

Securing the Alberta Advantage

Transition Management Plan

Field Crop Development Centre's transition

to

Western Crop Innovations

*Mission: To create a long-term, robust and sustainable future for Western Crop Innovations*

Prepared By:

Assistant Deputy Minister John Conrad, AGI

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# Executive Summary

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The Field Crop Development Centre (FCDC) was established in 1973 to research field crops to enhance yields, develop disease resistant varieties and provide farmers with better crop options for Alberta conditions. In 2019-2020, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation (AGI) moved away from conducting agricultural research. All provincial agricultural research programs were transitioned to post-secondary educational institutions.

The FCDC transitioned to Olds College in December 2020 along with government furnished infrastructure, machines, and equipment. The move was accompanied with \$10.5 million of support over 3 years with the intention of the program being fully incorporated into the College over the 3-year transition. Agreements and contracts were managed by the Government of Alberta (GoA) and Results Driven Agricultural Research (RDAR) to cover material assets, equipment, land, staff and buildings. In 2023, RDAR met with the College Board of Directors signalling a concern regarding the progress of the transition pilot and the long-term stability of FCDC. FCDC management was asked to provide a long-term plan that demonstrated a vision for the FCDC to be incorporated into the College and its ability to stand alone financially. A new proposal was developed by Olds College requesting an additional \$10.4 million over a term of 4 years. This was rejected by Minister on November 29, 2023. AGI and RDAR were to work with the College to determine next steps for FCDC and its assets.

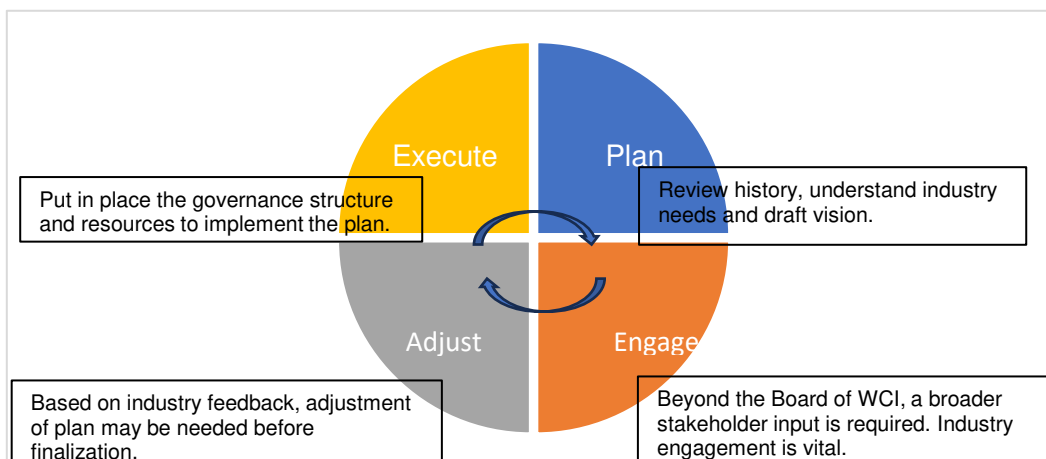
On December 21, 2023, Olds College issued working notice to all FCDC staff due to the inability to secure longer term program funding. Staff were to be terminated as of April 1, 2024, and all FCDC physical assets returned to the GoA. FCDC celebrated 50 years as a center in 2023. Thanks to the skills and efforts of FCDC staff over the years, innovations in barley and crop breeding has a strong history in Alberta; dissolution in 2024 is not the desired end state!

On January 31, 2024, representatives from government, commissions, and agricultural producer groups, specifically from the crops and livestock sector, academia, malting, and seed industries met to discuss the future of FCDC. All stakeholders affirmed that the FCDC must continue, but the focus and priorities of the center need to be revamped.

This document seeks the near-term investment of industry partners in a period of rejuvenation as crop innovation governance transforms over 2024/25.

## Guiding Principle: Industry driven

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# Operating Plan

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## Interim Operations

Before a vision for the future of crop innovations can be created, the short-term reality of FCDC needs to be addressed. In the short-term, Olds College, with funding support, will continue the administration and logistics components of the center for the caretaker period. In short, the caretaker will ensure the lights are on, the unit is functioning, and the employees are paid.

A new not for profit Western Crop Innovations has been established to operate the centre long term. Over the next year, Western Crop Innovations (WCI) will direct the work of the Center and as its capacity for administration increases, will gradually take over the operations and administration of the Center.

## Long-Term Operations

Over the next 14 months, WCI will develop a long-term plan for the next phase of work out of the center. The plan will include:

- Input from valued industry, public and academic stakeholders,
- A long-term vision for WCI,
- Performance Measures to ensure WCI's new strategic direction and objectives are inline with industry needs, and that needs are being met,
- A proposed financial support model and governance structure to provide long term stability to enable achievement of WCI's stated goals and objectives.

While the WCI Board will be responsible for the development and implementation of WCI's strategic, business, and operating plans; WCI's direction will be developed with industry input.

During the transition year – April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025, the industry stakeholder advisory group will support the interim Board and staff of WCI to:

- a. Drive strategic direction and communication.
- b. Commit financial and other resources.
- c. Support implementation of the new vision.

As WCI matures - April 1, 2025, onwards, WCI will be fully responsible for management, administration, and operations of the Center. Stakeholders will continue to be involved in the strategic planning and direction setting of WCI.

As WCI governance is solidified, the long-term role of stakeholders will also be confirmed.

## Funding

For the transition year the Center requires approximately \$3.5 million to operate. Industry and government partners will work together to fill this funding gap:

- It is believed that between AGI and RDAR approximately \$3.0 million can be provided.
- It is anticipated that industry/commissions will fund –between \$500,000 to \$1 million to assist with the transition period.
- Long term, stable funding (beyond the transition year) of WCI is expected to rely on a joint model of public-private collaboration. This funding is expected to be offset by the success of WCI deliverables and royalties derived from competitive varieties over the medium to longer term.

# Timeline

Milestone 1 – April 1, 2024: The “WCI” entity is in place, the interim board has been identified.

Deliverables building to the next milestone include:

- Current operations of WCI (i.e., FCDC operating plan and staff) are on going.
- Contracts between Olds College and WCI for administration services are in place, AGI has confirmed access to assets and facilities (i.e., land, buildings, genetics, equipment).
- WCI seeks interim ED.

Milestone 2- July 1, 2024: The board has begun strategic development, the stakeholder advisory group is identified.

Deliverables building to the next milestone include:

- Interim ED builds engagement plan, WCI begins engagement with advisory group.
- Current operations of WCI continues, administration supported by Olds College
  - WCI’s own administrative infrastructure is being set up.

Milestone 3 – October 1, 2024: A draft vision for a long-term plan is available and tested with the advisory group.

Deliverables building to the next milestone include:

- WCI begins to take over more of the administration of day-to-day operations for plant breeding.
- Funding support from industry is materializing,
- Future industry needs becoming clearer, 2025/26 operations beginning to solidify.

Milestone 4 – January 1, 2025: Implementation plan is developed and tested with advisory group, go forward funding is being confirmed, governance being confirmed/implemented.

Deliverables building to the 2025 operations year include:

- 2025/26 operating plan in place, resources to carry out the plan are being confirmed, WCI operations staff commitments in place.
- WCI administration infrastructure (HR, IT, Finances) in place, administration relationship with Olds College significantly reduced.
- WCI takes over management of GOA assets and facilities.
- WCI under management and governance of elected board and permanent ED/CEO.

## Conclusion

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The GoA envisions an industry driven WCI where the needs of Alberta and Western Canadian farmers are addressed first and foremost. In addressing the needs of our local producers and tackling the problems of the day, the WCI aspires to become a world leader among valued partners. AGI believes that some government funding of WCI needs to continue but, to thrive, crop innovations need to have industry guidance/direction and funding support. The success of the next phase depends on a collaborative joint funding model between public and private investment—an industry-government partnership in the greater term.

FCDC assets and resources have great value for Alberta's agricultural growth industry. Alberta has a great opportunity to ensure the next phase of the FCDC history addresses industry needs and enables a sustainable future for a relevant and competitive Western Crop Innovations.