
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2021PREM0022-000556
March 26, 2021

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation

Technology, innovation to strengthen B.C.'s food security

VICTORIA – The Province is investing in programs that will apply technology and innovation to agriculture to strengthen B.C.'s food security and support economic recovery.

Building on the Food Security Task Force's recommendations, the new Agritech Concierge will support food producers and agritech innovators, including recipients of the Agritech Grant program, advance their businesses and address the agricultural challenges being faced by the agriculture industry, in B.C. and around the globe.

"Supporting our province's food producers and agritech innovators is part of building a strong economic recovery for everyone," said Premier John Horgan. "We're acting on the valued work and recommendations of our Food Security Task Force. By launching these programs now, our province will reap the benefits of access to homegrown, safe, nutritious and affordable food for generations of British Columbians to come."

The task force was appointed by Premier Horgan in July 2019 to provide strategic advice and recommendations brought forward in a 2020 Food Security Task Force report. The report outlined how technology and innovation can be developed to strengthen B.C.'s agriculture sector and food security.

Through a suite of services, the Agritech Concierge will help businesses grow, diversify, access new markets and attract investment opportunities. The concierge will provide personalized service to businesses to attract investment capital, navigate government programs and connect with other levels of government.

The concierge will help companies understand and navigate the land opportunities available to grow their businesses and provide advice on how to work with communities to identify opportunities for investment.

"The pandemic has reinforced the vital role our province's agricultural sector plays in ensuring that British Columbians have access to safe, reliable and sustainable food," said Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation. "These investments and the concierge will strengthen our province's food security, catalyze innovation and ensure the agritech sector will play a key role in our economic recovery."

After a successful intake of the Agritech Grant program, the B.C. government has increased the program's funding by an additional \$4.5 million, for a total investment of \$7.5 million. With this new funding, the number of companies eligible for the Agritech Grant increased from a projected 10 companies to 21. The grants will be awarded to the recipients by March 31, 2021.

Funded projects include the development of custom robotics for safe, efficient berry and

mushroom harvesting, low-cost wireless biosensors to monitor pathogens in agriculture and community-scale manure management.

“We remain fully committed to increasing our food security in B.C.,” said Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. “Agritech is one of the ways to do that, and by supporting agritech businesses and entrepreneurs, we can continue to develop and create a world-leading agritech sector that will help increase our domestic food production, strengthen our domestic resiliency and expand our reach into international markets.”

As part of its inaugural work, the Agritech Concierge will support grant recipient companies to scale up, expand and develop technologies to help increase regenerative and sustainable food production in B.C. It will also facilitate pathways for international and out-of-province companies to locate and expand within B.C.

The Agritech Grant program is part of StrongerBC: BC’s Economic Recovery Plan. The plan focuses on recovery that is innovative, sustainable and inclusive. It outlines the latest steps the Government of British Columbia is taking to help people, businesses and communities come out of COVID-19 stronger, without leaving people behind.

Quotes:

Peter Dhillon, chair, B.C.’s Food Security Task Force –

“To drive the agritech sector forward, the Food Security Task Force laid out an ambitious, built-in-B.C. plan. Our final report outlines recommendations that focus on opportunities to increase innovation and develop technologies to support the future of this sector and ensure B.C. is globally recognized. I am pleased to see this work materialize. The task force looks forward to its continued engagement with government to further the task force’s recommendations.”

Hamlet Abnoui, co-founder and CEO, Novobind Livestock Therapeutics, Vancouver –

“We would like to thank the B.C. government for the Agritech grant. This funding is the boost we need to further our research and development of biologics as a safe way to fight rising resistance to anti-infectives in livestock, aquaculture and pets. Our complementary alternative to conventional treatments will help ensure our food, our communities and our homes are clean and safe.”

Timothy Kendrick, BW GLOBAL, Abbotsford –

“We are incredibly grateful to receive the StrongerBC Agritech grant. This grant will help build the Better World Innovation Centre where we will develop, demonstrate and deploy new, commercial-scale agritech and clean tech on our 45-acre regenerative organic farm. Our aim is to have business, government and academia focus on real world solutions to improve food security in B.C. and around the world.”

Jeff Booth, board chair, CubicFarm Systems Corp. –

“B.C. companies are developing innovative solutions to promote social good, reduce our food waste and address other social and environmental challenges. The agritech concierge and grants will help agritech businesses scale up and anchor in the province, resulting in a world-class sector that is a strong contributor to our economic prosperity.”

Quick Facts:

- Applications for the Agritech Grant program opened Dec. 11, 2020, and closed Feb. 12, 2021.
- Over 100 applications were received for the Agritech Grant program, with 21 grant recipients.
- Disbursed grants range from \$150,000 to \$500,000.
- The Agritech Concierge program is open to high-growth potential companies that are a B.C.-based technology or agritech company, agricultural producer or agri-food company. Consideration will be given to companies outside of B.C. that intend to establish operations in B.C. in the near term.
- Agritech refers to the use of technology and technological innovation to improve efficiency and output of agricultural production. Examples of agritech include indoor growing, vertical growing, sensor technology, robotics, food processing technology, agricultural genomics and waste reduction technology.

Learn More:

To learn more about the Agritech Grant program, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/agritechgrant

To learn more about the Agritech Concierge program and eligibility criteria, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/economic-recovery/agritech-concierge>

To learn more about the Food Security Task Force and its recommendations, visit: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/121/2020/01/FSTF-Report-2020-The-Future-of-Food.pdf>

To learn more about Agritech in British Columbia, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/ministries/agriculture>

For more information on StrongerBC, visit: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>

Two backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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Agritech Concierge overview

The new Agritech Concierge will support agritech businesses.

The concierge will serve as a one-stop shop for companies to access support services to help them invest, grow and scale up in British Columbia.

The concierge will be supported by industry development and trade and investment professionals within the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation.

The concierge will:

- support companies to navigate and access existing government programs – federal, provincial and municipal – to anchor and expand, improve export readiness and attract investment;
- provide stakeholder and government connections to help businesses access information, programs and facilitate conversations that can help fast track projects;
- enable conversations and collaboration with other levels of government (municipal/federal) and facilitate connections to industry partners; and
- offer site selection support, including identifying suitable sites for agritech development, navigating the regulatory environment and levels of authority that govern land and providing information and co-ordination support for permitting or submissions to the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).

Access to suitable land will support rapid growth of the agritech sector. It will also help ensure food security is prioritized as part of B.C.'s economic recovery.

Finding available land to grow the agritech sector was a key recommendation of the Food Security Task Force's 2020 report. The concierge will identify suitable lands that may be within the Agriculture Land Reserve, provincially owned or other available lands, to ensure companies and investors have information about vetted, project-ready sites that can support investment decisions and company acceleration.

The ALC is an independent tribunal operating under the direction of the Agriculture Land Commission Act. The concierge will support businesses working with the ALC in the form of outreach and co-ordination and guidance outside the statutory decision-making process.

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BACKGROUND 2

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Agritech grant recipients

The B.C. Agritech Grant program has awarded a combined total of \$7.5 million to 21 B.C.-based companies to help them anchor, scale up and develop technologies to improve food security in British Columbia.

Recipients and grant award amounts are:

Advanced Intelligent Systems is a leading Canadian autonomous robotics company, located in Burnaby. It uses a proprietary library of hardware and software modules to significantly reduce the development time and cost of new robotic solutions. It plans to create an indoor, driverless, autonomous electric vehicle to transport produce within greenhouses for processing, packing and shipping.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on Advanced Intelligent Systems, visit: <https://www.ai-systems.ca/>

AgriForest Bio-Technologies is a Kelowna-based plant biotechnology company with 14 employees. It will use the grant to focus on improving the methods and decreasing the costs of propagating disease-free berry varieties to meet a growing demand for superior planting materials by the growers of B.C. and Canada.

Grant award: \$150,000

For more information on Agri-Forest Bio-Technologies, visit:

<https://www.agriforestbiotech.com/>

Bakerview EcoDairy is a 42.5-hectare farm in Abbotsford that is home to dairy, beef cattle and layer hens. Bakerview EcoDairy will work to pilot a blockchain encrypted information management system to follow beef products from farm to consumer. Bakerview Eco Dairy will partner with KPMG to use existing software in a new way.

Grant award: over \$230,000

For more information on Bakerview EcoDairy, visit: <http://ecodairy.ca/>

BarrelWise is a Vancouver-based agritech company with nine employees that develops smart technology to enhance wine analysis and production. BarrelWise has developed a proprietary wine barrel management system that increases operational efficiency, decreases process errors and allows for precision barrel-by-barrel management of wine quality through the collection and analysis of critical data.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on BarrelWise, visit: <https://www.barrelwise.ca/>

BW GLOBAL of Abbotsford is Western Canada's largest food systems/greenhouse design and manufacturing company. It is building the Better World Innovation Centre, an international

collaboration on a 18.2-hectare regenerative organic farm in Abbotsford to demonstrate new agriculture and clean technology, along with new business models that will decarbonize food production and distribution and improve food supply, security and sovereignty in B.C. and around the world.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on BW Global, visit: <http://bw-global.com/>

BC Cattlemen's Association, based in Kamloops, has a membership of 1,200 ranchers and represents the interests of cattle producers throughout B.C. The association is developing wearable cattle technology that will allow producers to manage and track cattle movement within and outside of cellular service, taking advantage of existing cellular and satellite technology and infrastructure.

Grant award: \$350,000

For more information on the B.C. Cattlemen's Association, visit: <https://www.cattlemen.bc.ca/>

Cascadia Seaweed of Sidney has 20 team members, a combination of partners, employees and contractors, and is aiming to become North America's largest ocean cultivator of premium seaweed. Cascadia Seaweed's project involves improvements to farm operations using technology, increasing seaweed cultivation productivity and enhancing Indigenous relationships.

Grant award over: \$255,000

For more information on Cascadia Seaweed, visit: <https://www.cascadiaseaweed.com/>

Flex Alert Company Ltd. of Vancouver has 11 staff and develops low-cost wireless biosensors to monitor pathogens common in agriculture, such as powdery mildew, brown rot and botrytis. Flex Alert plans to use ozone nanobubble technology in irrigation for pathogen remediation in grape fields with Summerland Estate Vineyard as project partner.

Grant award: \$240,000

For more information on Flex Alert Company Ltd., visit: <https://flex-alert.com/>

Industrial Plankton is a 14-person Victoria-based company specializing in developing and manufacturing cutting-edge algae bioreactors for aquaculture hatcheries and biotech. Industrial Plankton is developing a turnkey seaweed hatchery/nursery, built in shipping containers for easy delivery, installation and adoption by industry. This technology will facilitate selective breeding and provide a reliable source of high-quality seaweed seedlings for commercial farms.

Grant award: \$200,000

For more information on Industrial Plankton, visit: <https://industrialplankton.com/>

i-Open Technologies Inc., based in Abbotsford, specializes in geospatial web-mapping applications, data integration and spatial artificial intelligence. The company is developing Agrilyze, B.C.'s first spatial data analytics platform for precision agriculture that collects, tracks and maps data allowing for efficiency and better regulatory compliance while optimizing resource usage (such as human, equipment, consumables and waste).

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on i-Open Technologies Inc., visit: <https://www.i-opentech.com/>

Lucent BioSciences, based in Vancouver, has 17 employees. It develops sustainable, carbon-positive, non-polluting micronutrient fertilizers that improve soil health. Lucent BioSciences Inc.

will work with Salmon Arm's **Valid Manufacturing Ltd.** to take recovered dry-cake dairy livestock waste and transform it into a non-polluting, safe, high-performance fertilizer and bring it to market.

Grant award: over \$245,000

To learn more about Lucent BioSciences Inc., visit: <https://lucentbiosciences.com/>

Mesh Exchange Inc. (doing business as: **FoodMesh**) is a Vancouver-based corporation building digital solutions to reduce and track food waste for the food sector. FoodMesh has 13 staff and will work to commercialize a data aggregation and insights engine to help retailers reduce and prevent avoidable wasted food.

Grant award: \$450,000

For more information on FoodMesh, visit: <https://foodmesh.ca/>

NovoBind Livestock Therapeutics is an agri-biotech company, located in Vancouver, working to combat rising resistance to anti-infectives and their accumulating residue in the environment. It does this by developing next-generation biologics that target and neutralize the specific bacteria, viruses and parasites that cause intestinal ailments in livestock, aquaculture and pets. NovoBind's novel biotherapeutic solutions are based on nanobodies (or single-domain antibodies) and provide a complementary alternative to conventional treatments.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on NovoBind Livestock Therapeutics, visit: <https://www.novobind.com/>

Point 3 Biotech Corp. (PT3) is an agritech consortium of more than 20 technology pioneers that have come together to drive technology solutions at the back end of animal agriculture, such as developing community scale manure management. PT3 plans to use recovered and processed dairy manure fibre instead of the wood fibre that B.C. imports, for hog fuel, shavings, sawdust and compost. The project will demonstrate the ability to harvest long strand dairy manure fibre from farms that bed on sand, for use in poultry barns and mushroom production.

Grant award: over \$255,000

For more information on Point 3 Biotech Corp., visit: <https://pt3.ca/>

Sanctuary Cognitive Systems Corp. is a Vancouver-based global leader in robotics and artificial intelligence, creating general-purpose robots able to perform physical work supporting the human labour force. It is currently working on a robotic hand to semi-automate blueberry picking and as proof of concept for the semi-automated harvesting of cherries, raspberries, strawberries and other potential applications.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on Sanctuary Cognitive Systems Corp., visit:

<https://ca.linkedin.com/company/sanctuaryai>

Skipper Otto of Vancouver is a community-supported fishery that connects fishers/harvesters directly to consumers. The company represents 37 small-scale, independent fishers/harvesters and 5,000 consumers. Skipper Otto's digital expansion project will use a technology partner to enhance agritech software for independent producers, filling a gap in the marketplace.

Grant award: over \$225,000

For more information on Skipper Otto, visit: <https://skipperotto.com/>

TechBrew Robotics is a robotics company based in Salmon Arm. The company provides solutions for industry. TechBrew plans to develop a final prototype of a mushroom harvesting

robot able to identify, locate and automatically pick mushrooms ready for harvest, without damaging them. This can result in a significant increase in yield and solve labour issues.

Grant award: \$500,000

For more information on TechBrew Robotics, visit: <https://techbrew.com/>

ThisFish Inc. of Vancouver is a leader in seafood traceability and production software that reduces costs, strengthens process control and improves compliance in global supply chains. ThisFish employs 13 people and will work on scaling up by establishing an operational centre in B.C. to position it for North American growth.

Grant award over: \$350,000

For more information on ThisFish Inc., visit: <https://this.fish/>

Trident Processes of Abbotsford employs eight people and develops and automates processing systems for liquid and solid separation of agricultural wastewater into high-value fibre biomass, nutrients and water. Trident's project will determine community needs and whether a business case exists to establish a future manure processing plant.

Grant award over: \$410,000

For more information on Trident Processes, visit: <https://tridentprocesses.com/>

Valid Manufacturing Ltd., is a 142-employee company based in Salmon Arm. It designs, engineers and manufactures innovative solutions for a wide range of industries. The company has recently developed a nutrient recovery system to help dairy farms manage their agriculture waste. Valid Manufacturing Ltd. will work with Vancouver's **Lucent BioSciences Inc.** to take recovered dry-cake dairy livestock waste and transform it into a non-polluting, safe, high-performance fertilizer and bring it to market.

Grant award: \$320,000

To learn more about Valid Manufacturing Ltd., visit: <https://validmfg.com/>

Verdi Expeditions is a Vancouver-based startup that climate proofs crops by helping farmers customize growing conditions for every plant. Verdi will focus on piloting and commercializing hyper-precise irrigation technology, which has been piloted successfully at two wineries.

Grant award: \$300,000

To learn more about Verdi Expeditions, visit: <https://verdiag.com/>

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