NUTRITION RESEARCH FUNDING PROGRAM

GUIDELINES

Updated September 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) is a non-profit organization funded by dairy farmers across Canada and representing more than 9,000 dairy farms in the country. Our organization plays a leadership role on behalf of the industry in several important areas, including funding and support of research in dairy production and in human nutrition and health. DFC has a long-standing commitment (over 30 years) of investing in dairy research to drive innovation and ensure a sustainable future for the sector.

DFC's investments in science are guided by the 2022-2027 National Dairy Research Strategy. The strategy was developed through extensive consultations involving a broad range of stakeholders from the scientific community and industry and resulted in the identification of targeted outcomes and research priorities under three areas: dairy farm sustainability; animal health, care and welfare; and dairy in human nutrition and health.

DFC's Nutrition Research Funding Program (the "**Program**") aims to support scientific research in the areas of nutrition, health, food science and sustainable diets, in relation to dairy products, in order to generate new knowledge and innovations for the benefit of the dairy sector and all Canadians.

DFC has adopted a peer-review system and a funding application process similar to those of major granting agencies (e.g., NSERC and CIHR).

II. RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The objective of the Program is to gain a better understanding of the specific role of dairy products in attaining and maintaining optimal health, as well as their contribution in a sustainable diet. DFC considers proposals that have nutrition and health implications for Canadian dairy products and that are relevant to Canadian dairy farmers.

Of specific interest to DFC are proposals which feature dairy products in their entirety (particularly milk, cheese and yogurt, including regular fat versions), demonstrate technological innovation, and utilize a multidisciplinary approach, whenever possible, to address fundamental and applied research questions. Applied human randomized controlled trials and mechanistic studies in humans are of particular interest.

Please note that studies that refer to or involve the potential for a health claim must comply with Health Canada's Guidance Documents for substantiation of health claims. For more details, please consult Health Canada's website at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/claims-reclam/assess-evalu/index-eng.php

Please refer to the Appendix for the targeted research priorities for this Call for Proposals.

Terminology for plant-based alternative foods:

Canada's food standards for milk and dairy products have existed in some form for more than a century and have a long history of providing both industry and consumers with clearly defined requirements regarding composition, strength, potency, purity, quality and other properties. Unfortunately, while Canada's food standards for milk and dairy products have been well-understood for decades, there has recently been a lack of enforcement by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) when it comes to a steady proliferation of plant-based products misusing standardized dairy terminology.

We therefore request that researchers not refer to any plant-based foods using standardized dairy names (e.g. milk, cheese, yogurt, cream, ice-cream, ice-milk, butter, etc.) in their proposals or in any research they may conduct. Furthermore, adding terms such as "substitute" (e.g., milk "substitute") or "equivalent", implies a level of nutritional equivalency which is not supported by evidence in the case of

most dairy products. It is therefore similarly recommended that researchers avoid using any terminology that implies nutritional equivalency.

The following are examples of appropriate text and terminology for researchers to use:

Plant-Based Beverages

This category of alternative products should be referred to as 'plant-based beverages'. Appropriate terms that may be used to describe these products include:

- 'Beverage', 'Drink', 'Juice' or 'Puree', etc.
    - E.g. 'soy beverage', 'coconut drink', 'almond juice', 'oat puree' etc.

**Note: 'Milk' and 'Cream' are standardized dairy terms that should not be used to describe plant-based beverages.

Plant-Based Foods

Specific categories of plant-based 'alternative' food products should be referred to as 'plant-based alternatives to XX' [XX = category of dairy products, e.g. butter, cheese, etc.].

- E.g. 'plant-based alternatives to cheese', 'oat-based alternatives to ice cream', 'soy-based alternatives to yogurt', etc.

Specific products should be described according to their function and/or characteristics (e.g. texture, condition, form, shape, consistency, etc.). For example:

- Plant-based alternatives to Butter
    - 'Margarine' (where applicable), 'Brick', 'Stick' or 'Spread'
        - E.g. 'plant-based spread', 'plant-based brick/stick for baking/sauteing', etc.

- Plant-based alternatives to Cheese
    - Alternatives to 'Hard Cheeses'
        - 'Brick', 'Block', 'Shred', 'Crumble', 'Slice' or 'Flake'
            - E.g. 'cashew-based brick', 'oat-based shred', 'plant-based slice', etc.
    - Alternatives to 'Soft Cheeses'
        - 'Spread' or 'Paste'
            - E.g. 'almond-based spread', 'oat-based paste,' etc.
    - Alternatives to 'Cheese varieties'
        - E.g. 'soy-based meltable pizza shred', 'fermented cashew crumble in brine,' etc.

- Plant-based alternatives to Ice Cream
    - 'Frozen Dessert'
        - E.g. 'cashew-based frozen dessert,' etc.

- Plant-based alternatives to Yogurt
        - E.g. 'fermented smoothie' or 'fermented emulsion,' etc.

**Note: 'Butter', 'Cheese/Cheese variety', 'Ice Cream', and 'Yogurt' are standardized dairy terms that should not be used to describe plant-based foods.

Please note that the aforementioned terms do not apply to partial products that are 'blends' of dairy and plant-based foods. For these specific products, please refer to them as 'partial' or 'blended' products.

III. ELIGIBILITY

Researchers from Canadian universities and/or federal or provincial research centres are eligible to apply to the Program. Non-Canadian researchers could be considered as co-investigators or collaborators.

The principal investigator (the "**Principal Investigator**") is responsible for the complete direction of the approved project (the "**Project**") and for other activities related to its efficient execution. The role of the co-investigator(s) in the Project must be clearly defined. Students and trainees are normally not eligible to act as co-investigators.

A researcher cannot be the Principal Investigator for two projects simultaneously carried out under this Program. However, the same researcher can be a co-investigator for no more than one additional project.

Whenever possible, projects should involve complementary teams of researchers from across Canada.

Commercial product research and development is not eligible.

IV. FUNDING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Under this Call for Proposals, the submission of a Letter of Intent (the "**Letter of Intent**") is the first step in the funding application process.

The Letter of Intent will first be reviewed by the Nutrition Expert Scientific Advisory Committee, an independent body of researchers. Based on their reviews, DFC's Canadian Dairy Research Council will make the final decision regarding the selection of the Letters of Intent. Principal Investigators whose Letters of Intent are selected will be invited to submit a Full Proposal (the "**Proposal**").

Proposals will be evaluated based on their overall clarity, scientific merit and technical feasibility, team expertise, training opportunities, knowledge translation and transfer opportunities, and realistic budget. Proposals will be subjected to an independent external peer review process and an evaluation by the Nutrition Expert Scientific Advisory Committee. DFC's Canadian Dairy Research Council will then make the final funding decisions. Decisions will be communicated to the Principal Investigators in July. The expected start date for the Projects is January 2027.

A selected Letter of Intent and/or an approved Proposal do not ensure Project funding *per se*. Funding will be confirmed only upon the signing of a Research Agreement (the "**Agreement**") (section VI).

In certain instances, projects of interest to DFC that fall outside the established timelines and research priorities may also be considered.

V. FUNDING APPLICATION PROCESS

a) Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent must be submitted using the Letter of Intent Form at dairyresearch@dfc-plc.ca **by December 1st, 2025**. The Letter of Intent Form can be found on the DFC website. *A confirmation of receipt and eligibility will be provided within five (5) business days of receiving the Letter of Intent.*

Please note: The same investigator can submit more than one Letter of Intent. However, regardless of how many Letters of Intent are approved, only one Proposal per Principal Investigator can be submitted for final review. Switching the names of Principal Investigator and co-investigators is not appropriate and may exclude the Letter of Intent or the Proposal from further consideration.

The PDF Form provided for the Letter of Intent is self-contained and specifically designed to eliminate the need for additional supporting material to transmit relevant information (i.e., appendices or cover letter). **Additional pages will be removed from the Letter of Intent Form.** Please also comply with the space and format limitations of the Letter of Intent Form. Do not use photo-reduced type. The font size is Arial, 11-points.

Letters of Intent submitted in French will be translated for English reviewers; however, the Principal Investigator and/or their team will not have the opportunity to review the translation.

b) Full Proposal

Upon selection of the Letter of Intent, DFC will send an invitation to submit a Proposal to the Principal Investigator and will provide a Full Proposal Form to be completed and submitted to dairyresearch@dfc-plc.ca **by April 6, 2026.**

Major changes from the Letter of Intent will not be permitted unless they were specifically suggested by the Nutrition Expert Scientific Advisory Committee. Making such changes could lead to the Proposal not being reviewed.

Guidelines for completing Proposals:

- Please comply with the space and format limitations as presented in the Full Proposal Form. Do not use photo-reduced type. The font size is Arial, 11-points.

- **The body of the Full Proposal Form is self-contained and must not include additional pages and/or attachments, except for tables and figures. Up to three manuscripts can be appended to the Full Proposal if they are directly relevant to the proposed Project.**

- **CV for the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators**
  A complete Curriculum Vitae for the Principal Investigator and each Co-Investigator, in the Canadian Common CV format (CIHR or NSERC) or on the DFC CV Form (available upon request), must be appended to the Proposal.

- **Title of Project**
  The title should be concise and clearly indicate the subject/topic of the proposed Project and reflect its main purpose. No abbreviations or acronyms should be used. The title may be modified upon mutual agreement between DFC and the Principal Investigator.

- **Project Details**
  The Full Proposal Form must include detailed information on background; objectives and hypotheses; experimental approach (including power and sample size calculations); milestones; team expertise and training of highly qualified personnel; potential benefits and economic impact for the dairy sector; and knowledge translation and transfer opportunities.

c) Budget Information

Funding under the Program is for a maximum of 2 years. The total amount requested from this Program can be up to $150,000. For studies requiring more than $150,000, it is strongly recommended to secure additional funding from other sources.

Detailed information about the financial requirements for the Project is to be provided as outlined below.

- **Personnel**
  Eligible categories include:

  1. Research personnel whose skills are required to conduct the Project,
  2. Technicians formally classified as such by their research institution,
  3. Graduate students (MSc and PhD), and
  4. Postdoctoral fellows.

  DFC reserves the right to request further information from the research institution regarding fringe benefits. Salaries for the Principal Investigator and co-investigators are not eligible.

- **Major Equipment**
  DFC does not provide equipment grants. However, in special cases where equipment is essential to the Project, DFC may, at its sole discretion, contribute to the purchase of major equipment upon a written request from the research institution and/or Principal Investigator. Major equipment is considered a single item for which the price exceeds $10,000.

- **Material and Supplies**
  Expenditures include expendable materials, such as experimental animals and feed, chemicals, glassware and supplies for existing equipment and its routine maintenance.

- **Publication and Publication Costs**
  DFC encourages the publication of research results in reputable, peer-reviewed scientific journals. The choice of the journal rests with the Principal Investigator. Preference should be given to reputable Canadian or international journals with extensive readership in Canada. Publication costs **should not** be included in the budget.

  Note 1: The invoice from the journal for costs related to the publication should be sent to DFC no more than 18 months after the end of the Project (DFC does not usually pay for open-access publications).

  Note 2: Publications resulting from DFC's support should be acknowledged using the following statement: *This project was supported by Dairy Farmers of Canada. As per the research agreement, Dairy Farmers of Canada had no role in the design and conduct of the project, data collection, and analysis or interpretation of the results as well as the decision to publish the findings.*

- **Travel**
  DFC encourages travel to relevant scientific meetings within Canada or abroad to present research results from the Project. A maximum of $2,000 per year can be requested.

- **Other Expenses**
  Computer costs related to data analyses, reimbursement to Project subjects and other routine expenses incurred as part of the Project are eligible.

- **Overhead Charges or Indirect Costs**
  DFC will not pay the research institution, the Principal Investigator and/or the co-investigator(s), as the case may be, for any overhead/indirect costs for DFC funded projects.

- **Unauthorized Expenses**
  Consultant fees are not eligible unless prior written approval is given by DFC.

- **Transfer of Funds between Budget Categories**
  Expenditures which exceed budgeted items are permitted provided the total budget does not change. Budget transfers in excess of 10% of budget category require the prior written approval from DFC.

d) Matching Funding/Other Sources of Funding

DFC encourages the Principal Investigator to obtain matching funds from federal funding agencies and/or other sources. The funds that will be requested must be described in the Budget section of the PDF Forms, along with the objectives or parts of the Project that will be funded by these other sources. Principal Investigators must have verified with the funding agencies if the Project complies with their research priorities and guidelines.

Note that DFC is an eligible organization for Mitacs programs. Principal Investigators are encouraged to apply to Mitacs to support a portion of the graduate student and postdoctoral fellow scholarships.

VI. RESEARCH AGREEMENT

The funding must be used entirely for specific activities supervised by the Principal Investigator. Prior to initiation of the Project, an Agreement (available upon request) will be entered into by and between the research institution, the Principal Investigator, DFC and other funding partners, if applicable.

The Agreement defines the rights and obligations of the research institution, the Principal Investigator, DFC, and any other funding partners, if applicable, including without limitation:

- Principal Investigator and research institution's responsibilities in the conduct of the Project,
- Financial responsibilities of the parties with respect to the Project,
- Reports,
- Publication of the Project results,
- Confidentiality,
- Ownership of intellectual property and other property rights, and
- Commercial use of the Project results.

In accordance with the provisions of the Agreement, the research institution and/or Principal Investigator grant DFC a licence to use the Project results for internal, non-commercial and research purposes; a first option to negotiate an exclusive commercial licence to commercially exploit Project results; and a right of first refusal to match any third-party offer to commercialize the Project results. In the event where DFC is not involved in the commercialization of the Project results, DFC shall earn a royalty based on the net profits generated by the research institution from the Project results; the percentage of the royalty would be determined prior to commercialization through good faith negotiations based on commercially reasonable terms.

VII. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Failure to complete and submit the Letter of Intent or the Full Proposal in accordance with these guidelines may delay or preclude review by the Nutrition Expert Scientific Advisory Committee for funding by DFC. Deviations from the above guidelines will be allowed only if approved by DFC.

All inquiries for additional information regarding any of the above points should be directed to dairyresearch@dfc-plc.ca.

APPENDIX
TARGETED RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

DFC considers those applications that have nutrition and health implications for Canadian dairy products and are relevant to Canadian dairy farmers. Of specific interest to DFC are research projects which feature milk products in their entirety (particularly milk, cheese and yogurt, including regular fat versions), demonstrate technological innovation and utilize a multidisciplinary approach, whenever possible, to address fundamental and applied research questions. Applied human randomized, controlled trials and mechanistic studies in humans are of particular interest. Our current research priorities and areas of interest are as follows:

Targeted outcome: The contribution of dairy products as whole and unique foods in optimal health and wellness across the human lifespan is strengthened

Research priorities:

- → Improve the understanding of the impact of dairy products on optimal growth and development in children and adolescents.
- → Reinforce the benefits of dairy products in musculoskeletal health.
- → Identify the effects of dairy products on healthy aging (particularly on preserving mobility, cognition and nutrient adequacy) in older age.
- → Further define the role of dairy products in supporting healthy weight and body composition (including supporting satiety).
- → Investigate the role of dairy products and milk components, amongst others A2 beta-casein, in a healthy gut, including intestinal integrity and digestibility, and on the microbiome.

Targeted outcome: The role of dairy products as whole and unique foods (particularly full fat milk, yogurt and cheese) in chronic disease prevention and management is reinforced

Research priorities:

- → Identify the specific impact of including dairy products in healthy plant-based dietary patterns on various health outcomes.
- → Further support the role of dairy products in cardiometabolic disease (CVD, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes) prevention and management.
- → Contribute to build convincing evidence for the role of dairy products in colorectal cancer prevention.
- → Expand the understanding of the role of dairy products in breast cancer prevention.

Targeted outcome: The value of dairy products as whole and unique foods within healthy sustainable diets in a Canadian context is further recognized

Research priorities:

- → Determine the value of dairy products within healthy sustainable diets in supporting nutrient adequacy, considering nutrient bioavailability and protein quality.
- → Assess the effects of dairy products within healthy sustainable diets in a Canadian context taking into consideration the four key dimensions of healthy sustainable diets (human health and wellbeing, environmental impact, affordability, and cultural acceptability).