



RE: OAFVC and January 30 Special Council Meeting

Hello, I am writing on behalf of George Brown College's Food Innovation & Research Studio (FIRSt) in regards to the upcoming Special Council Meeting on January 30, 2025. I understand that the purpose of the meeting is to investigate potential cost savings for Northumberland County, and wanted to provide a delegation in support of the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC) and its continued funding.

As background, FIRSt is a Technology Access Centre supported by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and our objective to support the food and beverage (F&B) sector with scientific research and development services from our lab at George Brown College in Toronto, Ontario. We work with our clients to troubleshoot product development challenges and help them take their product ideas from concept to reality. We take pride in our role as a testing facility that caters to the diverse needs of innovators and entrepreneurs in Ontario's F&B industry. As you may know, most of Canada's F&B facilities are located in Ontario and Quebec. Ontario's F&B manufacturing sector is the second largest in North America with more than 4,500 companies (<https://www.investontario.ca/agri-processing>) – and approximately 90% of those companies are small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 100 employees (<https://foodandbeverageontario.ca/about-the-industry/>). Due to their size, it is rare for these companies to have employees with all of the necessary skills required to manage and grow their businesses, and they are especially lacking in the technical skills needed to troubleshoot product issues, scale for production, and ensure they have validated and are in compliance with regulations related to packaging and quality control.

OAFVC is a key partner for FIRSt, as our applied research services have supported numerous companies in preparing for larger-scale production, which many of them conduct at the Centre. Our longstanding partnership has been marked by mutual referrals and a shared commitment to fostering advancements in the industry, and we believe OAFVC is integral to fostering innovation and growth within our shared sector. The OAFVC helps companies achieve financial success and create new jobs for a wide range of highly skilled individuals from technical and scientific positions through to business, sales, and marketing roles, which provides economic and social benefits to the County and beyond. The supports offered by the OAFVC are vital to help these SMEs from their initial launch into market and as they increase their production and sales. The training they offer food entrepreneurs exposes them to new technology, enhances food safety practices, and overall helps participants contribute to the broader food industry and economy with new skills and insights. By working with the OAFVC, these business owners are not only supported with necessary services to launch their products into the market, they are also building knowledge and capacity within those companies. There is truly no other facility in Ontario like the OAFVC – it is a key contributor to the F&B industry and provides a pathway for so many companies to grow and have a positive impact.

We look forward to Northumberland County's continued support and investment into the OAFVC, in support for the food and beverage industry in the County and Ontario at-large. Should you require any further information or collaboration, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dan Reilly

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