



Western
Crop Innovations



ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26



June 2026

Message from the Chair

This past year has been one of reflection, growth, and progress for Western Crop Innovations. As Chair, I am proud of the progress we have made together as an organization serving Canadian producers through feed and forage barley and triticale breeding and research.

Agriculture continues to evolve rapidly, and the challenges facing producers today demand strong leadership, innovation, and collaboration. WCI recognizes the important role producer-focused plant breeding plays in supporting resilient farms, competitive livestock sectors, and sustainable agricultural systems. Over the past year, we have worked diligently to position the organization for long-term success.

A key focus has been strengthening WCI as a producer-led, not-for-profit organization. Our governance model ensures producers remain at the centre of decision-making while keeping the organization focused on delivering practical value to the industry we serve. To further support this work, our Board recently completed governance training to strengthen our effectiveness as stewards of the organization.

Plant breeding requires patience, vision, and commitment. As someone who has worked in Alberta's cereal industry for many years, I have long understood the importance of investing in long-term innovation. My time with Western Crop Innovations has deepened that appreciation, and I am confident the varieties and research advancements developed today will continue supporting producers and industry well into the future.

My sincere thanks to my fellow Board members, staff, researchers, collaborators, funders, and industry partners for their dedication throughout the year. Most importantly, thank you to the producers who support and believe in the value of this work.

The year ahead brings exciting opportunities as we continue strengthening partnerships and advancing breeding and research programs that support the future of western Canadian agriculture.

Warm regards,

Kevin Bender
Chair, Western Crop Innovations



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Governance



Kevin Bender
Chair



Colin Rice
Vice Chair



Chris Israelson
Director



Harvey Hagman
Director



Kenneth Van Driesten
Director

Board of Directors

The inaugural Board election for WCI was held at the organization's Annual General Meeting in June 2025. Director nominees were brought forward by WCI members, and the four elected Directors represent strong producer backgrounds and broad experience within Alberta agriculture. In October 2025, Kenneth Van Driesten was appointed to the Board, further diversifying its perspective through his industry representation and expertise.

Message from the Executive Director



Trevor Sears
Executive Director

Over the past year, my first with Western Crop Innovations, I have had the opportunity to learn, build relationships, and gain a deeper appreciation for the important role plant breeding plays in western Canadian agriculture. Coming from the pork industry, entering the cereals sector has been both a new challenge and a rewarding experience. One of the highlights of the year has been meeting producers and industry partners who care deeply about the future of agriculture and the work being done at WCI.

This past year was also an important one for WCI as we worked to strengthen the organization and establish a clear direction for the future. We adopted a business plan, completed a science review, and developed a Strategic Blueprint that will help guide the modernization and long-term growth of our breeding and research programs. These initiatives are helping position WCI for greater impact, stronger collaboration, and improved accountability in the years ahead.

I would like to thank our members, funders, staff, collaborators, and industry partners for their continued support and confidence in WCI. There is tremendous opportunity ahead, and I am excited to help advance WCI's vision of becoming a centre of excellence in feed and forage breeding and research.

Sincerely,

Trevor Sears
Executive Director, Western Crop Innovations



Our Team



Meet our Dedicated Staff!

In 2025-26, WCI employed 26 permanent members of staff, engaged six contract employees, and four summer students. In June 2026, we were pleased to welcome our permanent Executive Director, Trevor Sears; and later, in October, we onboarded a new Director of Finance, Brent Murdoff.

Cooler-than-average weather and rainy conditions extended certain field activities in the 2025 growing season. However, this provided a

valuable opportunity for cross-training staff, essential for maintaining smooth operations and effective succession planning efforts.

Per WCI's business plan, organizational restructuring was initiated in October 2025 through updates to the reporting structure of administrative staff. The Board later approved the creation of a new *Director of Breeding and Science* position, and WCI began recruitment for the role in January 2026. Further optimization efforts remain ongoing.





Breeding Highlights



Feed & Forage Focus

WCI's business plan committed to enhanced focus on feed and forage. Accordingly, malt barley breeding is being gradually phased out. Registration and licensing opportunities for remaining advanced lines will be pursued to completion; however, moving forward, WCI will focus on developing varieties with end-use qualities tailored to feed and forage applications.



Operational Updates

Contra-Season Nursery: WCI moved its contra-season nursery from California to New Zealand to grow in an environment that more closely mirrors the Canadian climate.

Trial Sites: A new land lease was secured in Stettler to replace Morrin as a trial site. The land was managed over the summer and fall of 2025 in preparation for plot trials in 2026.

Germplasm Exchange: WCI reached agreements with groups in Brazil, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the USA for germplasm exchange, further diversifying the genetic base of our breeding programs.



Varieties Update

Two requests for support were submitted to the Prairie Grain Development Committee (PGDC) in February, 2026. At the annual PGDC meeting in March, both varieties received support for registration:



FB24623

Two-row, hulled feed barley. FB24623 will be available through SeedNet Inc.



T326

Reduced-awn, dual-purpose spring triticale for feed & forage use. T326 remains available for licensing.

Strategic Blueprint: Areas of Focus

In accordance with WCI's business plan, an independent science review of our breeding and research initiatives was initiated in November of 2025, made possible with support from Results Driven Agriculture Research (RDAR).

Review findings and recommendations were compiled into a "Strategic Blueprint," which was adopted by WCI's Board of Directors in January, 2025 as a guiding document for the modernization and optimization of WCI's operations. WCI immediately began work towards implementing the Blueprint's recommendations and priorities, advancing the organization toward the key goals of becoming a Centre of Excellence in feed and forage breeding and delivering better varieties, faster.

Research Highlights

Research Projects

10 PROJECTS, WITH 11 RESEARCH & INDUSTRY ORGS **& 14** LETTERS OF INTENT (LOIs) SUBMITTED WITH 6 COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

In spring 2025, final reports were submitted to Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation for a germplasm screening project. On April 1, 2025 project 2025F3658R: *Applying Genomic Selection to Enhance Yield, Lodging and Disease Resistance, and Breeding Efficiency in Feed Barley Variety Development* was launched in collaboration with Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS).

LOIs were submitted to the Agriculture Development Fund and Agriculture Funding Consortium with WCI as a principal investigator or collaborating institution. To date, one new project investigating ergot resistance mechanisms in triticale has been approved with a project start date of April 1, 2026; with two others pending.

Supporting Science Programs



Biotechnology

In addition to regular breeding support activities, the Biotechnology lab engaged in a new project that will support the implementation of genomic selection in barley breeding, collaborating with GIFS. This included identifying lines for a genotyping pilot and training population development. The lab also worked on analyzing data to identify potential new resistance genes and quantitative trait loci (QTLs) in barley.



Plant Pathology

During the 2025 growing season, the Pathology team screened 10,574 plots of advanced breeding lines at disease hotspots for seven Priority-I diseases in barley and two Priority-I diseases in triticale. WCI also contributed to the surveying of commercial fields across the province, part of a coordinated surveillance effort monitoring disease incidence and severity trends. Pathology has received approval for a new project launching April 1, 2026.



Quality

The Quality lab pivoted operations significantly in 2025 with WCI's shift away from malt variety development and refocus on feed and forage. Near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) calibrations were developed and validated for 21 new feed and forage traits, and new models for oats, rye, and wheat were developed to support the Silage Regional Variety Trials. The lab also supported external testing for project collaborations and private industry.



Agronomy

Through the spring and summer of 2025, WCI's agronomist coordinated the Silage Regional Variety Trials, overseeing trial design, protocols, and site visits. Work also began on developing Agronomy programming to complement the breeding program, aiming to strengthen the link between agronomic performance and genetic improvement. A full project proposal investigating the stay-green trait in barley remains pending.

Industry Alignment

- Introduction of industry & science advisory committees
- Implementing Product Owner & Commercialization Lead roles
- Identification and adoption of end-user-focused product development goals

Science & Innovation

- Engaging a Director of Breeding & Science
- Integration of genomic strategies into breeding programs
- Pursuing facility and technology upgrades to support faster breeding cycles

Accountability

- Development of product profiles tied to producer needs
- Enhancing commercialization strategies
- Defining clear KPIs & measuring outcomes



Extension & Knowledge Transfer

Extension Events

- 14 tours hosted
- 9 guest speaking engagements
- 33 meetings & events attended
- 11 print and digital media features
- 4 variety endorsement videos produced & published

Communications

- 162 newsletter subscribers
- 2,031 followers across social media platforms
- 172 social media posts in 2025-26



Field Day Highlights - July 16

- “Seed to Social” Networking Night (July 15): 25 registrants
- Field Day: 149 registrants
- 7 Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) Continuing Education Unit (CEU)-accredited presentations
- Varieties Showcase featuring 8 seed company partners
- 2 industry partner exhibitors



For more details, visit us!



westerncropinnovations.com





Western Crop Innovations 2025-26 Financial Report

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2026

	2026	2025
Current Assets		
Cash	1,515,147	183,571
Accounts Receivable	145,009	302,207
Inventory	22,048	-
Prepaid Accounts	63,762	49,755
Deposits	25,505	25,000
GST Receivable	29,941	31,088
Total for Current Assets	1,801,412	591,621
Non-current Assets		
Capital Assets	977,021	661,119
Total for Non-current Assets	977,021	661,119
Total for Assets	2,778,433	1,252,740
Current Liabilities		
Accounts Payable	255,174	415,763
Current Portion of Lease Payable	4,755	24,000
Total for Current Liabilities	259,929	439,763
Non-Current Liabilities		
Capital Lease Obligation	7,598	-
Deferred Capital Contributions	690,433	508,623
Deferred Income	897,451	-
Total for Non-Current Liabilities	1,595,482	508,623
Total for Liabilities	1,855,411	948,386
Net Assets		
Invested in Capital Assets	274,235	128,496
Unrestricted	648,787	175,858
Total for Net Assets	923,022	304,354
Total for Liabilities and Net Assets	2,778,433	1,252,740

Statement of Operations

For the year ended March 31, 2026

	Mar. 31, 2026	Mar. 31, 2025
Income		
GOA Base Funding	1,009,910	1,240,000
Sustainable CAP Activity Funding	1,858,826	2,000,000
SRDP - FA Admin - RDAR Funding	278,824	-
Agriculture Association Base Funding	280,000	525,000
Industry / Private Sector Base Funding	-	50,000
Breeding and Technician Chair Agreement	92,639	-
Project Revenue	622,068	475,770
Field Commodity Sales	187,330	130,687
License Fees	-	30,000
Royalties	273,587	248,581
Contribution Revenue	64,658	34,720
Other	57,947	10,285
Total for Income	4,725,789	4,745,043
Total for Cost of Goods Sold	109,075	-
	4,616,714	4,745,043
Salaries and Benefits		
Salaries	2,541,651	2,239,820
Benefits	313,109	324,395
Total Salaries and Benefits	2,854,760	2,564,215
Total for Farm Operations	162,940	699,671
Total for Lab Operations	125,318	48,229
Total for General Operations	713,097	1,043,401
Total Amortization & Other	140,919	85,173
Total for Expenses	3,997,034	4,440,689
Total for Other Expenses	1,012	0
Excess of revenue over expenditures	618,668	304,354

Audited Financial Statements:



Scan the QR code or visit
www.westerncropinnovations.com/publications
to view the complete
audit report for 2025-26 conducted
by BDO Canada LLP.

Thank-You, Funders!

The work conducted at Western Crop Innovations would not be possible without the generous support of our funders:

Primary Funding Support



Our Members



Project Funders



Join Us!



Alberta Crop Diagnostic Days at



Western
Crop Innovations



FIELD DAY

JOIN US FOR:

CROP PLOTS | DIAGNOSTIC DEMOS | EXPERT SPEAKERS
...AND MORE! Lunch & refreshments included with registration.

For more info & to register, visit:
westerncropinnovations.com/fieldday



Lacombe, AB | July 28





Western Crop Innovations

Nurturing tomorrow's harvests, today.

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