NUTRITION RESEARCH FUNDING PROGRAM

GUIDELINES

Updated September 2026

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. For more than 30 years, DFC has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to investing in dairy research to drive innovation and support a sustainable future for the sector.

DFC's investments in science are guided by the 2027-2032 National Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, which was developed through extensive consultations. The Strategy provides a national framework, guiding principles, and cross-cutting considerations for research and knowledge transfer investments in dairy production and human nutrition. The Strategy is organised into four research themes: Dairy farm sustainability and resilience; Dairy cattle health, care and welfare; Milk quality and composition; and Dairy products in human nutrition and health, and each theme is broken down into targeted outcomes and research priorities that specify their scope and actions.

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 a peer-review system and a funding application process similar to those of major granting agencies (e.g., NSERC and CIHR). Key research funding principles can be consulted on this webpage.

I. RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND CONSIDERATIONS

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.

Eligible projects must address at least one research priority and focus on pre-competitive research with a collective scope; this excludes projects aimed at developing, validating or demonstrating commercial products, technologies, or services for the benefit of a private company.

Please refer to the Appendix A for the Research Priorities for this Call for Proposals.

Of specific interest to DFC are proposals which:

- feature dairy products in their entirety (particularly milk, cheese and yogurt, including regular-fat versions);
- apply study designs with the potential to strengthen existing evidence on associations or establish causal relationships, such as clinical, observational, mechanistic, and systematic reviews or meta-analyses;
- document effects over time (short-, medium-, and long-term); and
- consider high-risk populations, specific age groups and their needs, women, ethnic groups and Indigenous communities.

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

II. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANTS

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

The principal investigator (the "**Principal Investigator**") is responsible for the overall direction of the approved project (the "**Project**") and for all activities associated with 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 may be the Principal Investigator on only one active project funded under this Program. In addition, the researcher may be a co-investigator on one or more projects under the Program.

III. PROJECT EVALUATION AND SELECTION

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 2028.

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).

IV. FUNDING APPLICATION PROCESS

NEW: DFC now uses the Submittable online platform for the application process. You will need to create a free Submittable account to submit an application. All communication regarding your submission will be sent by email through the platform and will also be available through your personal Submittable account. Please be sure to safelist notification emails from Submittable to ensure you receive all communications.

a) Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent must be submitted through the Submittable platform **by December 1st, 2026 at 11:59 (local time zone of Principal Investigator).**

Link to the Submittable platform: https://dairyfarmersofcanada.submittable.com/submit
(Applicants will need to create a free Submittable account to submit their application.)

All Letters of Intent received will be reviewed for eligibility. If a Letter of Intent is deemed ineligible, the Principal Investigator will be notified, and the Letter of Intent will not proceed to the next stage of the selection process.

NEW: A webinar will be held on **October 21, 2026, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (EDT)**, to present DFC's new research priorities and provide an overview of the Call for Proposals, as well as address questions from prospective applicants. Researchers who intend to submit a Letter of Intent are encouraged to attend. The webinar will be bilingual, with simultaneous translation.
To join the webinar:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84475166628?pwd=Sdza816Gzc21enJtnDGduyjkM4LTjz.1
(Please use this link to join the webinar at the scheduled time.)

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.

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 a Letter of Intent, DFC will invite the Principal Investigator to submit a Full Proposal through the Submittable platform. The deadline to submit a Full Proposal is **April 16, 2027.**

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

Guidelines for completing a Full Proposal:

- **Title of Project:** The title should be concise and clearly indicate the topic of the proposed Project and reflect its main purpose. The title may be modified upon mutual agreement between DFC and the Principal Investigator. Abbreviations and acronyms should not be used in the title.

- All abbreviations or acronyms must be defined in the Proposal.

- If the Proposal refers to plant-based foods or alternatives, please refer to the Appendix B for accepted terminology.

- Up to three manuscripts as well as tables and figures, 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 Full Proposal.

- **Research Institution Acknowledgment:** The Principal Investigator's research institution must confirm that it has reviewed the Full Proposal and has read and agrees to comply with the DFC Nutrition Research Funding Program guidelines. This confirmation is a mandatory requirement for submission of the Full Proposal and is included as part of the online submission process.

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 dairy products for consumption by Project subjects, experimental animals and feed, chemicals, glassware and supplies for existing equipment and its routine maintenance.

  Researchers are encouraged to seek in-kind contributions for dairy products required for the Project. Any such contributions must be confirmed before submission of the Full Proposal.

- **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 decision-making role in the conduct of the project, data collection, and analysis or interpretation of the data. Researchers are independent in conducting their projects and report the outcomes regardless of the results. The decision to publish the results rests entirely with the researchers.*

- **Travel**
  DFC encourages travel to relevant scientific meetings within Canada or abroad to present research results from the Project, provided that travel costs are reasonable.

- **Other Expenses**
  Computer costs related to data analyses, participant recruitment costs, 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 application 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.

V. USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools may be used to assist in the preparation of proposals, reports, and other research outputs but should not replace scientific judgment. Researchers remain fully responsible for ensuring that all submitted content is true, accurate, complete, and scientifically sound, including content generated or assisted by AI. All sources must be appropriately acknowledged and referenced, and AI-generated information must be carefully reviewed and verified to ensure that it does not contain fabricated or inaccurate data, results, references, or other information.

Confidential proposal information or unpublished research data must not be entered into public, free versions of AI tools Researchers should disclose the use of AI when it has materially contributed to research methods, analyses, or outputs. Routine uses for editing, formatting, or grammar checking do not require disclosure. AI use must comply with research institution, provincial, and federal requirements regarding research integrity, privacy, intellectual property, and data security.

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 A
RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Characterize the role of the dairy matrix in cardiometabolic disease prevention and management

- Clarify the effects of whole dairy products, including regular-fat dairy, on cardiometabolic outcomes (i.e., hard endpoints of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity)
- Evaluate the impact of whole dairy products, including regular-fat dairy, on metabolic health and intermediate metabolic outcomes (including classic and non-classic biomarkers), e.g., inflammatory markers, blood sugar, blood lipids and blood pressure, as well as on satiety hormones and appetite regulation
- Assess the role of dairy products in cardiometabolic and musculoskeletal health, as well as in body recomposition, in the context of energy deficit and weight loss, including GLP-1 analogue therapies
- Evaluate the health and nutritional effects of nutrient-dense dairy products in the context of food classification systems based on degree of processing
- Understand how unique dairy components (e.g., lipids, protein, lactose) as part of the whole food dairy matrix influence the health effects of dairy products

Examine the role of dairy in healthy aging

- Evaluate the effects of dairy products on the preservation of muscle health (mass, strength, quality) and function, and the prevention of sarcopenia
- Evaluate the effects of dairy products on brain health and cognitive maintenance
- Examine the role of dairy products in optimal bone development and maintenance as well as musculoskeletal health, particularly in younger populations such as teenagers and young adults
- Assess the effects of dairy products on bone health outcomes and osteoporosis prevention in middle-aged and older adults

Describe the role of dairy in gut and immune health

- Confirm the role of dairy products in colorectal cancer prevention
- Understand the relationships between dairy products, gut microbiota and systemic functional changes related to the gut-brain, gut-bone, and gut-immune axes
- Examine the relationship between dairy consumption and systemic inflammation
- Explore the relationship between dairy consumption and immune function

Clarify the role of dairy in healthy, sustainable diets

- Define the contribution of dairy products to food-based dietary guidelines
- Examine the role of dairy products in nutrient adequacy (e.g., protein quality, vitamins, minerals) for various age groups
- Clarify optimal protein requirements for health and the role of dairy products in supporting optimal protein intakes according to life stages
- Ascertain the bioavailability of key micronutrients in dairy products
- Determine the economic health outcomes associated with adequate dairy intake (e.g., cardiometabolic diseases, osteoporosis, colorectal cancer)

APPENDIX B
ACCEPTED TERMINOLOGY

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.