

Discussion Paper

A Proposal to Modernize the *Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act*

Context of the ARIO Act

In 1962, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) was created through the introduction of the *Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act (ARIO Act)*. The ARIO is a board-governed agency that reports to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The *ARIO Act* provides the framework for the powers, responsibilities, legal authority, and the duties of the ARIO.

The *ARIO Act*, gives the ARIO board powers and responsibilities to:

- inquire into programs of research in respect of agriculture, veterinary medicine and household science;
- select and recommend areas of research for the betterment of agriculture, veterinary medicine and household science;
- stimulate interest in research as a means of developing in Ontario a high degree of efficiency in the production and marketing of agricultural products;
- and, at the request at the Director of Research, lease, own, and maintain research facilities and tracts of land across the province for the purpose of conducting agricultural research related to its mandate on behalf of the Government of Ontario.

In order to support a broad spectrum of agri-food research, ranging from field crops, livestock, greenhouse, horticulture and aquaculture, the ARIO owns the province's 14 research station properties, with 5,600 acres and 200+ buildings. This array of research infrastructure enables Ontario to be a world leader in agri-tech research and innovation.

Modernization of the ARIO Act

The ARIO has been a key driver of some of the most important research projects leading to agri-food innovations in Ontario, including projects coming out of the Ontario Dairy Research Centre and Ontario Beef Research Centre in Elora, the Ontario Crops Research Stations throughout the province, and the soon to be completed Ontario Swine Research Centre.

During the last sixty years, there have been incredible innovations and, with no substantial update to the Act since its creation in 1962. It is time to modernize the Act to ensure the agri-food sector has the proper supports and is ready to capitalize on new opportunities. The Act currently limits the scope of research to agriculture, veterinary medicine and household science. It does not adequately address the current research and innovation in the agri-food sector needed to advance the industry, such as new technologies, robotics, digitization, and data management.

It is time to make changes to further establish Ontario as a world leader in agri-food best practices, so that the innovation that is developed matches the ambition of the sector.

The government's recently released Grow Ontario Strategy sets an ambitious goal to build and maintain world-class research infrastructure to encourage the use of innovation and enhance the sustainability and profitability of the agri-food sector. The proposed modernization of the *ARIO Act* is a key commitment outlined in the Strategy.

What We've Heard

To better inform this discussion paper and our proposals on modernizing the ARIO Act, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) hosted a series of stakeholder consultations and roundtables throughout 2022 into early 2023. The focus of these discussions was to explore the needs and opportunities for enhancing agri-food research and innovation in Ontario. These stakeholder discussions included participants from commodities organizations, Indigenous communities, research and innovation organizations, and academia.

These consultations also included input from food processors, those that take the raw commodities that Ontario farmers grow and turn it into the food that is placed on shelves. This critical component of the agri-food supply chain cannot be overlooked, and to date, the *ARIO Act* has not contemplated research and innovation for processors. The feedback received by the government will provide valuable insight into what research the industry requires to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

During the stakeholder engagement, the government heard several common and recurring themes:

A. Success and Accountability

In order to have measurable impact, success needs to be clearly defined. The ARIO should act to achieve and support the goals industry is working towards, and regularly report on progress and accomplishments.

B. Strategic Relationships

The ARIO should pursue a broader range of strategic relationships to reflect the entire agri-food value chain and allow greater access to the research stations to a variety of institutions, organizations, and the private sector.

C. Agriculture as a System

The ARIO should have the ability to provide advice across the whole agricultural research and innovation system as well as outside of primary production settings, such as food processing.

D. Research Priorities

The ARIO should play a lead role in collaboration and consultation on the ministry's research priorities with the agri-food sector and identify common research priorities across the industry.

E. Infrastructure Assets

ARIO research centres are valuable and could be used for more, including training of next generation of agricultural and agri-food experts, platforms for provision or scaling-up of KTT activities, pilot testing and demonstration sites (e.g., to support deployment of new technologies). The research centres should also be accessible to the whole agri-food value chain.

F. Modern Legislation

The government should update the *ARIO Act* so that the agency has the flexibility it needs to adapt to current and future priorities.

G. Innovation

The ARIO should create a culture of innovation and incentivize others to adopt new practices or emerging technology. A potential name of the ARIO change could also be considered to better reflect opportunities for innovation.

H. Awareness

The public profile of the ARIO should be strengthened to ensure that the sector, academia and the public understands the role of the agency, the accomplishments and importance of these accomplishments to the sustainability of the food supply chain, and the priorities going forward.

I. Knowledge Translation and Transfer

The ARIO should identify high-impact and transformational research opportunities, enhancing and promoting the knowledge translation and transfer (KTT) work and commercialization opportunities that are led by the ARIO to ensure Ontario's agricultural research is more accessible to the public.

Proposed Legislative Changes

Based on the feedback during stakeholder consultations and to align with the government's priorities outlined in the Grow Ontario Strategy, outlined below are the changes to the *ARIO Act* that the Ontario government is considering. If supported, these

changes could be included in a future bill that could be introduced into the legislature for consideration.

1. Update the Name of the ARIO (update)

To reflect the whole agri-food value chain and the growing innovative nature of agri-food research undertaken by the ARIO, possibly update its name to Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario.

2. Update the Name of the Director of Research (update)

The Director of Research role is critical to the functionality of ARIO and offers support to achieve the goals and objectives of the Board and the Minister. To further the development of ARIO, this role could evolve to an Executive Director position. This position could have an additional focus on furthering the business development of ARIO, translate goals into operational plans and actions, and to ensure regular communication and consultation with agri-food stakeholders.

3. Purpose Statement (new)

A purpose statement could be added to the *ARIO Act* that aligns with the ARIO's commitment to high-impact and transformational agri-food research and outlines the broadening scope of the ARIO's research and its continued evolution. A draft of a purpose statement is below:

The purpose of the Act is to continue the agency as Agriculture Research and Innovation Ontario (ARIO). The Act furthers the province's commitment to excellence in agriculture and food processing by facilitating high-impact research and innovation, managing agriculture and food research properties, cultivating strategic relationships, and supporting the growth of the agri-food sector into the future.

4. Objects (new)

Amend the duties of the ARIO that reflect stakeholder feedback and modernize the focus of the ARIO. These duties will replace the former list in the previous version of the *ARIO Act*. Some examples include:

- *To provide advice to Minister on research and innovation*
- *To enable, facilitate and encourage research and innovation*
- *To establish and strengthen relationships that enhance research and innovation and align with the priorities and the objectives of the Minister*
- *To encourage, enable and facilitate knowledge translation and transfer of research and innovation*
- *To encourage, enable and facilitate commercialization of research and innovation*
- *To acquire, operate, maintain and dispose of ARIO's property, as directed by the Executive Director*
- *To allow for the protection/conservation/preservation of agricultural research lands*

- *To inquire into programs of research*
- *To regularly consult with academia, industry, and sector organizations to determine emerging research needs, and select and recommend areas of research*
- *To stimulate interest in research as a means of increasing innovation and commercialization. This could include meetings with stakeholders to showcase the benefits of agri-food research and innovation.*

In addition to this, new duties for the Executive Director could include:

- *Work with the Chair to ensure that the Members receive timely information, documents, analysis, options, recommendations, and advice from staff to support the ARIO in fulfilling its statutory decision-making powers and duties.*
- *Translate the goals, objectives, and strategic directions of the Board into operational plans and activities.*
- *Work with the Chair to ensure effective, regular dialogue occurs with Minister to identify and address issues and concerns as related to the work of the Agency.*
- *Work with the Chair to ensure that the Agency operates within its approved budget allocation, and that public funds are used for the purpose intended with integrity and honesty.*

5. Definitions: Knowledge Transfer, Innovation, Research, Commercialization (new)
Definitions could be added or updated for knowledge translation and transfer, innovation, research, and commercialization that align with the ARIO's commitment to high-impact and transformational agri-food research and clearly outlines the advice ARIO can give. Potential definitions could include:

"Knowledge translation and transfer (KTT)" means the conversion of research knowledge into use among researchers and agri-food stakeholders through common exchange, collaboration, and communication.

"Innovation" means new and emerging research, technology, processes, and other products or services as it relates to agriculture and food sector

"Research" means research – and the development, testing, and evaluation of research – carried out and services provided in respect to the agriculture and food sector, including any novel or innovative research, ideas and approaches. and any emerging needs and/or interests identified

"Commercialization" means the process of bringing new agri-food products, technology, or services to market

"Executive Director" means the administrator of the Agriculture Research and Innovation of Ontario

Important Things to Keep in the Act

The government understands how important the ARIO has been for enabling cutting-edge agri-food research in Ontario, and have heard from stakeholders that there are sections of the Act – aided by its Director of Research – that are important to maintain to ensure the sector is still supported.

1. The ability of the ARIO to enter into property and financial agreements in order to support and foster agricultural research and innovation.
2. The ability of the ARIO to construct and maintain buildings that support and foster agricultural research.
3. The ability to select, develop and maintain research programs that align with the needs of Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sectors.

Discussion

The ministry is seeking feedback on the proposed changes outlined in this paper. Your feedback will be considered during the development of proposed changes to the *ARIO Act*. Please review the questions below and respond by April 5, 2023 to the contact information below.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you support the changes described in this proposal? Why or why not?
2. Do you have any specific concerns with any of the items discussed in this proposal? Please explain/describe.
3. Do you feel there are any additional areas for change that should be considered? Please describe.

Email your response to:

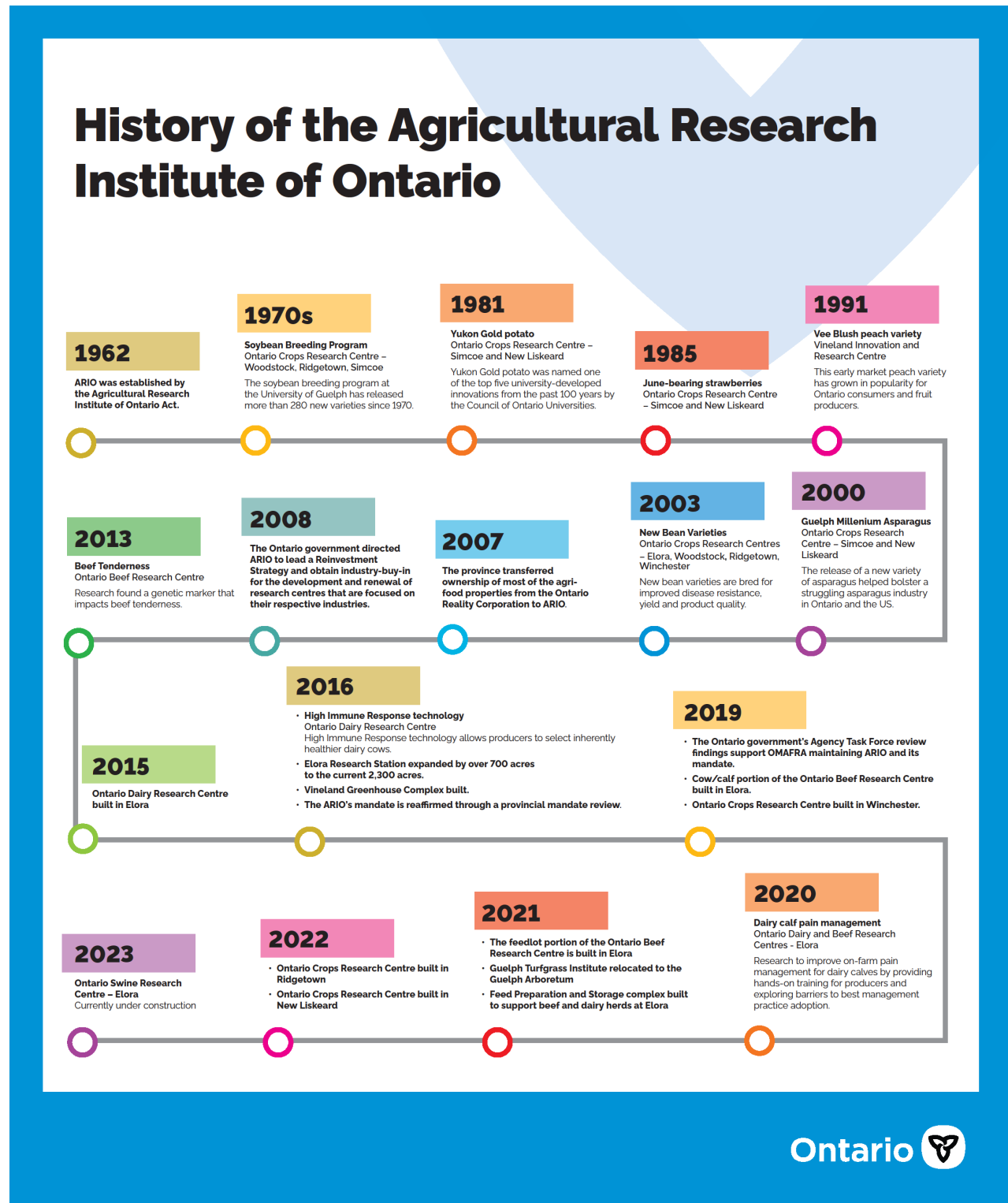
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Attention: Consultation on Proposal to Modernize the ARIO Act

Appendices

A. Information about the ARIO Shared During the Consultations



ARIO Vision and Mission

ARIO was created in 1962 by the *Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act*.

Vision

Globally leading the agri-food sector - empowered by transformational research and innovation.

Mission and Strategic Pillars of Activity:

ARIO is a trusted, authoritative, and credible body that is accountable to the Minister in the following areas of mandate and activity:

1. Advice: provide bold, informed strategic advice to the Minister on transformative, high-impact and diverse agri-food research and innovation.
2. Promote: communicate the value of Ontario's agri-food research opportunities and successes.
3. Transform: Establish partnerships to modernize the research infrastructure owned by ARIO and deliver transformational research.
4. Leverage: Ontario's research and innovation infrastructure is world leading and assets are leveraged to maximize benefits for the agri-food sector and to foster prosperous, sustainable and resilient agri-food and rural economies.

ARIO Infrastructure

- Completion of new Ontario Crops Research Centre in Ridgetown in 2022
- Anticipated completion of new Ontario Crops Research Centre in New Liskeard in 2022
- Anticipated completion of new Ontario Swine Research Centre in Elora by spring 2023
- ARIO also contributes \$4.5M per year towards the renewal and refurbishment of the physical infrastructure on its properties

ARIO Enables Alliance Achievements

- 121 research projects taking place at ARIO-owned research centres across the province in 2021-22 promising newer on-farm innovations
- 202.6 hectares used in 2021-22 for research to support crop research by identifying practices to reduce disease, manage pests, support soil health and enhance plant breeding
- 330 research academic, industry and government collaborators working together in 2021-22 to foster investment and engagement in projects

- 54 intellectual property disclosures in 2021-2022 leading to innovations worth protecting
- \$4.9 million in revenue generated from the sale of agricultural products – including milk, eggs and crops – from the 14 ARIO-owned research sites across the province.
- 1,638 KTT activities in 2021-22 in research projects which ensure scientific information reaches end users in the agri-food community
- At the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, 26 research projects initiated and 21 research projects completed in 2021-22.
- At the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, more than 200 products, practices, or processes assessed under research conditions to be ready for Ontario in 2021-22

Roles and Responsibilities of Ontario Agencies

Here's how the accountability framework works for provincial agencies:

- Cabinet is accountable to the Legislature.
- A minister is accountable to the Legislature and ultimately to the public. A minister's accountability cannot be delegated, but oversight can be delegated to appropriate ministry officials.
- An agency chair is accountable to a minister and is responsible for the mandate and conduct of the agency.
- The agency board is accountable to the minister through the chair.
- The CEO is accountable to the board.

Board governed agencies operate under a detailed memorandum of understanding, which must contain an accountability framework outlining the key roles of the minister, deputy minister, chair, board and CEO/Executive Officer.