



OFFICE *of* RESEARCH

AGRI-FOOD PARTNERSHIP

Research Station Outreach

OMAFRA-UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH AGREEMENT CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL REPORT, 2019-20

CASE STUDY SUBMITTED PER REPORTING REQUIREMENT 3.4.6

AT A GLANCE

Focus of the case study

There are 15 research stations in Ontario owned by the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) and managed by the University of Guelph through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance. These world-class research stations facilitate innovation and provide a research space with state-of-the-art equipment and resources for U of G researchers. Though the primary purpose of the stations is to support research, the Dairy Centre has also become a key space for outreach and engagement. This case study will report on the activities and deliverables of the Research Station Outreach program for the 2019-2020 fiscal year that have contributed towards the outcomes outlined in the 2018 OMAFRA-University of Guelph Agreement.

Goal

The goal of the Research Station Outreach program is to support outreach related to the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario's (ARIO) research stations in order to enhance collaboration among key stakeholders and promote the exchange, dissemination, and application of knowledge resulting from Alliance-funded research.

Strategy

From May 2019 to April 2020, the Research Station Outreach program implemented a variety of outreach events and activities to promote the ARIO research stations, including: (1) ongoing facility tours of the Ontario Dairy Research Centre, (2) the official announcement of the opening of the new Ontario Beef Research Centre, (3) an open house to celebrate the opening of the Ontario Beef Research Centre and, (4) continuation and expansion of the student ambassador program.

Benefits to Agri-food

This program contributes to the success of the Ontario agri-food sector by advancing knowledge of the sector, providing transparency to agri-food research, and by fostering collaborations amongst key stakeholders and end-users who benefit from this research. This program highlights the effective collaboration between the Alliance, industry and other key audience groups and showcases innovative research.

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Facility Tours of the Ontario Dairy Research Centre

The Ontario Dairy Research Centre, located in Elora, has provided tours of this state-of-the-art facility since 2017 for groups with an interest in the future of the dairy industry and an active relationship with OMAFRA, the University of Guelph and Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance. These tours enhance collaboration and the exchange, dissemination and application of knowledge resulting from Alliance-funded research. For example, these tours allow visitors to learn about and experience the innovative and high-priority research conducted at the facility. Tours also provide transparency of agri-food research which builds trust amongst these groups.

Coordination and execution of these tours is overseen by the Office of Research, Agri-Food Partnership KTT unit. Tours are led by an experienced guide who provides an informative tour of the facility. Tours allow visitors to see all major areas of the facility, learn about dairy operations and innovative dairy research, and experience how important research facilities are to advancing agri-food science.

The Ontario Dairy Research Centre also works in partnership with the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) Liaison program to provide tours of the facility to local high-school student groups. These tours showcase the

variety of jobs required within the facility pertaining to agriculture, research, veterinary medicine, and technicians, which help to expand student's understanding of possible positions working in the agri-food and research sector.

The Numbers

- 1,434 people visited the facility (May-2019-March-2020)
- 47 tours were delivered
- 33 unique organizations attended tours
- 8 tours in October (highest number by month)
- 7 high school and 4H groups visited

The Ontario Beef Research Centre Open House

The new Ontario Beef Research Centre at the Elora Research Station officially opened in August 2019. The Office of Research, Agri-Food Partnership worked in collaboration with the Beef Farmers of Ontario to plan an open house celebration. This gave the opportunity to showcase the new facility to regional beef producers, OMAFRA representatives and University faculty and staff. The aim of the event was to demonstrate how the facility will play an integral role in enabling research that supports Ontario's beef sector. The collaboration for this event further solidified the exceptional partnership between the Alliance and Beef Farmers of Ontario, which came together with the aim to benefit the agri-food industry through innovation and research.

The open house consisted of a one-day event where the facility opened its doors to the public before animals were moved in. This open house offered attendees the opportunity to see the facility first-hand, learn more about beef-related research conducted at U of G, and network with key stakeholders involved in this long-term project. Various KTT activities took place during the event such as:

- Presentation from key University of Guelph faculty members discussing their latest beef research
- Poster presentations from graduate students working in the beef research field highlighted how this new facility will benefit their research
- Dissemination of communications materials to relay information on key aspects of the facility such as, the laboratories, the handling chute, and the housing space, along with the positive impact this facility will have in the beef sector

Preparation for this event involved providing plain-language training to graduate students for their posters, and effective collaboration amongst various units across the Office of Research. At the event, attendees had the opportunity to tour the space either guided or at their own leisure. The event was a wide success with hundreds of visitors from the University, OMAFRA, BFO, and residents across Wellington county.

The Numbers

- Over 800 people attended the open house
- 9 graduate students engaged in poster-presentations
- 3 University of Guelph faculty presented
- 5 local businesses contracted to provide equipment and services

Student Ambassador Program

Student Ambassadors receive specialized training to become the next generation of highly qualified personnel entering the workforce. The Student Ambassador program trains University of Guelph graduate students conducting research in the dairy or beef sector to provide tours at the Ontario Beef and Dairy Research Centres. Training, coordination, and ongoing support to the student ambassador program is provided by the

Research Station Outreach Coordinator. Student ambassadors are provided with in-depth facility information and information about ongoing research trials to provide consistent tours to all groups visiting the facility.

This program also helps student ambassadors develop skills they will use in their professional careers, such as public speaking, plain language training, effective knowledge mobilization, and networking.

Benefits of the program

- Student ambassadors have helped to provide tours to groups of more than 100 people
- Student ambassadors expand the outreach program’s tour capacity by allowing for more frequent and larger tours
- Student ambassadors get specialized training, building their confidence and skill level to lead and speak to large groups of people from a variety of audiences

The Numbers

- 25 tours from May 2019-March 2020 were facilitated by Student Ambassadors
- 3 new ambassadors joined the program in 2019

ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Feature: Ontario Beef Research Centre Video

Prior to the official opening of the Ontario Beef Research Centre in August 2019, a video was produced with the aim to depict the build of the new facility as well as highlight the reasoning for new beef research station. This video has been used throughout multiple events, including the announcement and open house for the Beef Research Centre, and is posted online for anyone to see.

The video provides an effective communication material to summarize the needs that are addressed with the new build, is an excellent example of collaboration between the University, government, and industry, and showcases the new world-class research facility.

See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDhG5uQUz9g>

BEHIND THE NUMBERS: AGRI-FOOD SECTOR BENEFITS

Features:

Tours



“Thank you so much for helping OAC 94 tour through the dairy facility. The group was so impressed with the level of research which is being done, and the potential benefits back to Ontario dairy farmers.”

The OAC’94 Alumni visited the Ontario Dairy Research Centre for their annual outing. Karen Daynard, who organized the event, graduated from UofG in ’94 sent a thank you message after the tour.



“Without the ability to bring students onto our research stations, like the Elora Dairy facility, we would not be able to provide such a robust set of learning opportunities that give a "real life" look into the agri-food industry. It is important that youth learn about food production and that the sector is always improving to better quality, economic value, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. By giving a "behind the scenes" experience to high school students, it helps to grow awareness and interest in food and agriculture regardless of a student's background (i.e. rural vs. urban). Attendees have the opportunity to ask questions about contentious topics (i.e. environmental impacts)

and learn about studies, like genetics and feed efficiency research, to better understand improvements to the industry.”

Carleigh Johnston is the OAC Liaison Manager for the Ontario Agricultural College. The OAC Liaison program promotes agriculture-related academic programs to youth.

Student Ambassador Program



“My time as a student ambassador has been very beneficial for me during my graduate studies. I have really enjoyed touring different groups with varying knowledge of the dairy industry through the facility and answering their questions about the research we conduct. Touring groups with varying knowledge of the industry has allowed me to develop my communication skills. I am now able to adapt how I describe and explain things depending on the background of the group I am touring. Furthermore, being a student ambassador has improved my public speaking skills immensely, along with my confidence with speaking in front of a crowd. Being a student ambassador has improved and developed the skills I bring to the work force.”

Sarah Parsons is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Animal Biosciences at the Ontario Agricultural College studying dairy behaviour and welfare under the supervision of Prof. Trevor DeVries. Sarah has been a student ambassador at the Ontario Dairy Research Centre for over 2 years now and has helped led dozens of tours. She has also conducted several research trials at the Ontario Dairy Research Centre and brings that hands-on experience and knowledge to help elevate her tours.



"I learned about how the dairy research facility operates from another perspective - seeing the barn when conducting research compared to giving tours is different. It was also important to know and differentiate how the research barn compares to non-research dairy farms, since this was an essential consideration when giving tours and answering questions. I found that talking to producers and people from the industry gave me the opportunity to learn more about the dairy industry in Ontario. Giving tours also allowed me to practice public speaking to different groups of people with different interests, knowledge and backgrounds."

Angela Wilson is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Animal Biosciences at OAC studying dairy cow welfare and comfort under the supervision of Prof. Vern Osborne. Angela has conducted and been involved in many trials at the Ontario Dairy Research Station giving her

a strong knowledge of the facility and diverse research background. Angela joined the student ambassador program this year, and has helped with multiple tours involving large groups.