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Letter of Intent – Guidelines for Researchers

Organic Science Cluster III is a joint initiative led by the Organic Federation of Canada in collaboration with the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada at Dalhousie University to serve the needs of Canada's organic sector. This LOI process is being conducted in anticipation that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) next policy framework will include another Science Cluster Initiative, and that there will be an open call for proposals. The organic sector has been consulting with AAFC regarding projected timelines and criteria for the next Science Cluster program. As such the organic sector is working towards being prepared for the next call. For updates and details related to Organic Science Cluster III, see: www.dal.ca/OACC/OSCIII.

1. Purpose of this Letter of Intent (LOI)

- i. Provide an opportunity for researchers to express their interest in being part of the Organic Science Cluster III (2018-2023)
- ii. Screen (and provide direction on) proposed research for its relevance and potential impact on the organic sector based on:
 - a. how the Activity will strategically address industry priorities,
 - b. the novel scientific contribution the research will make,
 - c. the level of industry collaboration and support, and
 - d. the preliminary plan to communicate the results of the research.

Scientific merit, design, feasibility and likelihood of success will be evaluated in detail at the proposal stage. Applicants submitting the LOI will be provided with comments/feedback, and those LOIs accepted by the evaluation committee will be invited to submit a full proposal.

2. Who can apply

- University scientists in Canada
- Government scientists in Canada
- Private sector researchers in Canada

Notes:

- Private sector researchers are encouraged to work with Government or University scientists unless they can clearly demonstrate experience and capability in designing and conducting scientifically publishable research.
- The work must be based in Canada and relevant to the Canadian Organic Sector; international collaborators may be included if their expertise is required, however, no Cluster funds will leave Canada.

3. Definitions

- "Activity" – is the proposal submitted by a lead researcher, listing collaborating researchers and their objectives and workplans (e.g. Organic weed control in apple orchards)

4. Projected Timeline (2017)

The funding agency will not be able to provide an announcement or timeline for this process until mid-summer. The timeline below is intended to complement the organic sector's research needs process that is currently underway, while also projecting a realistic timeline for when the funding agency will be in a position to receive Cluster proposals. Deadlines for researchers are bolded, other dates are for OSCIII management but are included to aid in understanding the process.

	Completed By
Research priorities draft released by industry	13-Mar-17
Deadline for LOI submission	10-Apr-17
Full proposal guidelines available	10-Apr-17
LOI Applicants notified, full proposals invited	24-Apr-17
Deadline for researchers to submit peer reviewer suggestions	8-May-17
Activity proposal submission	29-May-17
Proposals sent out for peer review (3)	5-Jun-17
Peer Review completed	3-Jul-17
Science Advisory Body assessment	24-Jul-17
Deadline for letters of support confirming matching funding	31-Jul-17
Notice of acceptance, revisions, and other details	31-Jul-17
Revised activity proposal submission with all documentation	21-Aug-17
OSCIII proposal submission to AAFC	30-Sep-17

5. Matching Funding Requirement and Budget

At this stage, the details relating to the matching funding requirement for the Cluster program will not be known until the funding agency has released its guidelines in the summer. This is an important consideration since the organic sector does not have a levy or check-off program for organic research (unlike some other commodity groups). This means that industry matching must be secured on an Activity by Activity basis.

As with the last Cluster, we want to ensure that the research is of importance to the organic sector and has impact. This is greatly enhanced by a strong relationship between the researcher and the industry stakeholders. Thus, researchers will be expected to secure matching industry funding for their Activities.

At this stage we are requesting that researchers submitting an Activity proposal must identify **matching funding of 33%** (minimum of 18% as cash, maximum of 15% in-kind) of the total Activity budget from non-government sources.

Note:

- A higher matching requirement may be requested if the benefits are strictly limited to an individual company, or if the company is requesting ownership of intellectual property.
- Salaries of government paid employees are not eligible.
- All costs associated must be incremental expenses (i.e. would not have been incurred if the Activity did not exist).
- Equipment purchases should be specifically needed for this OSCIII Activity (i.e. not to supporting other work).

6. Research Areas

6.1 Research proposals should relate to the following areas:

1. Increasing **competitiveness** through:

- Improvements in productivity, production stability, resiliency and/or quality
 - o E.g. Breeding, pest & soil management, irrigation, feed, plant/animal health
 - o E.g. Management responding to climate extremes
- Improvements in efficiency, cost reduction
 - o E.g. Labour, nutrients, water, energy, feed
- Development and application of new technologies to support organic production systems
 - o E.g. Amendments, equipment, feed, biostimulants, pesticides, probiotics
 - o E.g. Data support systems, soil test recommendations, precision ag. technologies
- Development of emerging crops, livestock and related products
- Improvements in processing, handling and packaging

2. Advancing **public good** through:

- Improvements in knowledge about how organic agroecosystems function
 - o E.g. Pest behaviour, nutrient cycling and movement, life cycle analysis, energy use
- Evaluation of ecosystem services – benefits, shortcomings, improved practices
 - o E.g. Biodiversity, soil health, water quality, carbon sequestration
- Evaluation of the health benefits of organic
 - o E.g. Nutritional value, risk reduction; shortcomings, improvements

3. Supporting organic sector **evolution** through:

- Assessments of the sustainability of organic agriculture production systems
- Application of holistic principles to find solutions that close nutrient and energy cycles
 - o E.g. Recycling/use of waste by-products in organic systems as a sustainable practice (e.g. struvite, municipal compost)
- Improvement of animal welfare – assess status, improved practices
- Improvement of organic standards – Canadian science to support the standard
- Integration of the traditional knowledge of First Nations peoples into organic

6.2 Research considerations:

- Relevance to unique needs and market of the organic sector
 - o A national review of research priorities will be available by mid-March for your reference. Researchers may also refer to locally identified priorities.
- Industry support for the research as a priority (demonstrated with letter(s) of support)
- Impact potential – as a national research program with public funding, the research should have high likelihood of adoption of valuable research outcomes by many stakeholders (i.e. not specific to one operation)
- Work in multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional teams is encouraged
- Continuing research - Priority may be given to the continuation/completion of Activities from the previous Cluster, providing they remain an industry priority.

6.3 Out of scope research

LOIs will not be accepted for: social sciences, marketing/market development, public trust, aquaculture, international development, regulatory work.

7. LOI Form Instructions

Section 1: General Information on the Activity

The title of the Activity should be precise and concise while still describing the work to be done. State the primary geographical location and specify the subject area as appropriate (e.g. Horticulture: *Fruit – strawberries*).

Define the length of the proposed Activity and expected start date (earliest: April 1, 2018).

Provide an estimate of the projected total budget (i.e. for the whole time frame of the Activity) necessary to complete the Activity and the status of industry matching commitment (if available). Note, this budget is only intended to give an overall impression of the magnitude of the research Activity, and can be adjusted as required in the proposal stage.

Budget notes: Salary for government employees is not eligible. All costs must be incremental to the Activity (i.e. would not otherwise be incurred without the Activity). This is not a capital investment program; capital purchases over \$5000 will need special justification assessment.

Section 2: Activity Principal Investigator

The Activity Principal Investigator (researcher) is the applicant and is responsible for proposal submission and reporting, along with the primary deliverables of the Activity. The Principal Investigator will also be the primary contact with the administrators of the Cluster.

Section 3: Co-investigators

Name other researchers (organizations) who will be involved in the Activity. These are the collaborating researchers who will receive a portion of the budget, or who will be making a substantial direct contribution to the work. Collaboration between AAFC and university researchers is encouraged where appropriate. Add extra lines if necessary.

Section 4: Collaborating Industry Partner

The Organic Science Cluster is intended to provide coordinated research serving the strategic needs of the organic sector. In a highly competitive environment for research funds, it is critical that the research has impact and as such is supported by industry collaborators. It is viewed that a close relationship between industry sponsors of research and the scientists greatly increases the likelihood that the research will be relevant and the results will be disseminated with impact.

At the LOI stage, it is recommended that one or more industry collaborator(s) is identified, that is providing, at a minimum, in-kind support. LOI submissions that identify industry collaborators with cash support will be looked upon favourably, however, formal support will not be required until July.

Provide the name of the partner(s) you are expecting to provide matching contributions and indicate the nature of their contribution if known (Note: supporters of this research who are not providing matching funds are identified below). Letters of Support may be included outlining the industry partners intended contribution to the research (i.e. financial and/or in-kind). Some specifics, such as level of funding, may be detailed in the proposal stage.

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Section 5: Collaborating Extension Specialist or Industry Professional

The intent of the Cluster is to have impact on the organic sector. Past experience has shown that Activities are more likely to be relevant and to have impact if they are discussed first with extension specialists and/or an extension specialist is included as a collaborator. This may not apply to all research Activities.

If an extension specialist involved in the sector has already been contacted and is interested in participating in the Activity, provide general information (address, telephone and fax number, email address) as well as a letter of support for the Activity.

Section 6: Other Supporters of the Activity (General Support)

Provide names and/or organizations of supporters who have shown interest in the Activity. Letters of support from other industry representatives indicating the importance of the research can also be submitted along with the LOI to demonstrate the relevance of the Activity.

Section 7: Activity Overview

This overview should include a defined research problem or opportunity, explaining how this issue is a priority. Identification of the research priority can arise in several ways:

- i. Direct communication with industry stakeholders (e.g. producer, producer group, processor, retailer, marketing agency, certifying body, other service provider) or organic extension specialists/consultants who have identified the work as a priority,
- ii. Review of national research priorities identified by the Organic Value Chain Roundtable's Research Needs Task Force (available in mid-March 2017),
- iii. Reviewing [results of past research prioritization undertaken in 2009](https://www.dal.ca/faculty/agriculture/oacc/en-home/about/canadian-research-priorities.html) and/or the associated research needs assessment process (<https://www.dal.ca/faculty/agriculture/oacc/en-home/about/canadian-research-priorities.html>)
- iv. Identifying a new opportunity or barrier and building a case for it to be a research priority.

General and specific objectives should be provided (these may change slightly in the full proposal). Research proposals should be hypothesis driven where possible. A brief description of the planned research should be provided outlining where the research will be conducted and what kind of work is being done (field, lab, greenhouse).

A description of the novel scientific contributions derived from the Activity is required. How is this research innovative for the sector? The applicant should show that the proposed Activity will build on previous work and will not repeat work that has already been done.

References should be footnoted in the text. The list of references can be provided on a separate page attached to the LOI.

Section 8: Anticipated Impacts on the Organic Industry

Describe the benefits derived from this Activity for the organic industry and more specifically for farmers and stakeholders in the sector. How does this Activity address the research priorities in the sector in terms of impacts? Clearly indicate how the research increases profitability, captures a new opportunity, reduces risks (environmental, social, economic, etc.), enhances competitiveness for Canadian producers and/or processors, and/or builds credibility for the sector.

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Section 9: Extension and Communication Plan

Give a brief overview of how the results of this research will be disseminated to the organic sector to ensure that they have impact and are adopted. Indicate partnerships that will be established to support this knowledge dissemination. A detailed communication plan will be expected in the full proposal.

Note: you must demonstrate how you are going to **ensure that the research will have impact on the stakeholders to promote adoption; presentation at scientific conferences will be a low priority**, but publication of scientific papers will be supported.

Section 10: Involvement of the Collaborating Industry Partner

How will the industry partner be integrated at each stage of the Activity (i.e. writing of the proposal, research implementation and communication strategy)? Describe the interaction between the principal investigator or co-investigators and the industry partner at each stage of the Activity.

8. Deadline for submission is **April 10, 2017**

Each LOI should include:

- Completed LOI form as an **MSWord** document
- Letters of support from industry partners and proponents (can be pdf)
- Letter of support from the extension specialist involved in the Activity (Section 5)

Submit the completed LOI and accompanying documents to: rveenhuis@dal.ca

For more information:

See the OSCIII website: www.dal.ca/OACC/OSCIII

Margaret Graves – Program Manager (902-896-3481), gravesm@dal.ca) OR

Nicole Boudreau – Organic Federation of Canada (514-488-6192), boudreau.nicole@videotron.ca)

Andy Hammermeister – Director, OACC (902-893-8037, andrew.hammermeister@dal.ca)