

April 14, 2023

Kelli Rice
Research and Innovation Branch
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
1 Stone Road
Guelph, ON N1G 4Y2

Submitted online and via email to: kelli.rice@ontario.ca

Dear Kelli:

RE: 23-OMAFRA003 Proposed Modernization of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) Act

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) proudly represents more than 38,000 farm family members across the province, supporting our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations administered by all levels of government. OFA is passionate and dedicated to ensuring that the agri-food sector and rural communities are considered and consulted with for any new or changing legislation that would impact the sustainability and growth of our farm businesses.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to provide input on Proposal 23-OMAFRA003: Proposed Modernization of the Agricultural Research Institute (ARIO) Act. The ARIO Act was created in 1962 and has not been updated since the early 1990's. Modernizing the ARIO Act is a positive step in addressing the research and innovation needs of the agri-food sector. Consulting with the farm community is imperative to a thriving agricultural industry and economy in Ontario - to collaborate on research needs and priorities, encourage innovation and achieve the goals in the province's ambitious Grow Ontario agri-food strategy.

Agriculture is a knowledge-based industry and research is essential to the sector's future competitiveness with improved genetics, efficient systems, and safer, better-quality products. OFA believes that agri-food research is a critical tool for Ontario farmers, providing new technologies and practices that improve agricultural productivity, develop new agricultural products, and sustain Ontario's soil, air, and water resources.

OFA agrees that the ARIO should play a lead role in collaboration and consultation on the ministry's research priorities across the agri-food sector, identifying common research priorities to address the gap that currently exists. To achieve this effectively, clear policies for ARIO structure, governance, roles and responsibilities, engagement with, and accountability to, the agri-food sector need to be established. Changes to the ARIO Board make-up, including

representation of commodity and producer groups as well as other parts of the agri-food value chain, will ensure research priorities and investments are strategic and meet sector needs.

With representation of the full agri-food value chain on the ARIO Board and engagement across the sector, OFA sees that ARIO could become an effective over-arching body recommending areas of research and innovation for strategic infrastructure and equipment investments in the Ontario agri-food sector. Updating the ARIO name to Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario reflects this full-sector approach and emphasizes the role of innovation.

To ensure meaningful impact, metrics to achieve success should be defined. In addition to full sector representation and engagement in research and innovation priority-setting, OFA suggests that other performance measures would include a strengthened public profile for ARIO that fosters a clear understanding of the role of the agency, and a transparent process for accessing ARIO research centres.

Key definitions are also an important consideration to ensure meaningful impact of ARIO. As a start, OFA sees that the definition of innovation needs to include 'new products, practices, processes and systems' relating to the agri-food sector. Similarly, research as a defined term needs to include 'the development, testing and evaluation of products, practices, processes and systems' and needs to reflect innovation with respect to the Ontario agriculture and food sector.

The discussion paper proposes a new purpose statement for ARIO. OFA sees ARIO in a key, over-arching role that enables and coordinates priority-setting for impactful investment in research and innovation, with producer and commodity representation and cross-sector collaboration. This would ensure the right infrastructure and equipment exists to support world-class research that enhances the sustainability and profitability of the Ontario agri-food sector, aligning with the Grow Ontario Strategy. To achieve this, OFA expects that ARIO will maintain its ability to enter into property and financial agreements respecting lands, construction and maintenance of infrastructure and buildings that support and foster agricultural research and innovation.

The discussion paper also proposes new objectives for ARIO and duties for a new Executive Director role. OFA supports that a key objective for ARIO is to advise the Minister on high-impact, transformational agri-food research and innovation. However, OFA strongly recommends that ARIO's specific role with respect to enabling, facilitating and encouraging research and innovation needs to be clearly defined to compliment rather than compete with the role of other organizations in the sector, particularly the role that OMAFRA plays in this area. Similarly, OFA also recommends that ARIO plays only a supporting role in enabling knowledge translation and transfer, as well as encouraging commercialization and supporting business and market development, to compliment rather than overlap with the well-established and proven work of OMAFRA and others in the sector.

OFA wants to emphasize that the revised structure and role of ARIO needs to recognize representatives of the agri-food sector as key partners. This should be reflected by including producer groups and sector organizations in the composition of ARIO to ensure meaningful engagement, not merely regular consultation.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to provide its perspective on the proposal 23-OMAFRA003 Proposed Modernization of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) Act. We look forward to ongoing discussions with OMAFRA on the role of ARIO to ensure that priorities for research and innovation support farm businesses and reflect OFA's advice and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peggy Brekveld." followed by a period. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Peggy Brekveld
President

cc: The Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs
OFA Board of Directors