



## COMMENTARY

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### “The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

203-1700 Ellice Ave. ~ Winnipeg MB ~ R3H 0B1

ph: (204) 697-1140 ~ fax: (204) 697-1109

[kap@kap.mb.ca](mailto:kap@kap.mb.ca) ~ [www.kap.mb.ca](http://www.kap.mb.ca)

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## Government Must Support Ag Research

By Ian Wishart, KAP President. Cell: (204) 856-6964.

*This is the third in a series of four columns on agricultural election issues put forward by Ian Wishart, President of Keystone Agricultural Producers.*

As federal party leaders wrap up debates on the future of the country, farmers are looking for signals that they have the future of Canadian agriculture on their priority lists. An essential tool to maintain the viability of agriculture is research.

After many years of financial drought, agricultural research is withering away. KAP believes there is a need for more publicly funded research that addresses both production challenges and the needs and wants of the marketplace. With the appropriate research, farmers could see future growth and wealth stemming from crops that have the health and wellness attributes that Canadians are looking for. The size and extent of the public investment into agricultural research will largely shape Canada's farming landscape in the future, and the next federal government must make its commitments clear in this campaign.

At present, public funds are often matched to well-funded corporations or mature sectors of the agriculture industry. Although this funding remains necessary and useful, there must also be support for potentially viable small and emerging sectors that do not have access to matching funds.

When it comes to research funding, KAP believes it should be a partnership between producers and both levels of government, with all partners contributing funds and participating in establishing the focus of the research. Producers put significant dollars into research through check-offs and through the government's investments, and Canada needs to establish clear mechanisms so that farmers can obtain a share of the ownership and financial returns from the outcomes of research. As it stands, farmers must pay for the publicly-funded research that is developed in partnership with large companies, and then they must pay again to use the resulting technology. It's a double-dip into farmers' pockets, and that must be rebalanced.

There must also be dollars allocated to the demonstration of research results to producers so that they can apply the results of public research on-farm. These practical

investments will help farmers meet production challenges or respond to consumers' needs and wants.

Finally, for agricultural research to flourish there must be a commitment to the necessary infrastructure and people that are at its core. Many of Canada's research stations are in need of serious upgrades or overhauls. More effort must also be put into retaining and recruiting qualified research scientists. To keep agriculture innovative, and to ensure that farmers benefit from this innovation, the next government must focus on an expansion of publicly funded research.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 22 commodity groups throughout the province. Our strength is our democratic structure, and our mission is to represent and promote the interests of the province's farm families.