transfer. Primary among these are long-term soil tillage and crop rotation experiments, which are linked to national and international networks of similar research. Given a 30-year time base for climate data, effective climate studies require a longer term duration than does other agricultural research. Cropping studies underway on the CEF include long-term crop rotations, heat and drought stress effects on crop yield, heat and drought tolerance in variety selection and those that address crop pests and diseases that arise from climate change. All of these soil and crop research programs will increase Canada's food security as the impact of climate change is realized and will contribute generously to Canada's economy.

To focus on one research area, optimizing soil resilience is essential to assure optimum agricultural response to environmental and climate changes now seen as rapidly accelerating. Soil tillage studies on the proposed gift-lease package demonstrate how the practice of minimum tillage reduces soil erosion, improves soil health and significantly decreases the agricultural contribution to greenhouse gases. Soils are the most complex materials on Earth, the skin of the earth, and are absolutely essential to our survival and that of the biosphere as we know it. Agriculture's effective response to climate change depends critically on maintaining optimum soil health. Moving the soil and crop research to another site would put the research clock back to zero. Soil is a resilient geologic resource in which change occurs at a geologic rate with research results showing their true value only after more than twenty years. The loss of such hard-earned data would be a major tragedy for any reason, and certainly not warranted for locating a hospital building site in proximity to its existing location.

Healthcare and its effective delivery for Eastern Ontario patients is extremely important to me and all Ottawans. Healthy nutritious food, however, is one of the major prerequisites for health. I have not heard one word of justification showing that a medicalized healthcare facility should have a higher priority and value than long-term agri-food research land and facilities which contribute significantly to producing healthy food, so essential to good health. Yet, the Ottawa Hospital has assumed the privilege of three of four building sites on the CEF. Why have we not heard, with firm commitment, that CEF research facilities are not available for urban development even for a needed renewed Civic Hospital?

The Central Experimental Farm is a National Historic Site of Canada. The long term management plan to assure this heritage status calls for renewed research mandates, noting the importance of long term studies and study sites to face uncertainty caused by changing climates. That AAFC has not called for reconsideration of the Ottawa Hospital's continuing intention to claim the CEF as a potential building site is a strong indication that AAFC no longer supports long-term climate change research even at the core facility for agricultural research, the CEF National Historic Site.

Over the recent twenty-five years, AAFC has been promoting science policies where federal research scientists align with industrial partners both to obtain financial support for their research program which has the basic goal of benefiting their specific industry and to assure that the research findings are taken into that industry component. The federal science programs suffer greatly in at least two ways – a). Industry supported research is no longer freely and directly accessible to the public and b). A research scientist who alters her program to meet a particular industry priority is constrained from undertaking the innovative new ideas in which industry generally has little interest. The research on the 24 ha package is clearly for the public good of agriculture and food and very much worthy of uninterrupted continuation. When these research fields are not receiving your assurance to counter the move toward urban development on those research fields, a clear message is sent that publicly-supported agricultural research is no longer in future plans for AAFC.

Minister McKenna has indicated publicly that the lack of due process being taken for the transfer of land to the Ottawa Hospital warrants a reconsideration. Similarly, the transfer of 24 ha of prime long-term research plots to the National Capital Commission to allow lease-gifting must surely deserve due process reconsideration as well. It is totally incredible that a highly significant agricultural research facility and program was treated simply as a piece of real estate for development and has not been reconsidered by this time, one and a half years later.

Minister MacAulay, it is unconscionable that when scientists who have devoted their entire life to science and research are not consulted and only find out from the media that their research facilities and program will be terminated without notice, as happened in 2014, they become extremely demoralised and non-productive. Please, assure me by direct communication that the 2014 decision to gift-lease research plots to the Ottawa Hospital will be reversed.

Yours respectfully,



G Clarke Topp PAg, PhD, FCSSS, FSSSA
Soil Physicist & Environmental Scientist

CC: The Rt. Hon Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada;
Catherine McKenna, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change;
Mélanie Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage;
Chris Warkentin, MP, Conservative AAFC critic;
Ruth Ellen Brosseau, MP, NDP AAFC critic;
Yasir Naqvi, MPP, Ottawa Centre;
Chandra Arya, MP Nepean.