



## The British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association

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### **Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food** **House of Commons** **1st Session, 41st Parliament**

**Growing Forward 2 (Science and Innovation)**  
**Thursday, October 20, 2011**

*Presented by Joe Sardinha, President, BC Fruit Growers' Association*

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#### **Preamble**

Research is a vital part of agriculture's unbroken record of improvement in quality and productivity, starting from the days when James Watt developed (from 1763–75) an improved version of Newcomen's engine, in Great Britain.

The Green revolution is the best-known leap in agriculture productivity. The Green Revolution from the 1940's to the 1970's used research, extended that research to practical farm practices, and introduced other developments such as improved grain varieties. Up until that time, the fear was that food supply could not keep up with population growth.

Gains in agriculture productivity, on a world-wide scale, have flattened out. The fear of world-wide food shortages has re-emerged as a concern, as world populations are projected to continue increasing through 2050.

Canada has a stake in advancing productivity of farms:

- Food security is an issue which will be discussed with more frequency as food supplies tighten. In Canada, this discussion will mainly centre around increasing food prices, rather than food shortages.
- Competitiveness of Canadian agriculture will erode if productivity is allowed to slide, compared to other competing regions.
- The value of inventions that are created in Canada can alone compensate for the investment in productivity enhancement. This holds particularly for variety development (plant breeding), a key to innovation in the tree fruit sector.

## **What are the Interests of agricultural producers, especially tree fruit growers, in research?**

- Growers are most keenly interested in improvements to horticultural practices, for example:
  - o More efficient irrigation.
  - o More efficient pruning, thinning, picking, grading and storage of produce, using automation and computer technology.
  - o Development of new varieties suited to our Northern Climate.
  - o More environmentally friendly pest control, which builds on successes in integrated pest management and area-wide pest management, enabling producers to manage both current and emerging pest and disease issues.

## **What is the Reality?**

Growing Forward 1, in our opinion, did not deliver research programs to the extent that high-valued Canadian horticulture needs to be competitive and to build value for Canadians.

The switch that established national Research Science Clusters was well intentioned, but poorly implemented – it took longer than expected to launch, and the criteria and eligibility of research projects changed up to the final moment. The Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) assumed the role of administrator for the Edible Horticulture Science Cluster and has done a commendable job in dealing with the many changes to the science initiative. Under the CHC's guidance, the Canadian apple industry invested substantial efforts in synthesizing provincial research priorities into national research priorities. The industry then worked to develop its top three project proposals, as did other commodity representatives of the CHC.

Application deadlines were met, but the guidelines changed after the fact, and two of apple industry's three proposals were turned down because they involved federal research employees at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Research Centers. This really undermines industry's confidence in investing all of this time and effort, when projects are rejected for what we feel are new and inconsequential reasons.

Following that debacle, the CHC was informed this summer that additional unallocated funding existed for the horticultural science cluster. It was a last minute scramble by all to submit new project proposals in a very short time frame. The apple industry did submit for a new project albeit this was done in a very ad hoc way without undertaking a priority setting process. Was it the right project for our scarce resources? We hope so, but it would be accidental given the nature of that funding process and the last minute changes to the cluster initiative. If agricultural associations are willing to commit their share of research investment it is perhaps time that government programs are made more

transparent at the outset, with less bureaucracy so as not to sideswipe industry's efforts to capitalize on research that will ultimately enhance the competitiveness and profitability of the agricultural sector.

## **Growing Forward 2 Recommendations**

1. The government has increased other types of agricultural and processing research at the expense of research in horticultural practices (often referred to as primary production research).

***Recommendation:*** *We recommend ensuring the level of funding for research in horticultural practices is balanced with other research needs.*

2. The government has let key research positions go unfilled, when retirements occur or are imminent. In a round of consultations a few years ago, this was a high priority to resolve, yet no strategy is emerging and the erosion of our science capacity continues to diminish.

***Recommendation:*** *For tree fruit, we recommend that a Weed Scientist, a Post-Harvest Physiologist and a Plant Breeder be hired to replace recently retired or soon to be retired scientists at the Pacific Agri-Food Research Station in Summerland, BC.*

3. ***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that Advisory Committees for Research Stations, composed of producers nominated by Provincial Commodity Associations, be re-established, with meaningful input into business plans, including succession planning for researchers, adequacy and balancing resources required for senior researchers and technical staff, and ensuring balance between horticultural and other types of research.*

4. ***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that the federal government provide incentives for consolidation of research. We have seen periods of consolidation followed by drift into splintered regional approaches at federal agricultural research establishments. We have seen incursion of private, provincially-focused organizations into federal research responsibilities, while provincial extension efforts get reduced.*

5. ***Recommendation:*** *We recommend that the Agriculture Canada Research Branch take strong measures to re-establish consolidation of research activities in order that Canadian horticulture producers, who are relatively small in the world scheme, do not further undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of agriculture research.*

Thank you for the opportunity to present policy recommendation on Science and Innovation in Growing Forward 2.