

A major platform for the beef sector

research



New facility development and pasture expansion support Ontario's vital beef industry

A huge \$15.5-million facelift is underway at the Elora Research Station, with the construction of a new cow-calf research centre, a facility owned by the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario and managed by the University of Guelph under the OMAFRA-U of G Agreement. A separate project will repurpose 200 acres of land to create pasture at the station and almost double the capacity for livestock on site.

This initiative, will improve research on beef cattle health and welfare, and is the largest update to the facility since it was built nearly 50 years ago.

“We’re proud to work with the government and industry to develop and support landmark achievements in research that will move the province’s beef industry forward sustainably and profitably,” says Malcolm Campbell, Vice-President Research.

He says these renovations, along with the dairy research facility at Elora, will make Ontario a leader in bovine research facilities in Canada.



Top: Designer's rendition of the completed calf-cow barns that are part of the first phase of the project.

Inset: Technician Tim Caldwell and Prof. Katie Wood.



The first stages of the beef project are underway, with workers framing two new 5,530-square-metre cow-calf research barns and a joint handling facility. These barns, part of the first phase of the project, will house up to 288 cows, nearly double the current capacity of the research station barns.

Cows will have access to the pasture for all but a few months of the year. Peter Milton, Manager of Research Station Operations at Elora, and his team began seeding and planting cover crop for the pastures in June. He expects fencing around the new pasture plots to be complete this fall.

“What’s different about these pastures is that they are very close to the new barns. The cows don’t need to be transported very far to go out to graze,” says Milton. “It will keep things very accessible for research.”

Onsite, more than 100 new automated Insentec and Calan Broadbent feeding head gates,

which monitor and measure exactly the time and amount a cow is eating, will also be added. This complements the 48 existing Insentec feeders currently in use in the feedlot.

Tyson Amidon, foreman of the Elora Beef Research Station, says these feeding head gates use a specific microchip technology embedded in the identification ear tags for each cow to record feed data. This technology will allow researchers to conduct individualized feed trials and track feed measurements for each cow.

Another major feature of the new build is the addition of two new C-Lock Greenfeed Trailers. Animal Biosciences Prof. Katie Wood, head of beef nutrition research at the University of Guelph, says these solar-powered equipment allow researchers to measure gas exchange in animals on pasture, and will support research aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a more applied setting.

“Our work at the beef station typically focuses on improving efficiency and growth, reducing the environmental impact of beef cattle, and management strategies to improve health and welfare,” she says.

Wood says research trials, expected to commence the second year the facility is operational, will be multi-disciplinary.

“The facility is designed for flexibility to accommodate many different types of research,” she says.

Beef Farmers of Ontario president Joe Hill says the facility will support the breadth of livestock research, including genetics, production, quality and safety.

“The facility gives the ability to conduct research on a meaningful and integrated scale,” says Hill. “The advancement of beef research is integral to providing science-based information to maintain consumer confidence, and to ensure that the beef industry is globally competitive and ready to take advantage of current and emerging trade opportunities.”

The new facility received funding from the federal and provincial governments, the University of Guelph and the Beef Farmers of Ontario. Its operation will continue under the OMAFRA-University of Guelph Agreement.



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Phone: 519-824-4120, Ext. 53781

Written by Gillian Beatson,
Students Promoting Awareness
of Research Knowledge (SPARK)
– Research Communications

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Gillian Beatson, SPARK (top)

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